

# Profiles of First-year Writing

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# Overview of this session

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- ▶ What are students asked to write, particularly in the first year of post-secondary education?
- ▶ How can individual instructors across the disciplines help them perform better as writers?
- ▶ How can institutions structure their writing resources to support students as they develop as academic writers?



# Canadian context: a primer


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- WAC programs that support faculty members are few and far between; WAC programs more commonly support students (“How to write a psychology paper” workshops for students)
- Research: writing “inventories” to describe how departments use writing now (baseline data) and to inform discussions of how to expand, direct, or improve the use of writing for learning



# Previous study

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- Graves, R., Hyland, T. & B. Samuels (2010). Undergraduate Writing Assignments: An Analysis of Syllabi at One Canadian College. *Written Communication* 27 (3): 293-317.
  - This study collected 485 assignments from 179 syllabi at a small liberal arts college in Ontario
  - We have continued this work to include six (6) follow-up studies in Alberta:
    - Faculties of Nursing, Pharmacy, and Physical Education and Recreation;
    - Political Science department; and a
    - Community Service-Learning program.
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# Who isn't assigning writing?

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	<b>Number of writing assignments</b>	<b>Percent of courses with writing assignments</b>
Liberal Arts	485	79%
Nursing	157	86%
Political Science	198	100%
Geography	186	82%
Service Learning	163	100%



# Number of assignments by year in program

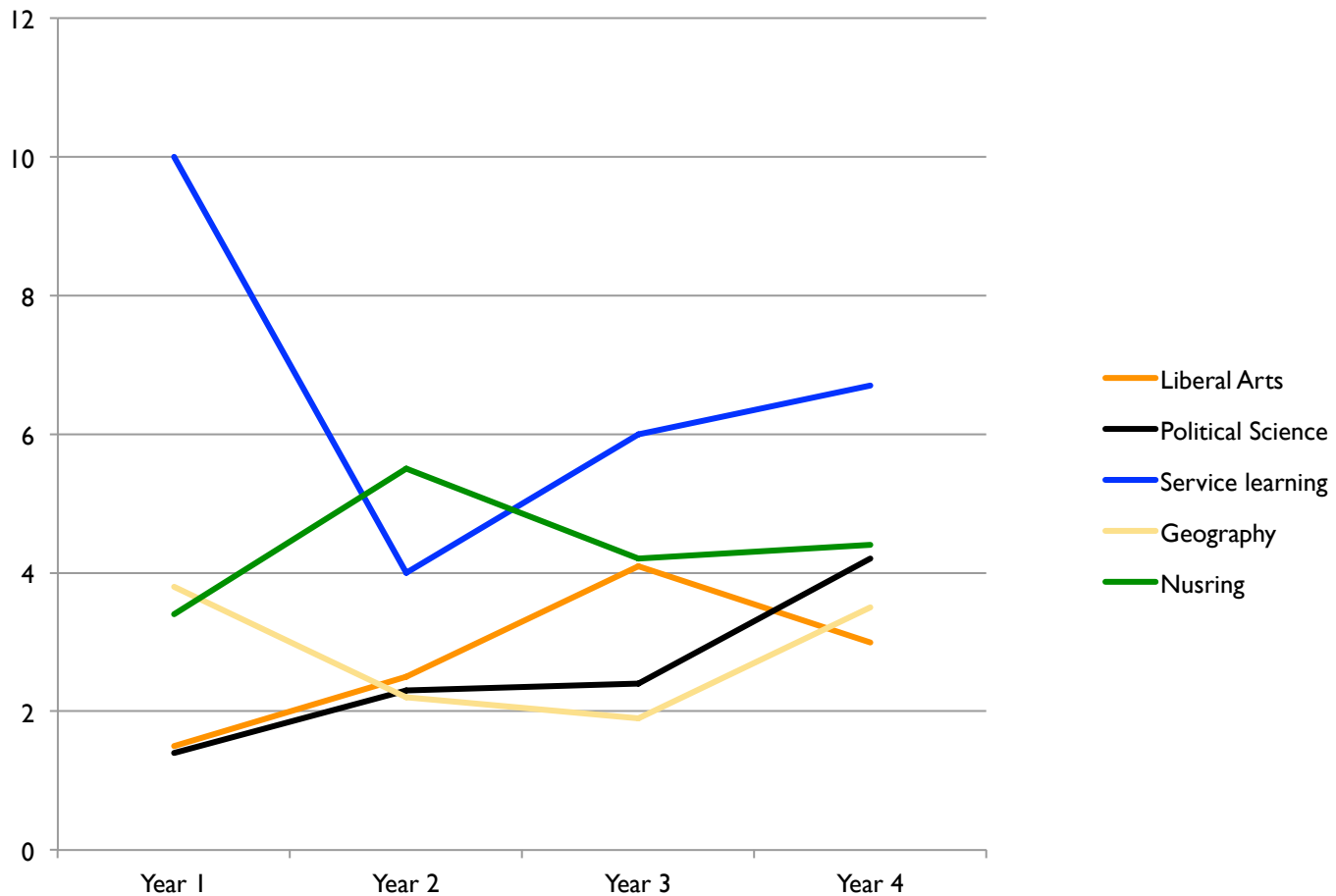
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	<b>Liberal Arts</b>	<b>Political Science</b>	<b>Service-Learning</b>	<b>Geography</b>	<b>Nursing</b>
Year 1	34/1.5	7/1.4	42/10	15/3.8	17/3.4
Year 2	225/2.5	39/2.3	12/4	40/2.2	33/5.5
Year 3	189/4.1	40/2.4	35/6	24/1.85	50/4.2
Year 4	56/3.0	112/4.2	74/6.7	107/3.5	57/4.4

First number is total number of assignments.  
Second number is average number of assignments per course.

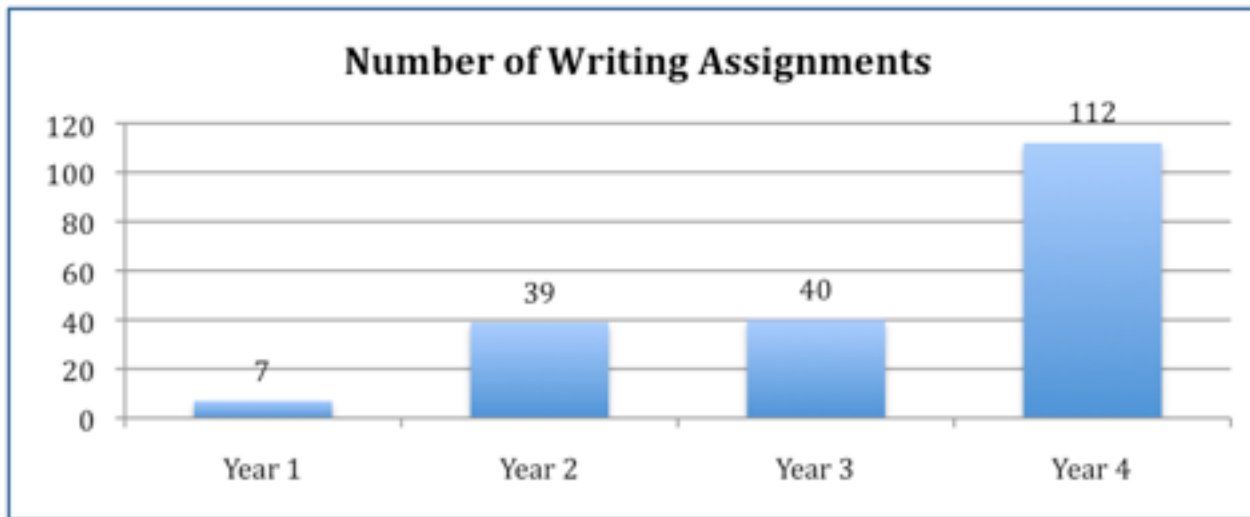


# Number of assignments by year in program



# Number: Political Science

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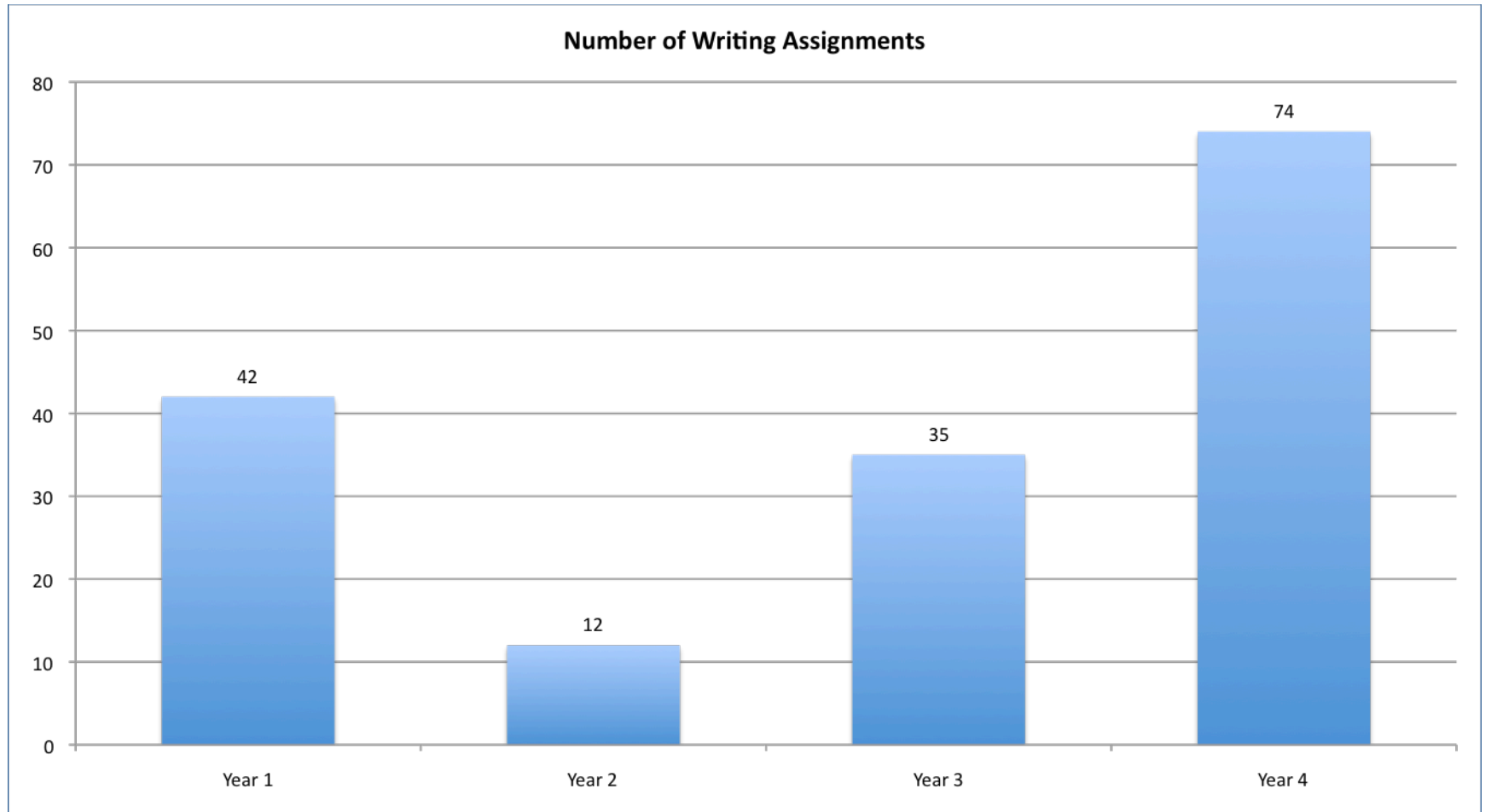
	No. Courses	Avg. No. Assign.
1	5	1.4
2	17	2.3
3	17	2.4
4	27	4.2
Total	66	





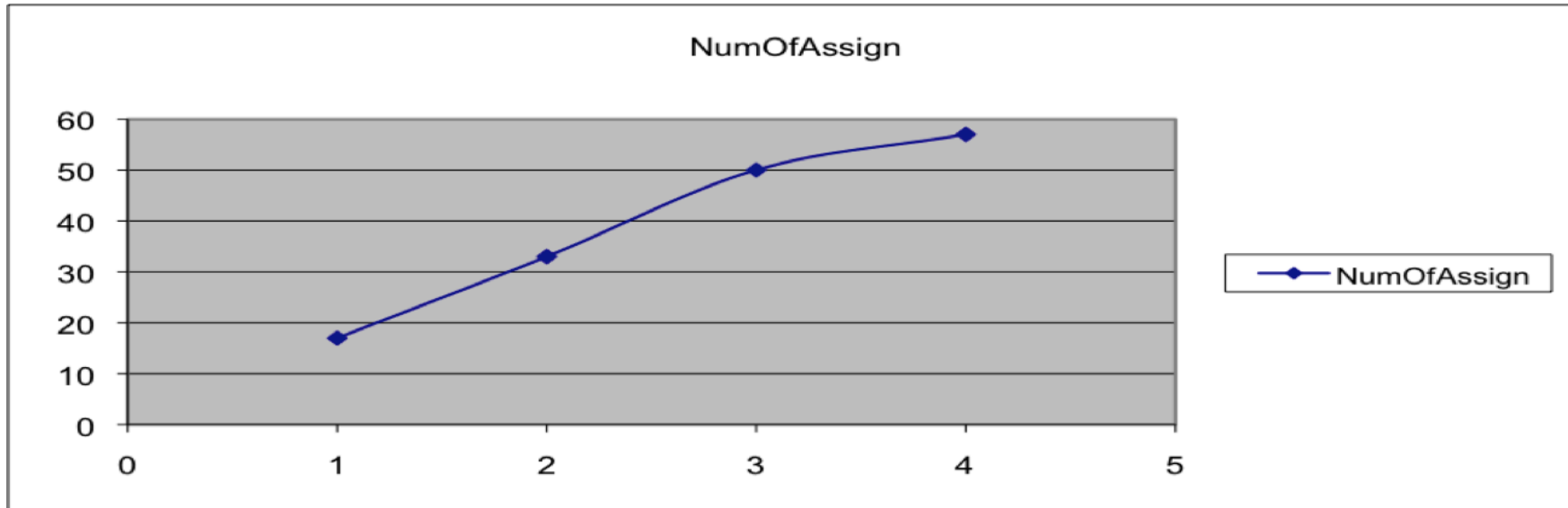
# CSL: Number of Assignments

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# Nursing: Number of Assignments

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# Number: Phys. Ed. & Rec.

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Year	Total no. of courses	Total no. of assignments	% of courses with writing assignments	Avg. no. of assigns. per course
1	38	66	71%	2.5
2	16	46	88%	3.2
3	27	67	82%	2.6
4	19	87	100%	4.6



# Genres vary considerably

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	<b>Liberal Arts</b>	<b>Political Science</b>	<b>Service-Learning</b>	<b>Geography</b>	<b>Nursing</b>
<b>Papers</b>	20	32	22	25	18
<b>Reports</b>	18			30	12
<b>Essay</b>	27	21		12	
<b>Summary</b>					
<b>Self-evaluation</b>					24
<b>Handouts</b>					11
<b>Presentation</b>		15	17	13	
<b>Journal</b>			10		

Note: numbers are reported in percent of all assignments.



# Genres: Physical Education

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Genres assigned more often in **upper years** than lower years (1, 2):

- summary;
- proposal;
- report; and
- critical thinking problems.

Genres assigned more often in **lower years** than upper years (3, 4):

- logs (e.g., reading logs);
- lab reports;
- lesson plans;
- journals;
- handouts; and
- drafts.



# Genres: Nursing

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Assignment	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Self Evaluation	38	4	11	8	15
Paper	29	4	2	14	9
Handout	17	2	6	7	2
Personal Goals	12	2	2	5	3
Journal	12	0	3	4	5
Report	12	0	2	1	9
Peer Evaluation	11	2	2	4	3
Group Email	11	2	2	5	2
Presentation	8	1	2	2	3
Outline	3	0	0	0	3
Annot. Biblio.	2	0	1	0	1
Proposal	1	0	0	0	1
Field Notes	1	0	0	0	1
Totals	157	17	33	50	57

# Genres: Physical Ed. & Rec.

Assignment	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
1. Presentation/ Demonstration	24.2	15.2	15.0	25.2
2. Paper	15.2	10.8	10.4	24.1
3. Assignment	19.7	10.8	7.4	4.6
4. Log	12.1	4.3	1.5	3.5
5. Summary	1.5	2.2	7.4	4.6
6. Lab Report	4.5	6.5	0	3.5
7. Proposal	0	2.2	3.0	5.7
8. Lesson Plan	4.5	2.2	1.5	2.3
9. Analysis	1.5	4.3	3.0	2.3
10. Outline	4.5	0	3.0	2.3
11. Report	1.5	2.2	1.5	3.4
12. Practice Plan	0	6.5	3.0	0
13. Journal	3.0	2.2	1.5	1.1
14. Handout	3.0	0	0	0
15. Annotated Bibliography	0	0	0	2.3

# Genre in CSL: First year assignments

Assignments	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Paper	3.7%	2.5%	4.9%	10.4%
Presentation	1.8%	0.6%	4.2%	10.4%
Journal	1.8%	2.5%	3.0%	3.0%
Essay	3.0%	0	0.6%	2.5%
Outline	2.5%	0	0.6%	1.8%
Draft	3.7%	0	1.3%	0
Field Report	1.3%	0	1.3%	2.5%
Online Discussion (blog)	1.8%	0	0.6%	1.8%
Email	0.6%	0.6%	1.3%	1.3%
Proposal	0.6%	0.6%	0	1.8%
Field Project	0	0	1.3%	1.8%
A/V	0	0	1.8%	1.3%
Bibliography	1.8%	0	0	0.6%
Other	0	0	0	1.8%
Abstract	0.6%	0	0	1.3%
Field Notes	1.3%	0	0	0
Handout	0.6%	0	0	0.6%
Work Log	0	0.6%	0	0.6%
Lesson Plan	0	0	0.6%	0.6%
Review	0	0	0	1.8%
Mind Map	0.6%	0	0	0






# Political science: Genres

Assignment	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Paper	63	5	16	12	30
Essay	42	1	9	10	22
Presentation	30	0	0	5	25
Proposal	13	0	2	2	9
Draft	8	0	1	2	5
Handout	8	0	0	2	6
Journal	7	0	4	1	2
Outline	5	0	1	0	4
Book Review	5	0	1	3	1
Other	4	0	2	0	2
Bibliography	3	0	2	0	1
Peer Evaluation	3	0	0	1	2
Film Review	2	0	0	2	0
Online Discussion (blog)	1	0	0	0	1
Field Report	1	0	1	0	0
Business Letter	1	1	0	0	0
Abstract	1	0	0	0	1
Self Evaluation	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>112</b>

# Length of writing assignments



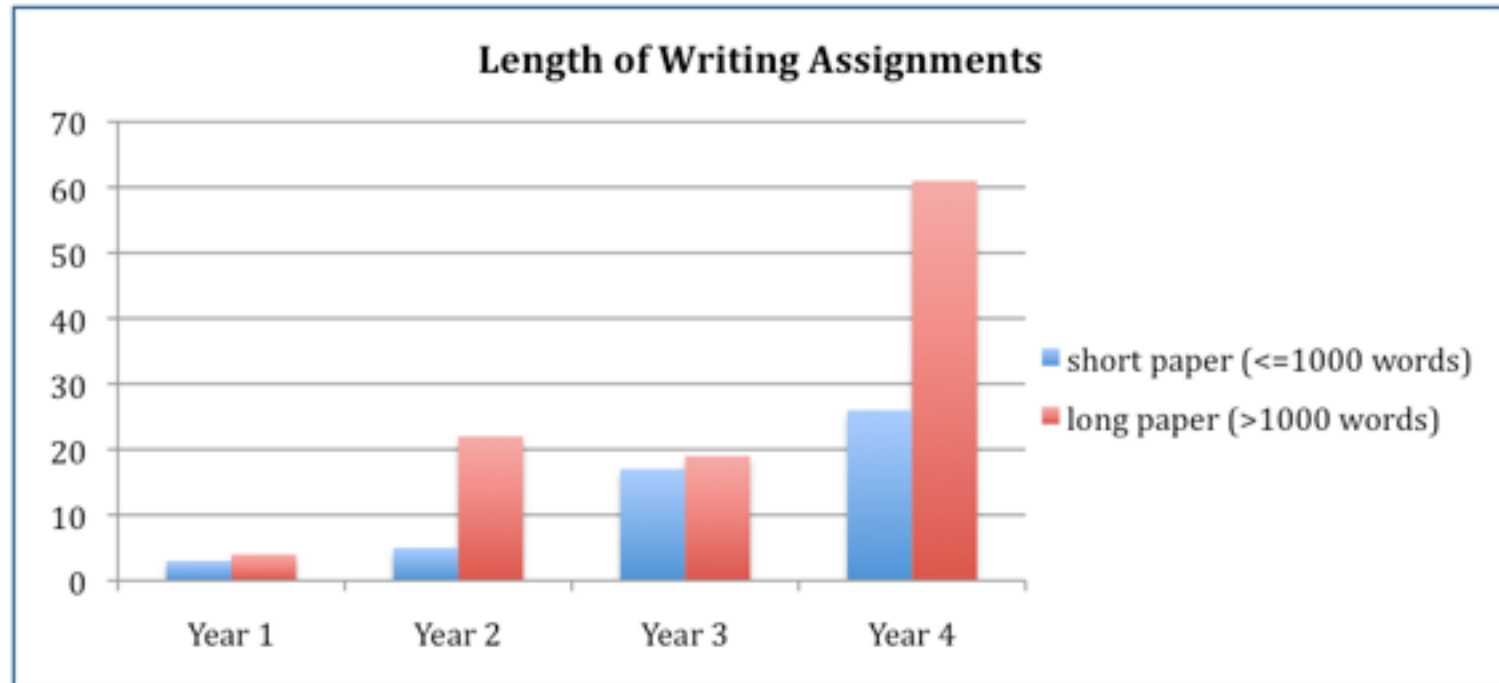
Length in pages	Liberal Arts	Political Science	Service-Learning	Geography	Nursing
under 2	31	5	16	18	0
2 - 4	26	27	39	34	74
5 - 6	12	15	14	19	2
7 - 10	17	23	14	18	18
11 - 12	8	11	6	5	0
13 +	6	19	11	6	6

Note: numbers are reported in percent of all assignments.



# Length: Political science

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# Political Science: Length

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Assignment word length	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Under 500	8	0	1	2	5
500-1000	43	3	4	15	21
1250-2750	72	3	20	14	35
3000-5000	29	1	1	4	<b>23</b>
Over 5000	5	0	1	1	3
Length not indicated ( <i>nd</i> )	41				
<b>Total number of assignments</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>87</b>



# CSL: Length of first year assignments

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Assignment word length	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Under 500	35%	6%	18%	41%	100%
500-1000	50%	7.5%	20%	22.5%	100%
1200-2500	10%	4%	31%	55%	100%
3000-5000	21%	7%	29%	43%	100%
Over 5000	0	0	0	100%	100%
					100%



# WAC, writing assignments, and disciplinary contexts

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Student efficacy (a key issue in student retention) requires sequential composition over the student's entire career:

1. How can students get ready to write these genres?
2. How does this happen sequentially over a student's career within a discipline/program?
3. How do disciplinary programs implicitly or explicitly structure assignments (over the course of the entire program) to maximize student engagement and efficacy?

