

# SACAD: John Heinrichs Scholarly and Creative Activity Days

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## Writing Across the Curriculum Faculty Survey

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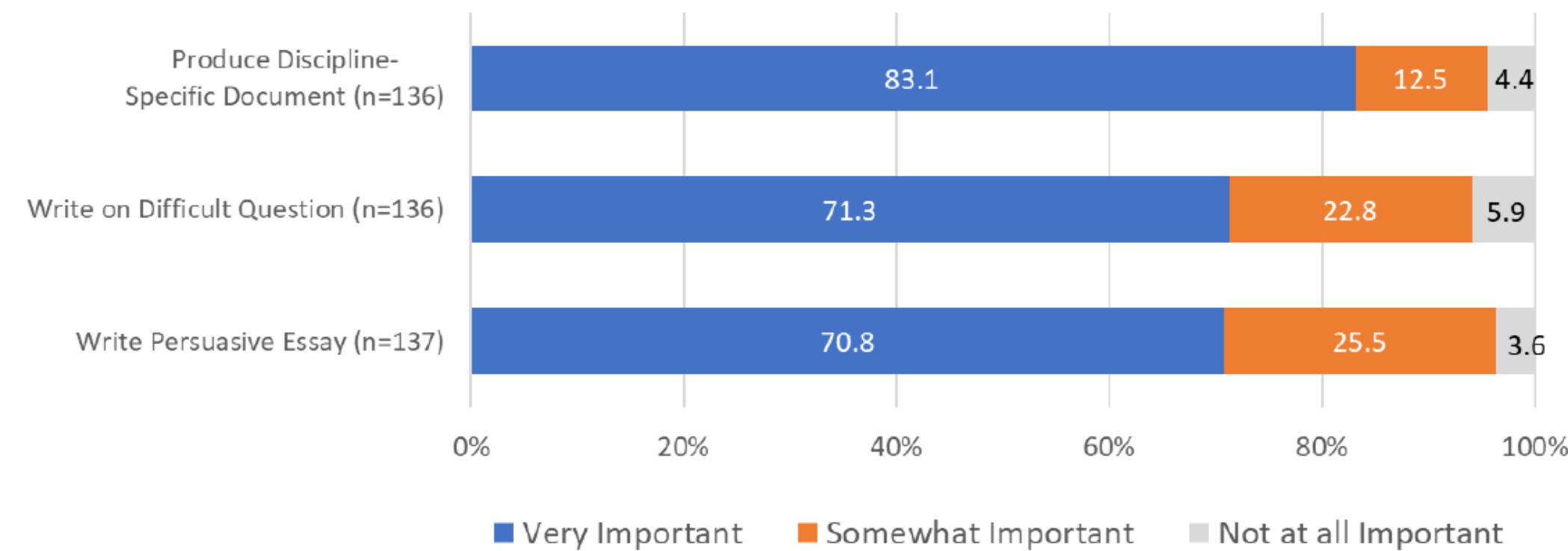
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## Abstract

This study seeks to determine FHSU faculty attitudes, knowledge, and practices related to the incorporation of writing into their courses. In spring 2021, the Fort Hays State University Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Committee partnered with the Docking Institute of Public Affairs to survey undergraduate faculty. The 140 respondents to the 85-item survey represent a cooperation rate of 23.02%. The data reveal an overall positive culture of writing at the university, where most faculty believe writing instruction is a shared responsibility across campus and across a student's program of study. These faculty recognize the importance of FHSU's writing-related CORE outcomes. They incorporate both low-stakes and high-stakes writing in their courses and provide various forms of guidance and support for that writing. They assign writing from multiple genres (44 identified) and know the important reasons why they assign writing.

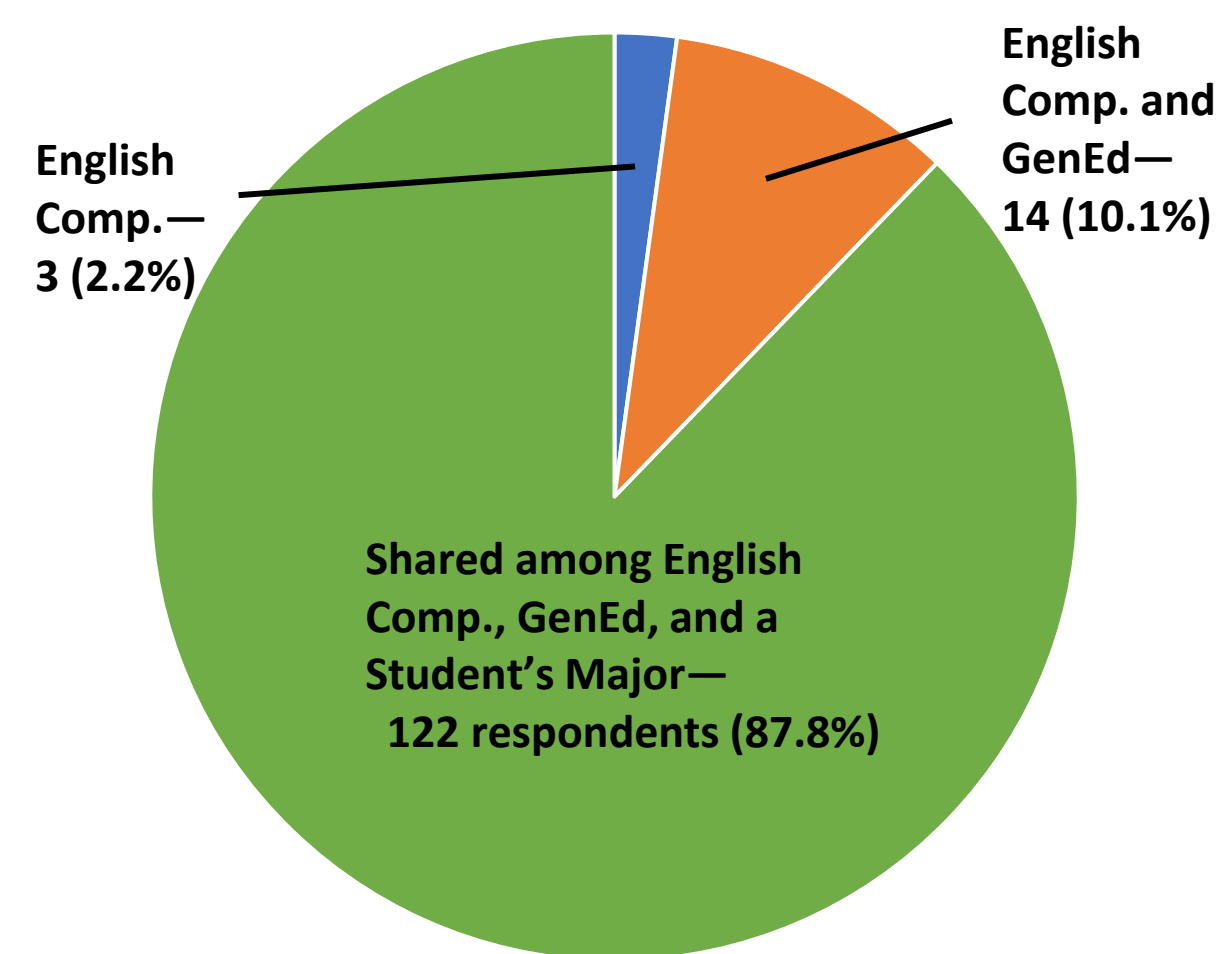
## Perceived Importance of CORE Outcomes



## Methods

A Qualtrics survey link was emailed to 633 faculty and was open from April 5-25, 2021. Only faculty members teaching undergraduate courses at FHSU were eligible to complete the survey. No compensation was offered. The survey was divided into five sections: demographic questions, opinion questions, questions about departmental practices around CORE outcomes and scaffolding, questions about individual practices related to assigning writing, and questions about individual motivations related to assigning writing.

## Who's Responsible for Teaching Writing?



## Selected Results

- The vast majority of respondents—87.8%—believe that the responsibility for teaching writing at FHSU is a shared responsibility among the English department (first-year writing courses), the general-education program, and the curriculum within a student's major.
- 72% of faculty respondents are either "very familiar" (20.4%) or "somewhat familiar" (51.8%) with the CORE writing outcomes.
- 54% of faculty respondents report that their department has discussed the CORE writing outcomes.
- Faculty respondents recognize the importance of the CORE writing outcomes, with 95.6% deeming "discipline-specific document" very or somewhat important, 94.1% deeming "write on a difficult question" very or somewhat important, and 96.3% deeming "write a persuasive essay" very or somewhat important.
- Nearly 90% (89.1%) of faculty respondents report using lower-stakes writing activities (such as discussion board posts, quick-writes, journal entries, etc.) AND higher-stakes writing activities (such as essays, essay exams, research papers, lab reports, etc.) in their classes.
- Professors take many steps to guide and support students working on higher-stakes writing assignments. The majority of respondents do the following for all such writing assignments:
  - Provide verbal and written instructions.
  - Explain verbally and in writing what students should learn from the assignment.
  - Explain verbally and in writing what criteria will be used to grade the assignment.
  - Discuss the purpose of this particular genre/type of writing.
- Faculty respondents indicated 44 different writing genres assigned in their courses.

## Top 5 Reasons Faculty Assign Writing

- Develop students' critical thinking skills
- Reveal to what extent students understand the content knowledge of the course
- Prepare students for the writing they will do in their careers
- Help students think through and learn a new concept
- Develop students' overall writing ability

## Introduction

The WAC faculty survey explored six research questions:

- Do faculty perceive teaching students to write as a shared responsibility or as a responsibility that lies with certain departments and courses?
- Are faculty familiar with the new CORE writing outcomes, and how do they feel about the importance of these outcomes?
- Do faculty assign lower-stakes writing activities such as discussion board posts and/or higher-stakes writing activities such as research papers?
- What support and guidance do faculty provide when assigning higher-stakes writing assignments?
- What genres of writing do faculty assign and what requirements (e.g., use of outside sources, targeting a specific audience) are attached to them?
- What motivates faculty to assign writing to students?

## Conclusion

As 80% of respondents indicated that they were not familiar or only somewhat familiar with the new writing-related CORE outcomes, and as these outcomes have recently been combined with the new information literacy graduation requirement, the WAC Committee plans to promote the outcomes more heavily. Respondents also indicated particular interest in professional development events around time-saving grading practices, creating enjoyable assignments, and strengthening students' discipline-specific writing skills, so these will be areas of focus for the WAC Committee moving forward. Based on low reporting of curricular scaffolding and having students write to an actual outside audience, these are also promising future professional development topics.

## References

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