

Department of English, George Washington University  
Writing in the Disciplines Review, 2012-2013  
Final Report

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## Introduction

The purpose of the English Department's Writing in the Disciplines (WID) Review has been to solicit instructor expectations regarding WID pedagogy in literature courses and to compare these aims with actual assignments and student writing. Instructors have used the resulting information to reconsider their individual WID pedagogy and, with the committee, to recommend new WID approaches and, indeed, new writing pedagogies in English generally that will enhance the department's mission of teaching the formal, historical, and theoretical richness of literature and culture.

This final report offers a view of the committee's work, which began in October 2012 and was completed in June 2013. The work involved collecting and coding syllabi, interviewing faculty and graduate student instructors, and collecting and coding assignments and papers. Both WID and non-WID faculty were invited to participate in the review; this helped to determine how writing is happening in a range of English classes. In April 2013, the committee reconvened with the participating instructors to share findings and move toward the present final report. This final report is hereby delivered to the English Department and the University Writing Program. It summarizes our findings and features recommendations for department-wide consideration, all of which may serve as a template for future reviews of both WID and non-WID writing pedagogies in English.

## Summary of the Work

### *Syllabi Review*

In response to a call for English Department syllabi in the fall of 2012, department instructors (full-time faculty and graduate students) submitted 24 literature syllabi (15 WID, 9 non WID) to the committee. Of the 15 WID, nine were for 1000 level courses, two for 2000, and four for 3000. Of the 9 non WID, three were for 1000 level courses, five for 3000, and one for 4000. See Appendices One and Four for syllabi data visualizations and coding form.

### Findings:

- 13 of 15 WID syllabi assigned between 16 and 30 pages of written work.
- 5 of 9 non-WID syllabi assigned between 16 and 30 pages of written work.

*Observation: Most of our collected syllabi assigned an average to moderately high amount of writing (16 to 30 pages), which is desirable for the curriculum in English. This is the case across both WID and non-WID syllabi.*

- 14 of 15 WID syllabi require at least one assignment to be drafted or revised.
- 5 of 9 non-WID syllabi require at least one assignment to be drafted or revised.

*Observation: The major (and expected) difference between WID and non-WID syllabi is the revision requirement. In the recommendations below, we will suggest that more non-WID courses incorporate revision in order to meet the aim of the curriculum in English: to teach the formal, historical, and theoretical richness of literature and culture as an experience of discovery through the student's own writing process.*

- 67% of WID syllabi require class time to be spent on revision.
- 44% of non-WID syllabi require class time to be spent on revision.
- 47% of WID syllabi require at least 31 minutes of class time total, for the semester, to be spent on drafting or revision.
- 44% of non-WID syllabi require at least 31 minutes of class time total, for the semester, to be spent on drafting or revision.

*Observation: Another major difference between WID and non-WID syllabi is class time spent on revision. In our recommendations below, we will suggest apportioning class time to revision in order to meet English curriculum aims, and, through proposed workshops, we will invite discussions of how much time to devote to revision, including suggestions for revision pedagogy.*

- 10 of 15 WID syllabi require at least one peer-reviewed assignment.
- 3 of 9 non-WID syllabi require at least one peer-reviewed assignment.

*Observation: This is another major (and expected) difference between WID and non-WID syllabi. In our recommendations below, we will discuss peer review as an element in the classroom revision repertoire.*

### *Faculty Interviews*

The committee met with 12 instructors in face-to-face interviews early in the spring 2013 semester; these instructors, who were among those submitting syllabi in the fall, volunteered to participate in the interviews. Four of these were full-time professors, six were GTAs teaching solo courses, and two were GTAs working as assistants in WID courses. Of the 10 solo instructors, nine were WID faculty, and one was non WID. After explaining the purpose of the WID review, we posed a series of questions regarding the situation of writing generally in the department: What are the purposes of writing in the English classroom? What are the forms and contexts of student writing in English—its genres, audiences, and media—and how do these relate to the forms and contexts of professional academic writing in English? What are the writing proficiencies instructors hope to cultivate? How are they assessed? What are instructor grading practices? Are comments and grades delivered digitally, on paper, or both? How is the GTA prepared for the course? And how does the WID requirement shape the content experience of particular English courses?

A synthesis of responses to these questions follows, divided into 1) pedagogical aims; 2) assignments; 3) grading and responding; and 4) general observations and recommendations.

1. **Pedagogical aims:** Participants stated that writing about literature helps students understand literary texts. Specifically, writing about literature, beyond summary, engages how literary language “acts itself out,” generating multiple meanings. Such writing both builds on close reading methods as exemplified in classroom discussions and goes on to reenact and transform them on the page or screen. It fosters critical thinking: that is, understanding beyond the surface and against (or in tension with) convention. It leads to knowledge of the conditions, times, and places of literature and culture—and, indeed, of one’s own writing itself—and it builds in students the confidence of participating in the disciplinary conversations of English. Writing encourages student enthusiasm for literature. Finally, it teaches the significance of process (drafting, revision, peer review) through which topics are limited, sources and evidence are researched to arrive at citable passages, and thesis statements are fine tuned, all with an eye toward clarity of expression; these elements, as “writing,” constitute the genre of student literary analysis in English, whose professional homologue can be understood as the research article.
2. **Assignments:** According to participants, literary analysis guided by a theme and grounded in the close reading of primary texts is the most typical assignment. Assignments incorporating close readings of primary texts as well as secondary readings are also prevalent—the primary texts usually coming from materials on the syllabus itself, the secondary readings (theory, criticism, history) coming either from the syllabus itself or assigned research. Other assignments include reviews of articles, annotated bibliographies, and abstracts. Each of these assignments responds to a prompt, though sometimes instructors ask students to generate their own. Assignments later in the semester will occasionally require students to revise and expand earlier papers. Some instructors require revision of at least one paper (see syllabi findings above), though others will require revision based on grades (e.g., papers receiving less than a B- will require revision). Other, less formal, assignments include in-class writings and Blackboard posts (on the blog or message board) targeted toward facilitating class discussions.
3. **Grading and Responding:** There is a typical mixture of responding to papers (marginal and final comments), and grading is done both in writing and digitally (through Microsoft Review, e.g.). Marginal comments focus on patterns of error and content, while a final comment, usually between 100 and 400 words, summarizes the point of the paper, offers positive feedback, and delivers criticisms.
4. **Interviewees’ Observations and Recommendations:** An English department training workshop on WID expectations and grading, particularly for GTAs, would be a welcome complement to the WID training already offered by the Writing Program—and this can expand to include training on writing pedagogy in English generally. A full-semester, for-credit writing pedagogy class (taught by English or Writing Program faculty) would be a welcome development, too. More attention needs to be placed on the needs of non-

English majors in WID courses to ensure their understanding of English writing practices—e.g., choosing passages from primary texts and doing close readings. Students should be able to evaluate course-assisting GTAs in course evaluations. Assisting GTAs should be more involved in the writing process—reviewing drafts, running peer review, meeting students during office hours. Consideration should be given to conflicts in WID courses between class time used for covering material and class time used for the writing process.

### *Final Assignments/Final Papers Review*

The committee collected final assignment prompts and their related papers from nine different fall 2012 classes, eight of which were WID, one non WID; these nine instructors, coming from the group of 12 involved in the interview sessions, were all volunteers. The level of classes is as follows: four 1000 level, three 2000 level, and one 3000 level.

From these classes, a total of 28 papers were collected. We asked instructors to choose papers from the 3rd, 9th, and 15th students on their rosters, and we requested they remove all identifying features (student name, instructor name, and section number) except for course level.

We coded the final assignment prompts with a variety of questions in mind (see below) and noticed the importance of citing and closely reading texts to all assignments. See Appendices Two and Four for assignment prompt data visualizations and coding form.

We thus coded the final papers to track quotation use, a particular proficiency to which WID instructors expressed a commitment during interviews. While other proficiencies are important (developing a thesis statement, e.g.), we see quotation use as the proficiency most illustrative of the goals of the writing assignments submitted to us. Understood as the direct quoting or paraphrasing of the words of a primary or secondary text, and encompassing the lead-in to the quote, the mechanics of quoting (quotation marks, indentation, citations), and, crucially, the student's response to the quote (as close reading or summary, e.g.), quotation use expresses a bedrock skill in the English curriculum: the ability to cite and interpret the texts of others. See Appendices Three and Four for quotation data visualizations and coding form.

Our coding of final assignment prompts included the following:

- Kind of assignment in literary and/or cultural analysis (e.g., discussion of a required topic involving the use of required texts).
- Presence of learning objectives and grading criteria.
- Secondary source requirements.

A review of the final assignment prompts revealed the following:

- Instructors favored assignments that offered students a general question or topic within which to fashion their own arguments; these assignments also allowed students to choose the texts with which they made their arguments—often texts on the syllabus itself.
- Most prompts addressed the use (or prohibition) of secondary sources.

- Most prompts did not state learning objectives or a rubric.
- Most prompts asked students to craft a thesis about the topic and to close read or otherwise analyze primary literary or other cultural texts.

Our coding of final papers tracked every instance of quotation and considered the following:

- Source: primary (i.e., literary/cultural) or secondary (i.e., criticism, theory, history) text.
- Purpose of the quote (e.g., a primary text leading to a close reading or a secondary text offering critical terms for summary or analysis and later use).
- Quote presentation (i.e., how the quote is introduced and put into the context of the source material).
- Quote formatting (i.e., the use of quotation marks, indentation, and citation).
- Quote contextualization within the larger scheme of the paper (e.g., whether it leads to a new phase of analysis or supports an existing phase of analysis).
- Success of the quote, from providing little benefit to the argument to extending the argument in positive directions.

The quote coding used the following rubric:

1. Quote is unrelated to topic/argument and generates no response.
2. Quote relates to topic/argument but is offered with little or no response and little or no context in relation to source material. Quote fails to impact the development of paper topic/argument.
3. Quote relates to topic/argument. Response analyzes quote's general meaning but pays little or no attention to its specific literary or conceptual language, thus missing significant aspects of the quote itself. There is little or no acknowledgement of the context for the quote in relation to source material. Quote somewhat impacts development of paper topic/argument.
4. Quote relates to topic/argument. Response analyzes quote's general meaning and pays some attention to its specific literary or conceptual language, thus recognizing significant aspects of the quote itself. There is some acknowledgement of the context for the quote in relation to the source material. Quote clearly impacts development of paper topic/argument.
5. Quote relates to topic/argument. Response analyzes the quote's general meaning and pays good attention to its specific literary or conceptual language, thus fully recognizing significant aspects of the quote itself. There is strong acknowledgement of the context for the quote in relation to the source material. Quote exceptionally impacts development of paper topic/argument.

Our coding of the 258 instances of quotation in the 28 papers revealed the following:

- The average score per quote is a three, in line with the rubric above. This was consistent across the various course levels. By and large, students were able to choose quotes that related to their topic or argument. They were able to discern in their responses the general meaning or significance of the quote—and, on occasion, the significance of the details of a quote. However, there was a general lack of engagement with the nuances of specific key terms in the quotes: a lack of identifying, re-citing, and then “unpacking” or extrapolating from such key terms in order to bridge the analysis toward subsequent sections of the paper, drawing on the most significant aspects of the quote itself. Further, the instances of quotation revealed student difficulty acknowledging the context of quoted material—the situation of such material in the source text in terms of plot (primary text) or the development of an argument (secondary text). As a result, the impact of quotes on the argument of the paper was, on average, noticeable but not as significant as it could be.
- There was less analysis of the actual words and concepts of quotes than there are generalizations in support of the larger aims of a paper. In terms of responses to primary texts, this meant that instances of especially “literary” language—figurative, allusive, opaque, playful language—were left uncommented upon, usually in favor of a passage’s generalizable meaning in terms of plot shifts or character development. In terms of responses to secondary texts, this meant that theoretical flashpoints centered on the action of a particular concept (as expressed in a word or phrase) were left uncommented upon, usually in favor of how the passage in question ratified the broader point of the text.
- There was a nearly 50/50 split between complete quotations (as block quotes or complete sentences from the source used in the body of the essay) and paraphrasing or the placement of a word or two from sources within a student’s own words; however, there was a noticeable lack of block quotes—18 out of the 258.
- Just over 80% of the quotes were formatted in MLA style.

## **Recommendations**

Based on our findings, we submit the following recommendations for both WID and non-WID teaching, careful to note instructor autonomy in the construction of course content and pedagogy:

- Include revision for at least one writing assignment across all English courses, thus making English a de facto WID department in this regard, and make sure revision is the bedrock of English WID instruction generally. Revision, allowing students to improve from one draft to the next, removes the pressure of “one-shot” writing assignments. It allows instructors to focus on improving quotation use (as discussed above) from one draft to the next. Beyond instructor feedback on papers, revision offers the possibility of using classroom time for teaching drafts and organizing peer sessions. “Content-heavy” courses may not have time for revision and writing-process instruction in general. Nevertheless, the possibility of revision across all English classes is a crucial outcome of the present WID review, and a new workshop (proposed below) can help all faculty determine how to apportion class time to writing instruction. Designated WID classes are

encouraged to continue assigning revision, to consider extending revision to multiple assignments, and to emphasize quotation use as the focus of revision in instructor feedback and classroom work.

- Promote quotation use as the department's disciplinary gold standard in WID and non-WID courses while not downplaying the significance of other writing elements (thesis creation and development, e.g.). Quotation use presumes the difference between quoting and close reading primary (literary or cultural) and secondary (critical, theoretical, or historical) texts.
- Create and implement a Literary Methods, a required complement (perhaps a prerequisite) to Critical Methods (the department's introduction to literary and cultural theory). Critical Literary Methods will teach students college-level techniques of literary and cultural analysis. Literary Methods will build out from quotation use, teaching citation and the close reading of novels, poems, and films. The bridge between Literary Methods and Critical Methods will emphasize how close analysis brings out the shared characteristics of literary and theoretical forms: their overlapping imaginative, creative, and conceptual values, the teaching of which is at the heart of writing pedagogy in English. As is the case with all English classes under this proposal, Literary Methods will involve the revision of at least one paper and classroom time devoted to teaching the writing process; as a WID course, it can offer even more.
- Create a yearly, pre-semester, day-long WID workshop for full-time faculty and graduate student instructors which non-WID instructors are encouraged to attend. Led by an experienced, full-time English WID instructor, the workshop will explain the expectations for WID in English: teaching revision, emphasizing quotation use, and devoting class time to teaching drafts and organizing peer work. Indeed, advice on apportioning class time to teaching writing in relation to other content demands will be important. The workshop will distribute prompts and commented/graded papers in order to explain baseline expectations for assignments and instructor responses.
- Create a graduate course on writing pedagogy in the distinct, related fields of composition and literature to be taught individually or in tandem by University Writing Program and English faculty. (We note the pending labor concerns involving Writing Program faculty teaching graduate courses in English.) This course will help graduate students as they transition into teaching WID and non-WID courses at GWU and, further, into the academic job market in English. Related to this is assigning a teaching mentor to both WID and non-WID graduate students, along with the creation of a mid-semester and end-of-semester folder review process led by the mentor to review exemplary papers and address classroom issues generally.

We offer these recommendations in hopes of starting a conversation in the English department about the great writing that's already being taught within our walls and how we can make that experience even better. Like any writing endeavor, these recommendations may themselves be subject to revision and, hence, improvement, and we look forward to starting a dialogue along that way.

## **Conclusion**

Full-time and graduate instructors in English are already doing a great job in the classroom. By focusing on revision as the constitutive element of writing instruction across all English classes, WID and non WID; by emphasizing quotation use as the cornerstone of our discipline's instruction in the formal, historical, and theoretical richness of literature and culture; and by offering new workshops, courses, and mentorship relationships among faculty and graduate student teachers, the department can do an even greater job in the classroom.



**Appendix 1:  
Syllabus Analysis**

Data Collected:

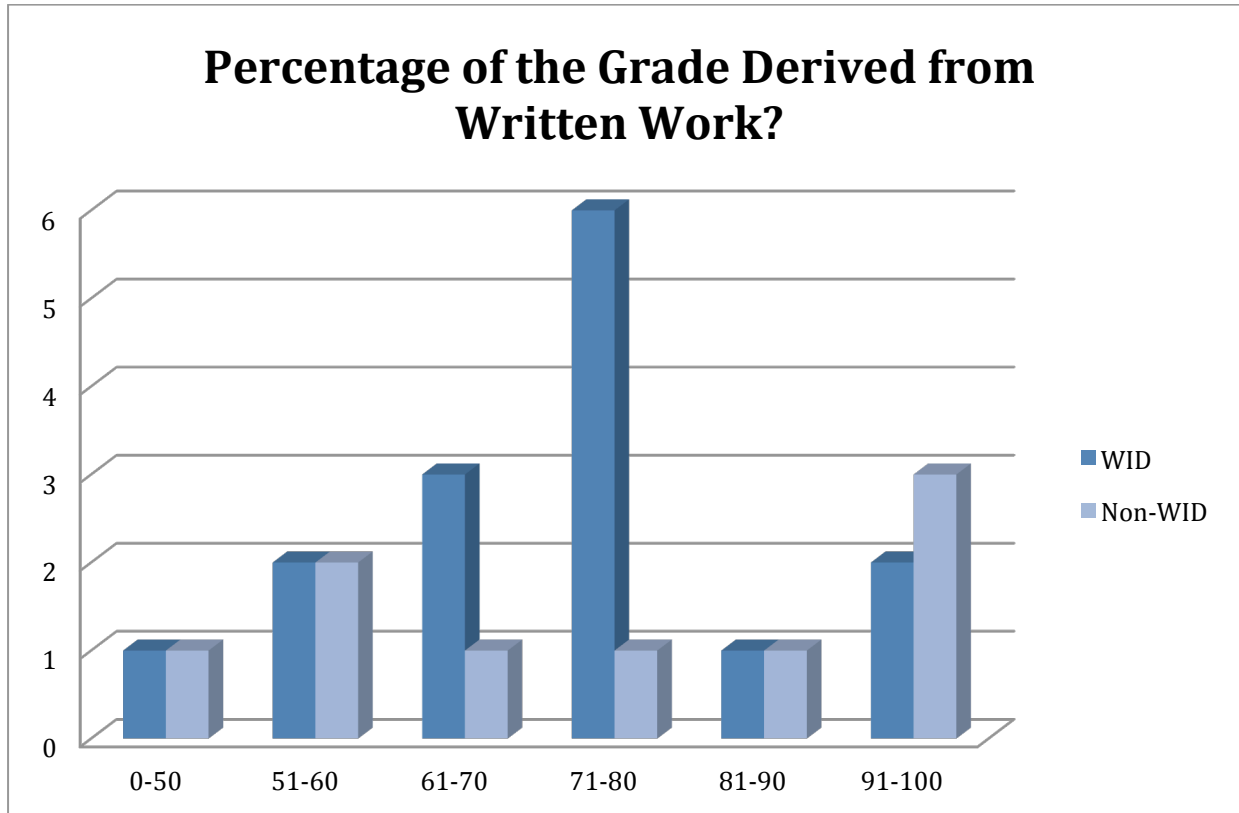
15 WID Courses, 9 Other courses broken down as follows

	WID	Non-WID
1000 Level	9	3
2000 Level	2	0
3000 Level	4	5
4000 Level	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>

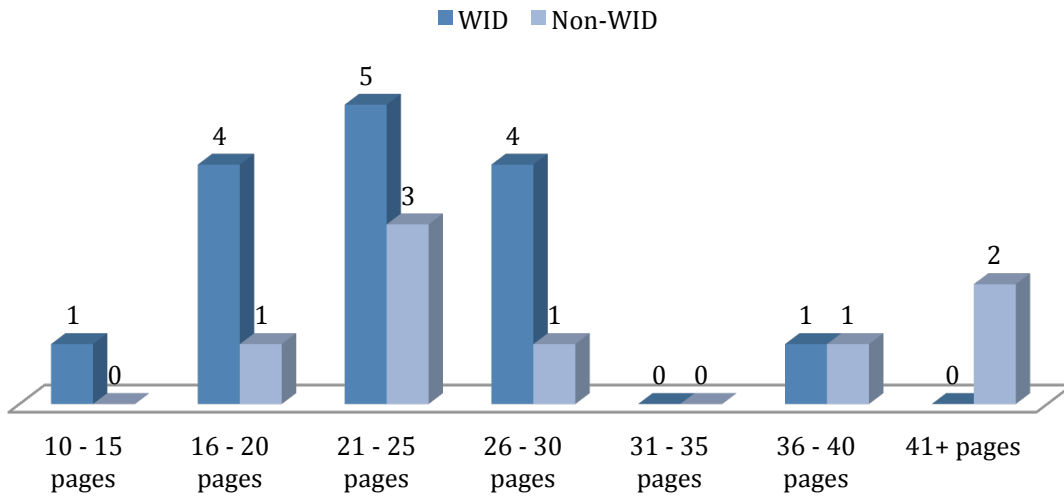
**GTA DATA:**

Is a GTA Attached to the Course?	WID	Non-WID
1000 Level	2*	0
2000 Level	2	0
3000 Level	3	1
4000 Level	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>

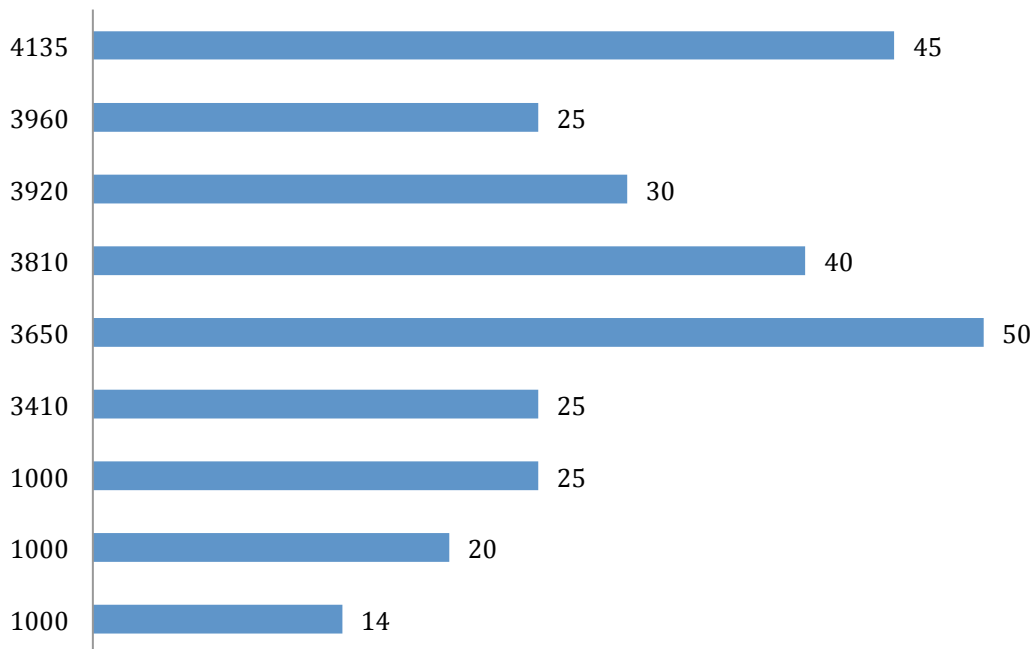
\*Attached to the same course



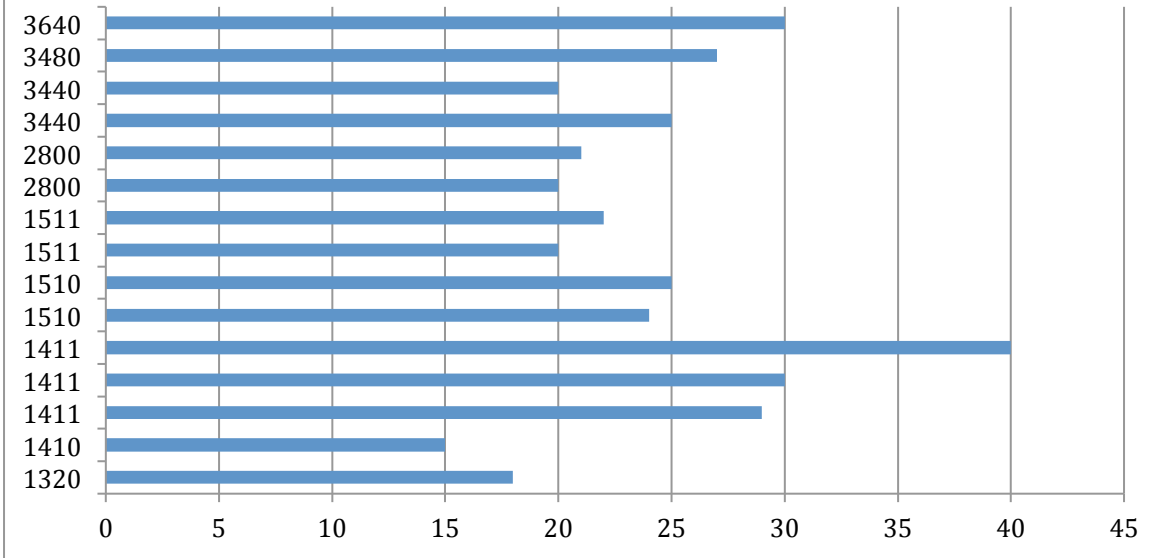
## Total Pages of Assigned Writing for the Course



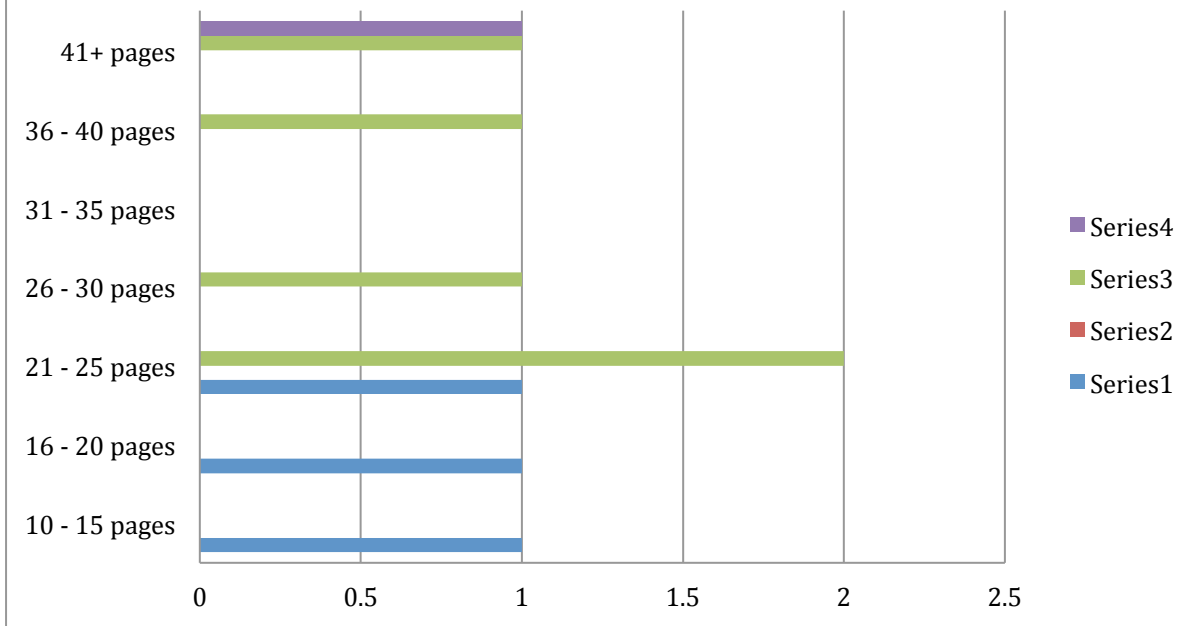
## Total Pages of Assigned Writing for the Course - Non-WID

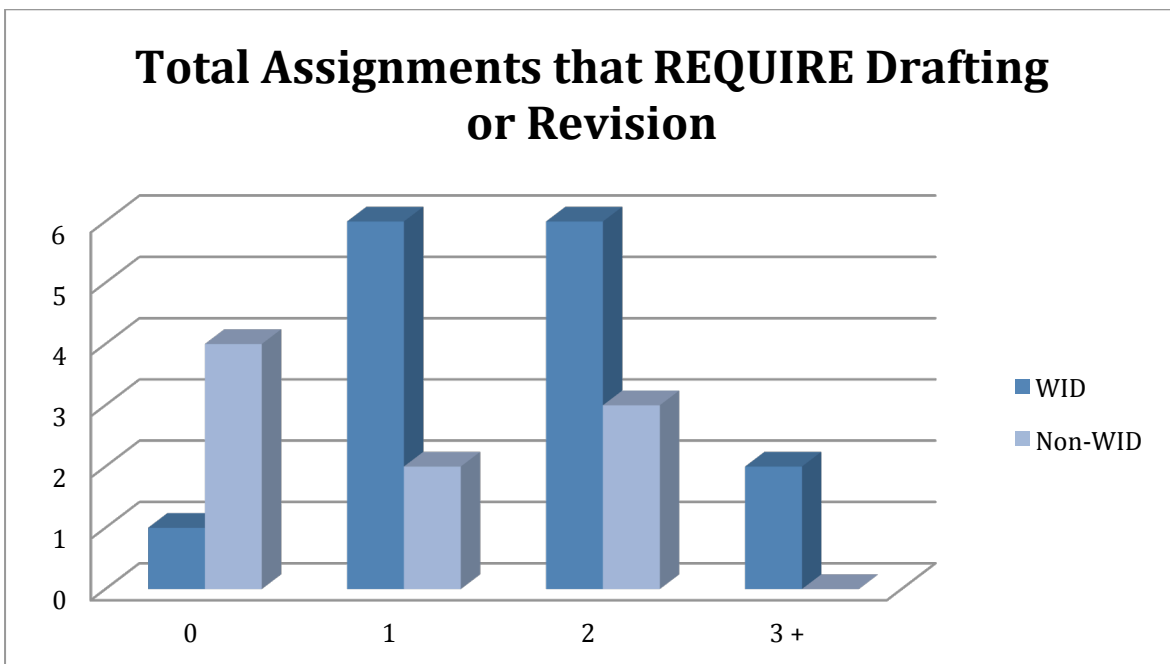
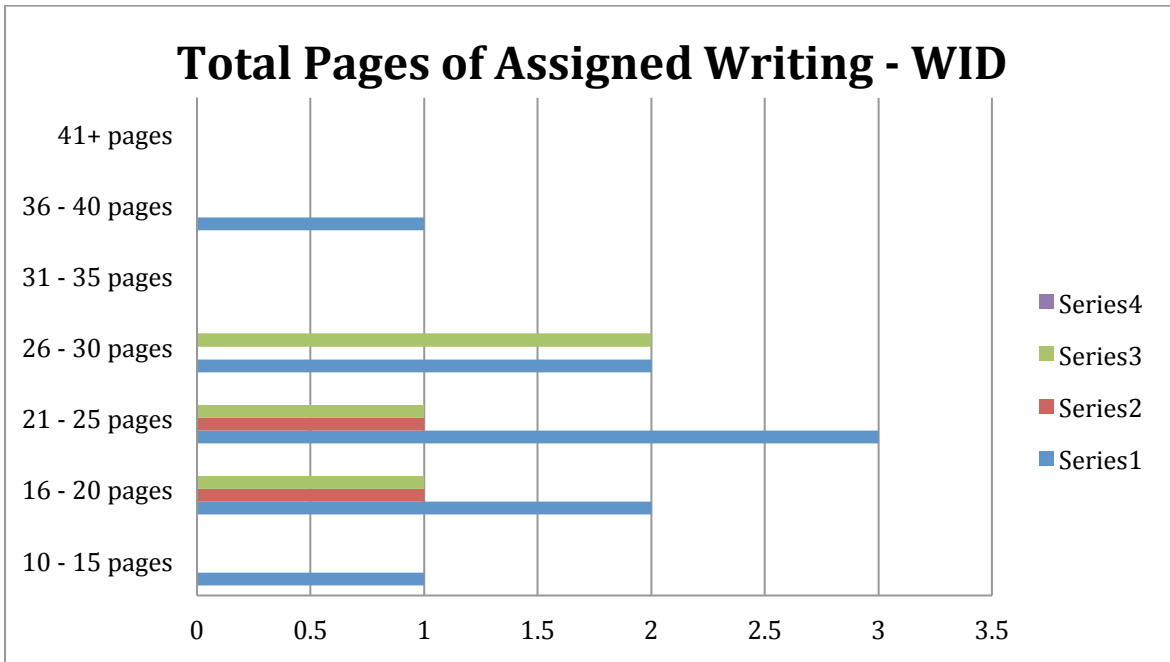


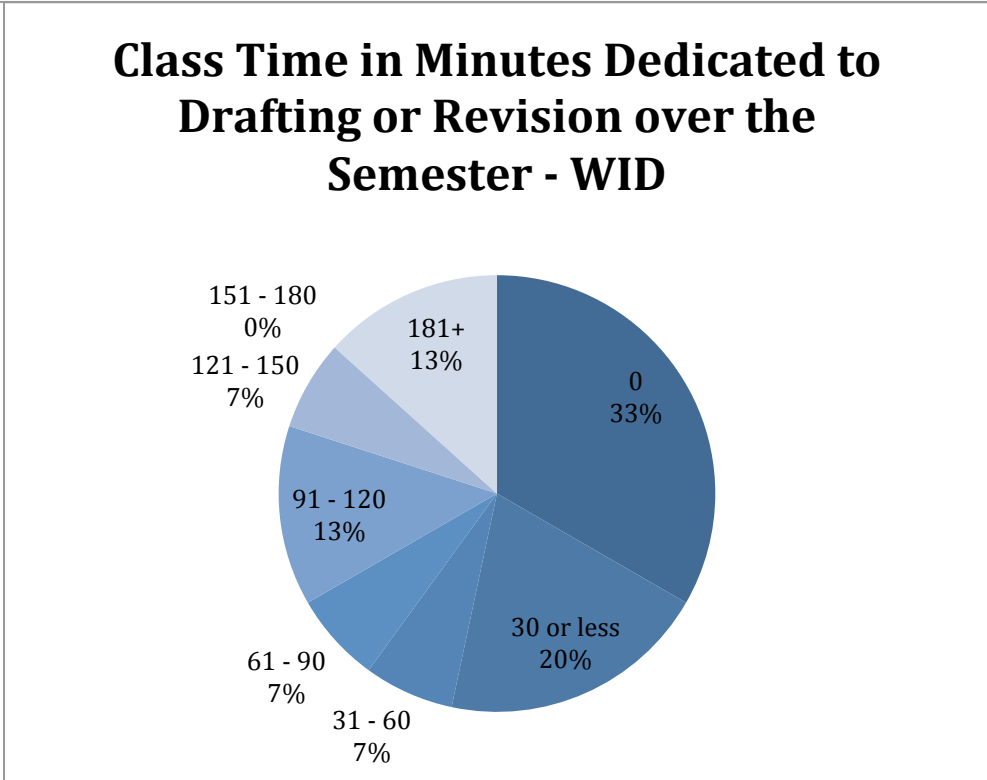
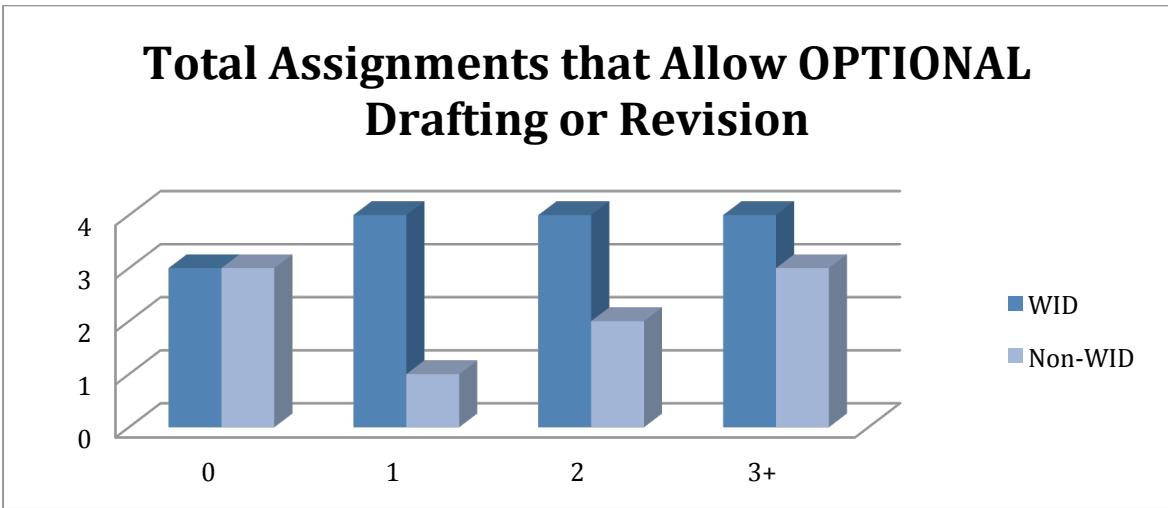
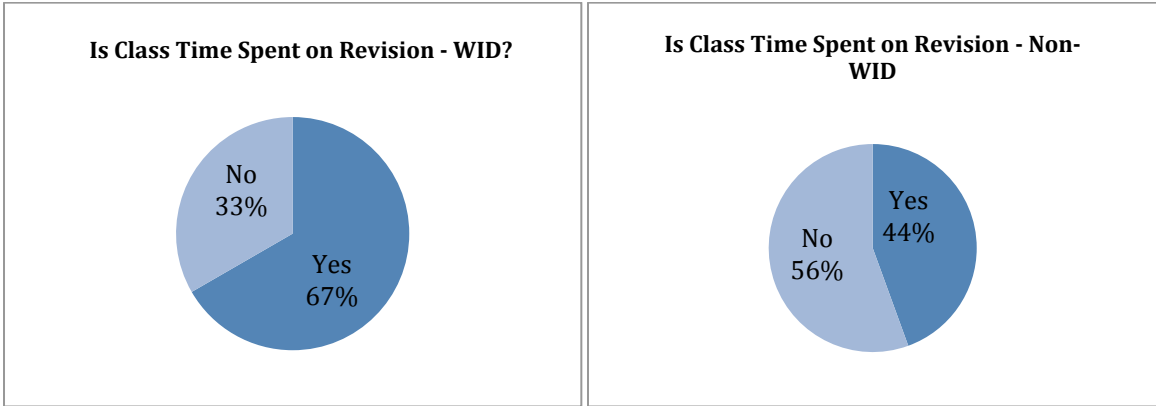
## Total Pages of Assigned Writing for the Course - WID



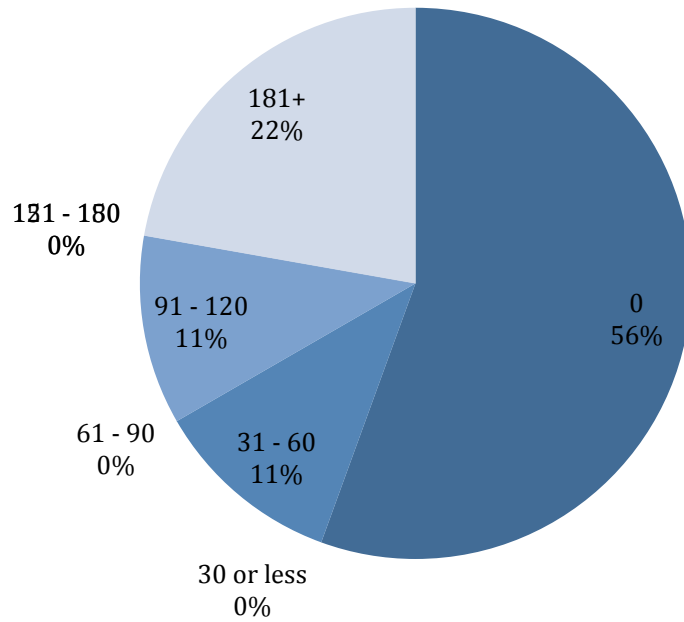
## Total Pages of Assigned Writing - Non-WID



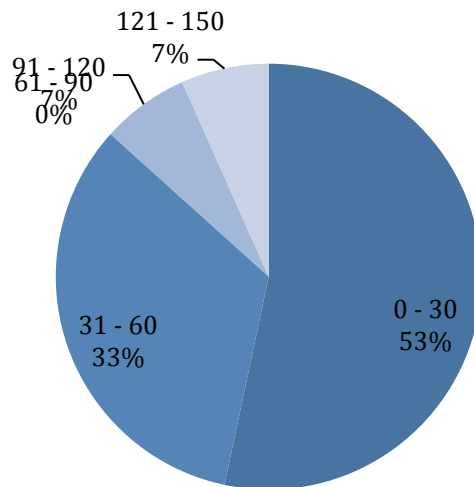




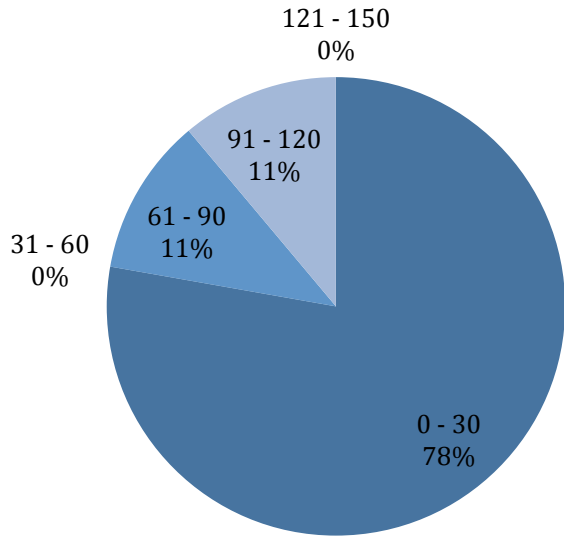
### Class Time in Minutes Dedicated to Drafting or Revision over the Semester - Non-WID



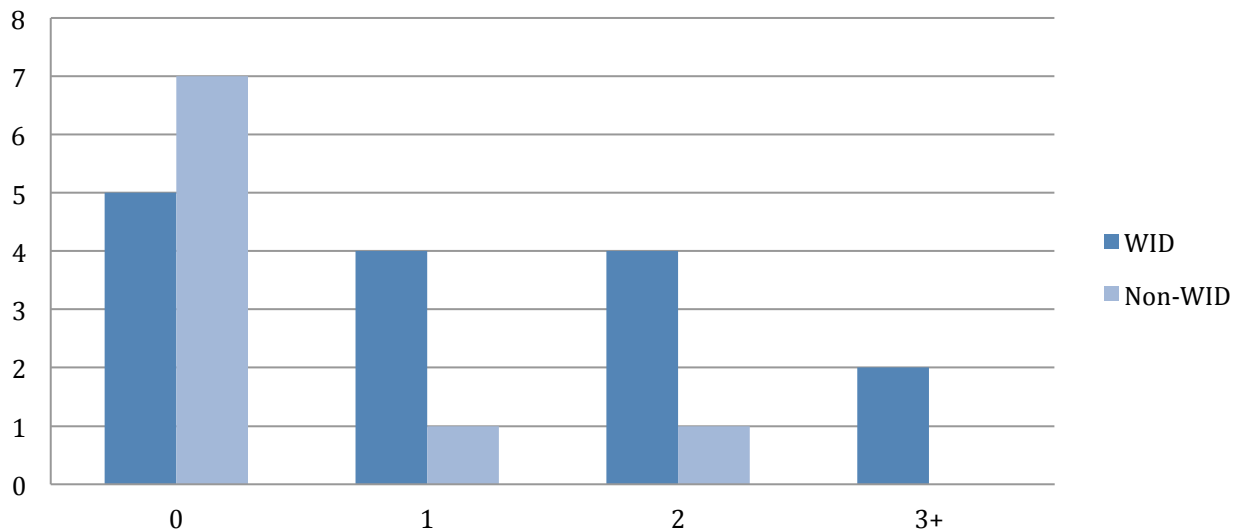
### Class Time in Minutes Dedicated to Peer Response over the Semester - WID



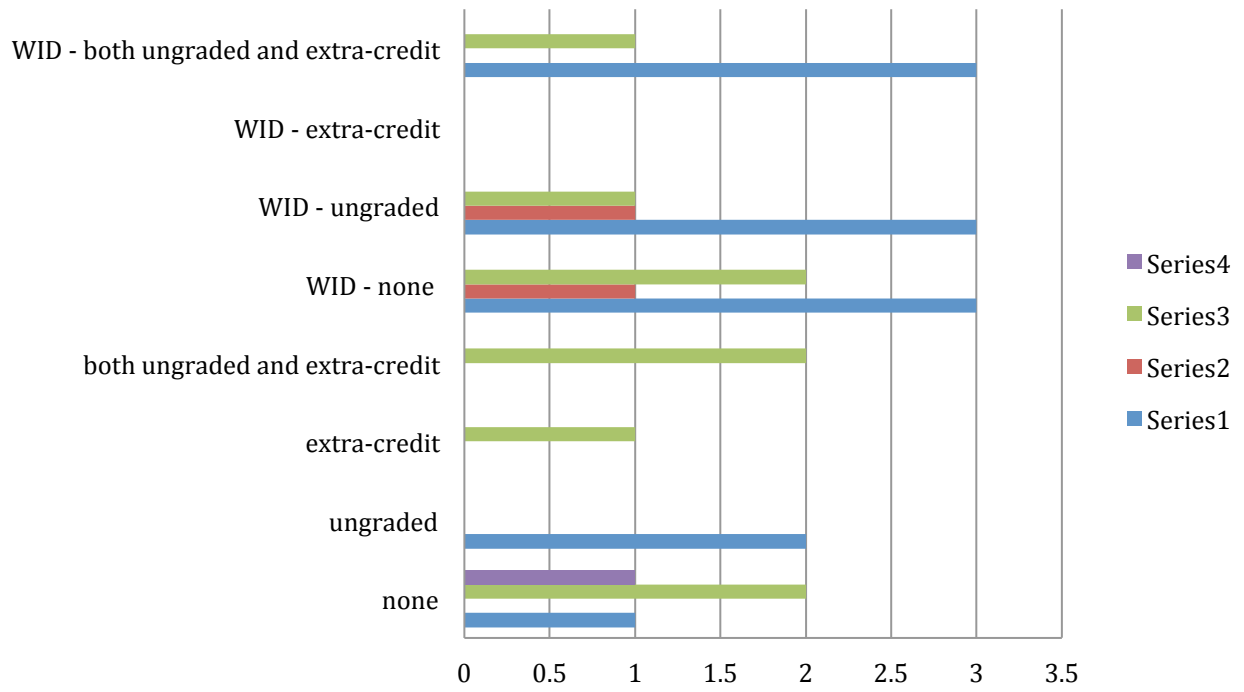
## Class Time in Minutes Dedicated to Peer Response over the Semester - Non-WID



## Total Assignments that REQUIRE Peer Response

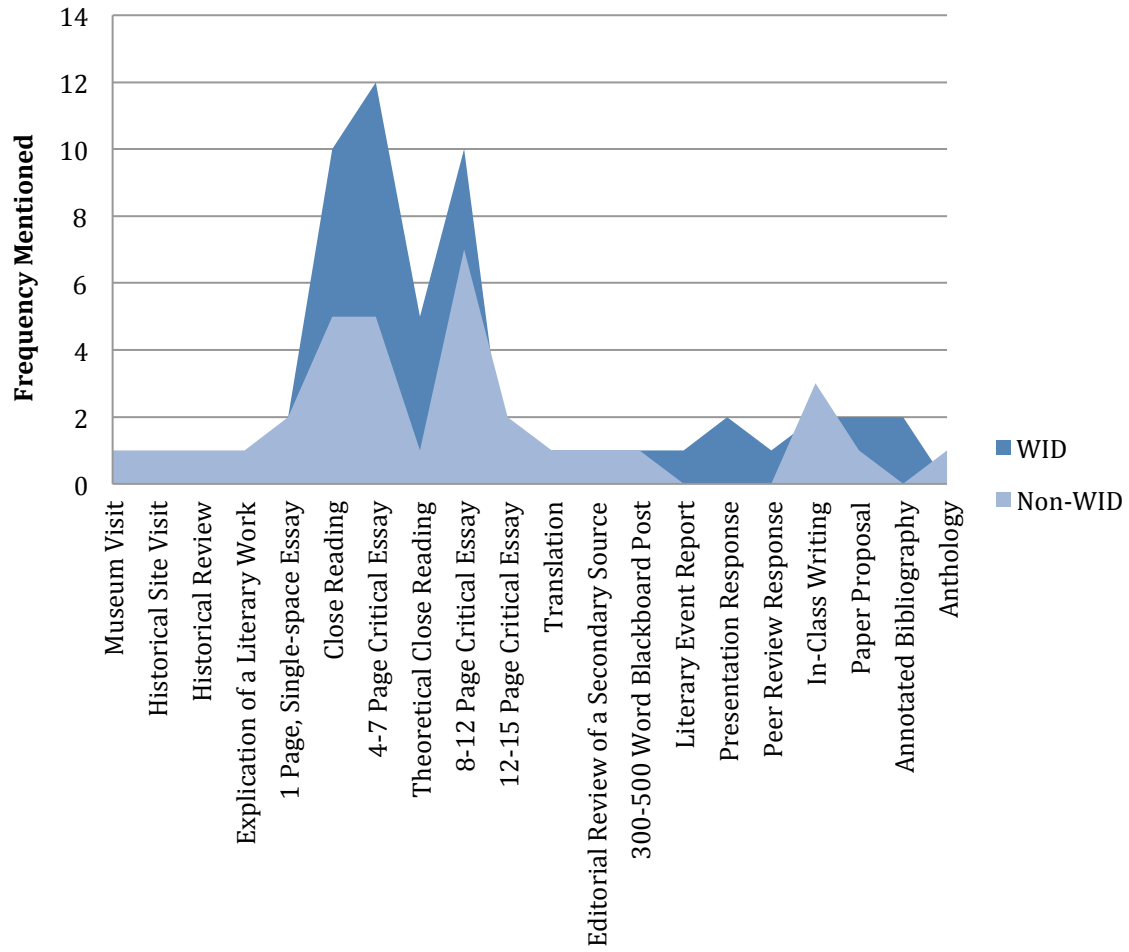


## Supplementary Writing Assignments

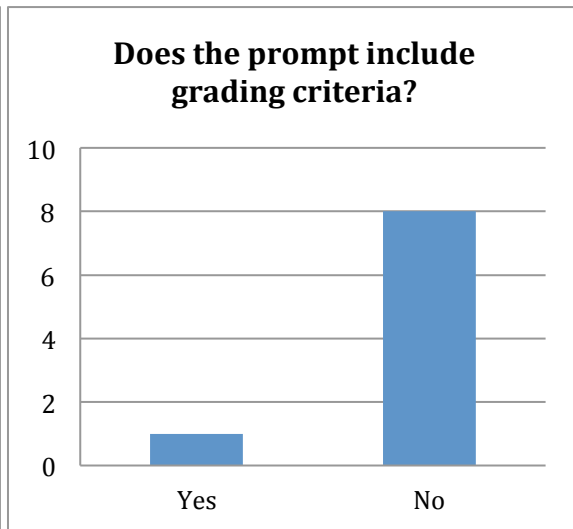
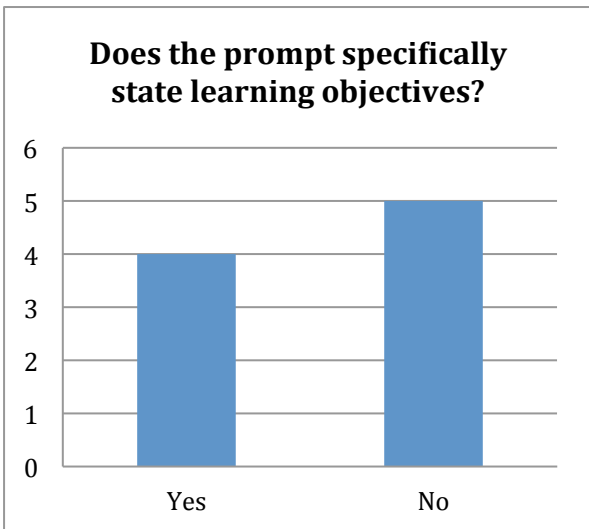
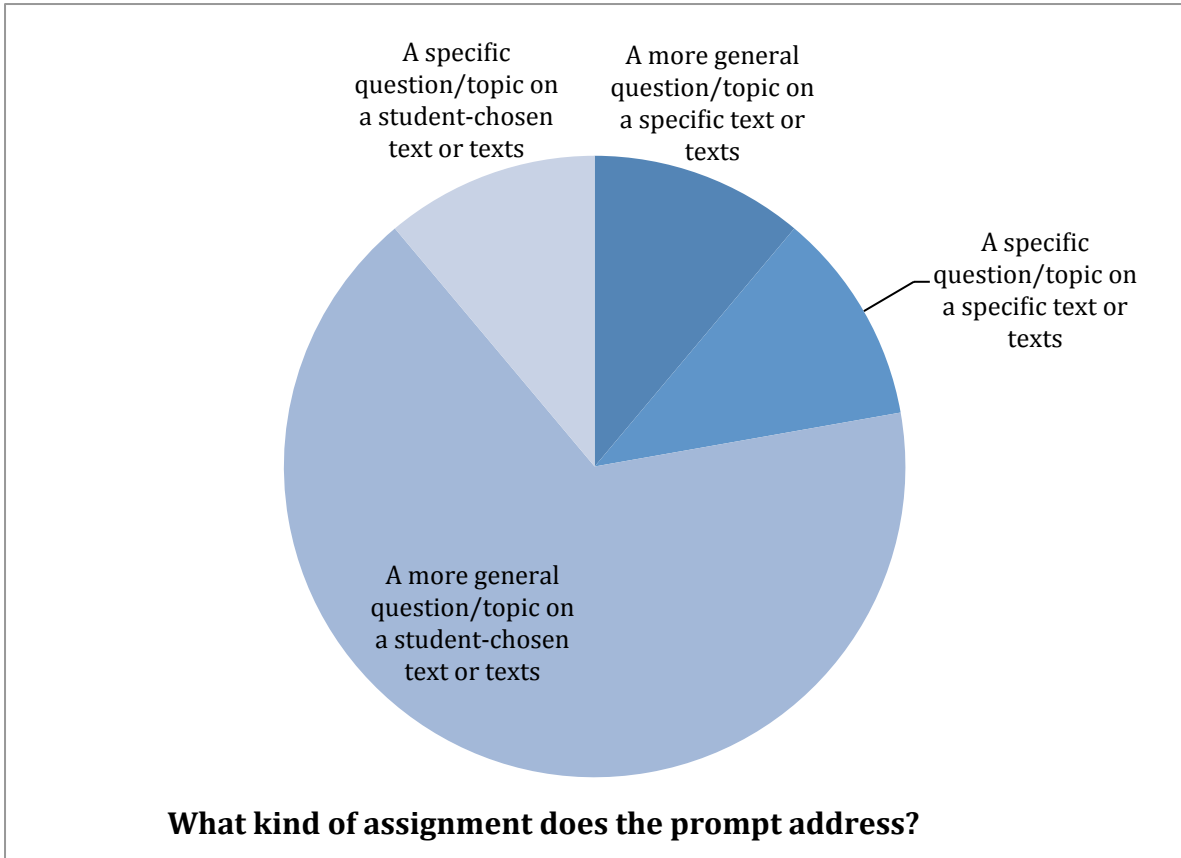


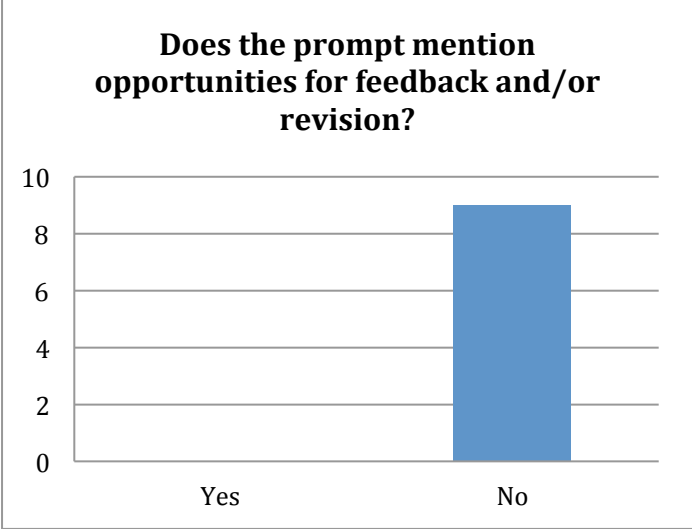
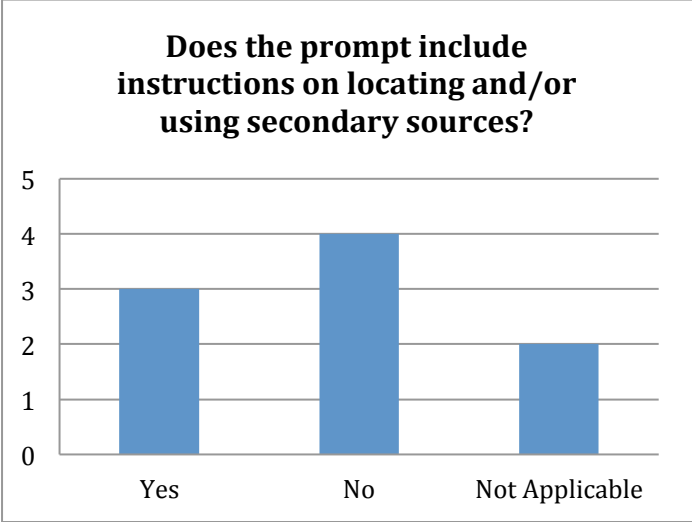
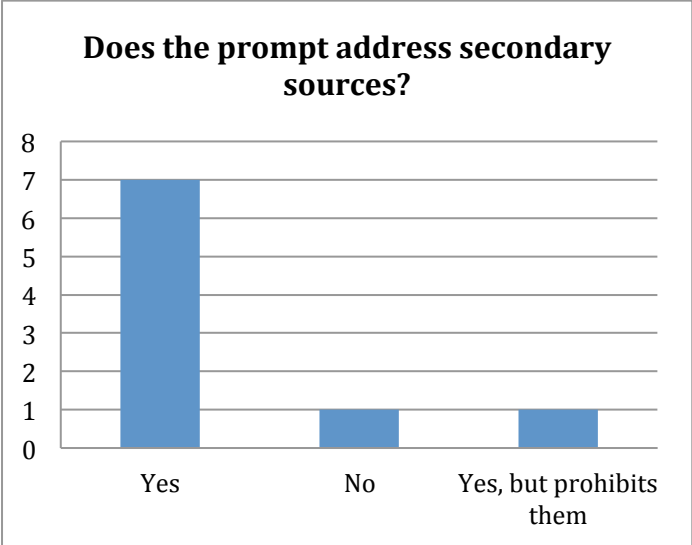


## Types of Assignments - Self-reported

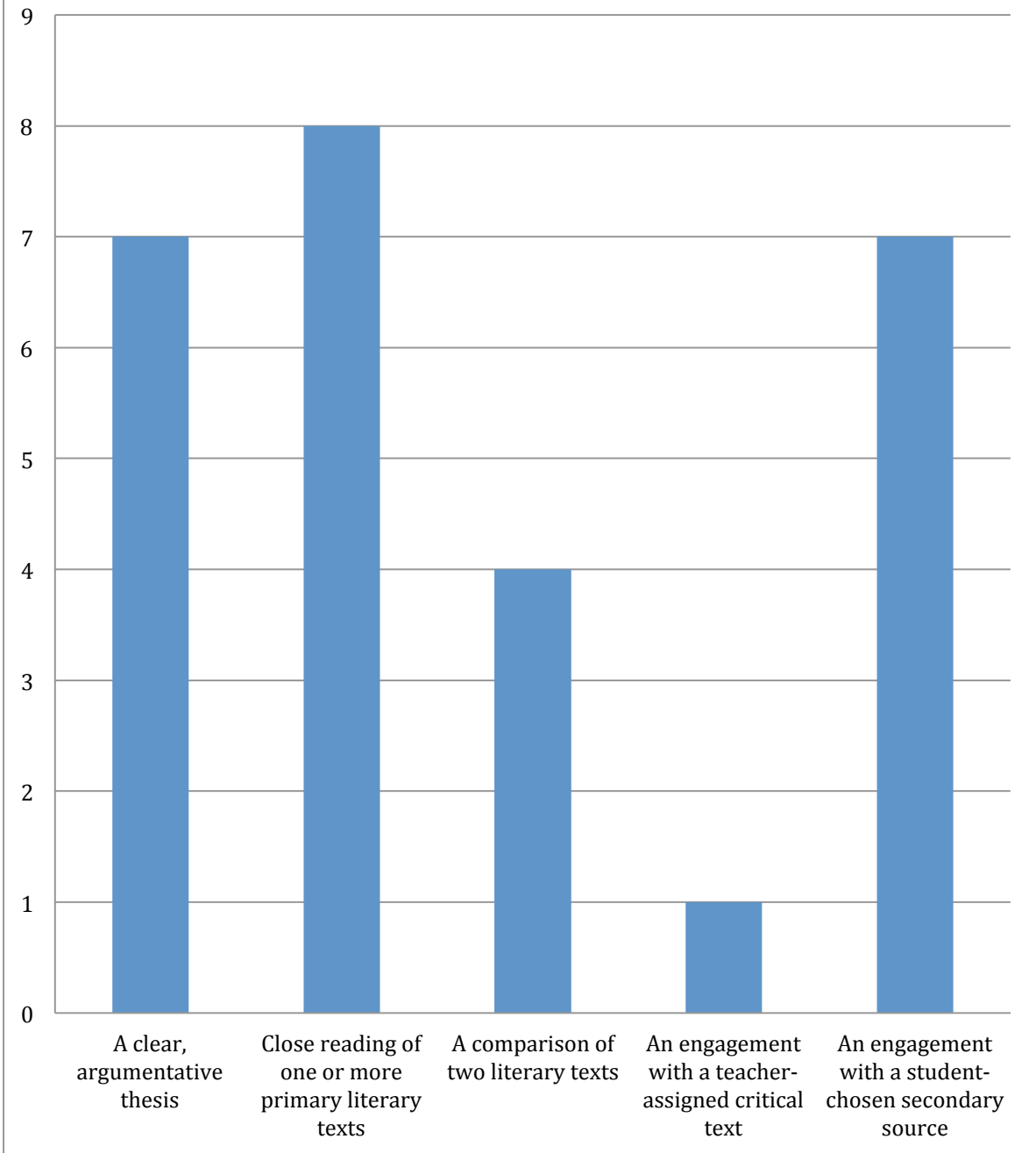


**Appendix 2:  
Final Paper Writing Prompt Analysis**





**Briefly summarize the stated assignment: Does it require...?**



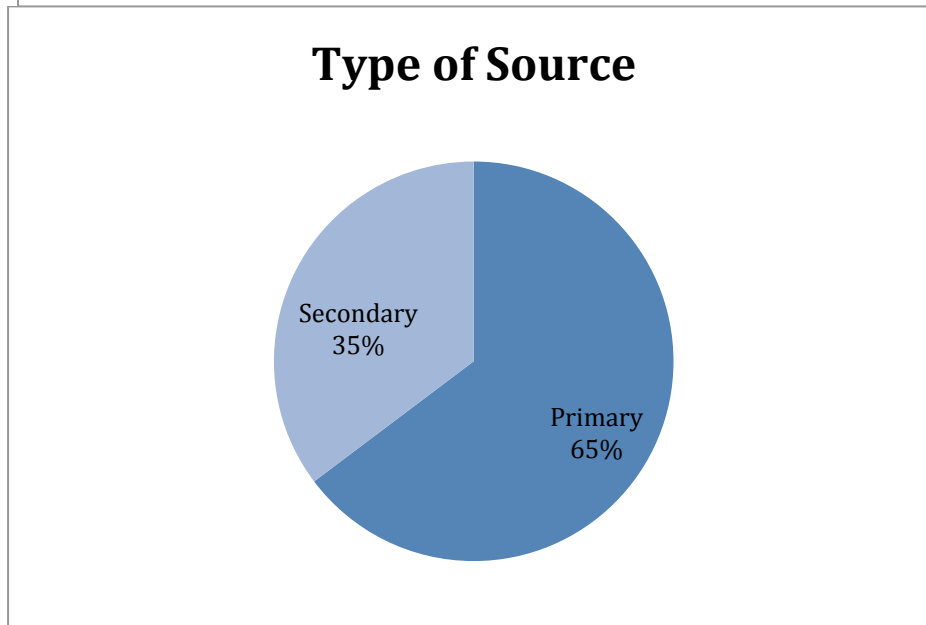
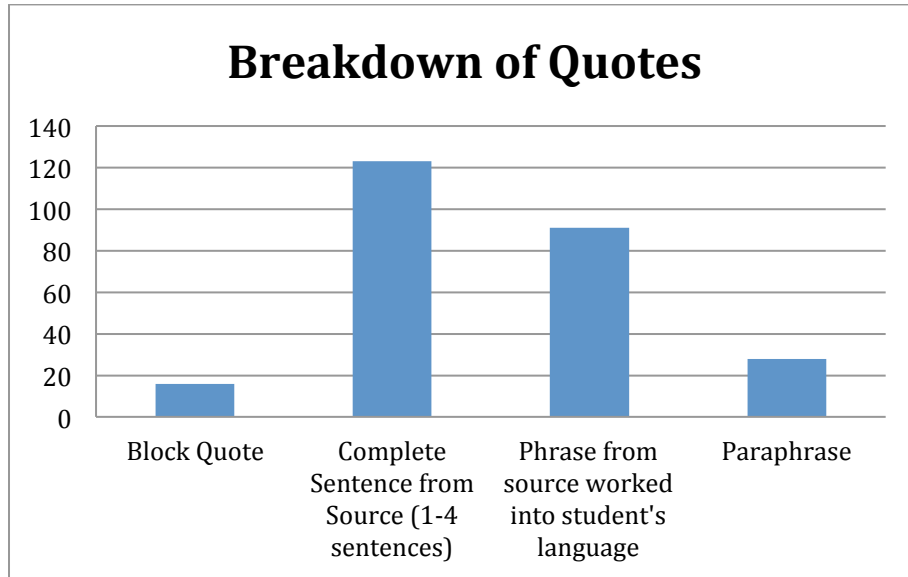
**Appendix 3:**

**Data Analysis of Quotes in Final Papers**

**Total papers reviewed: 28**

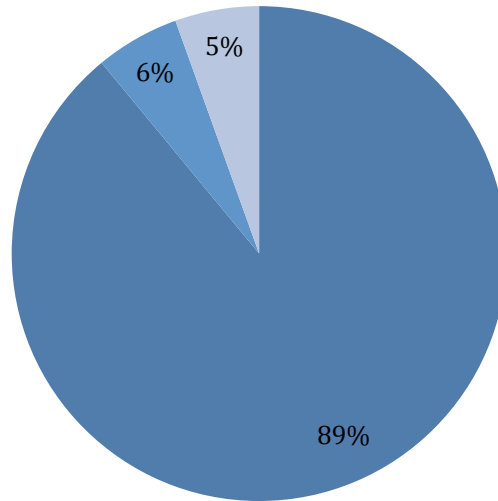
**Total instances of quoting and paraphrase: 258**

**Total quotes only: 231**

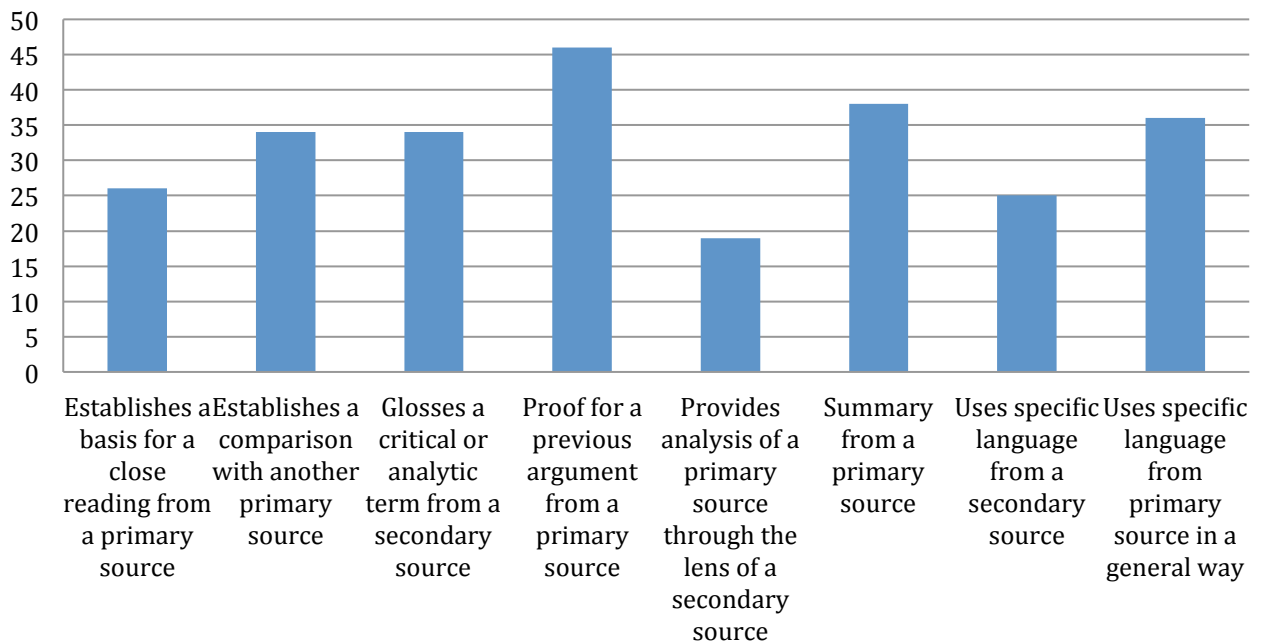


## Types of Secondary Sources Used

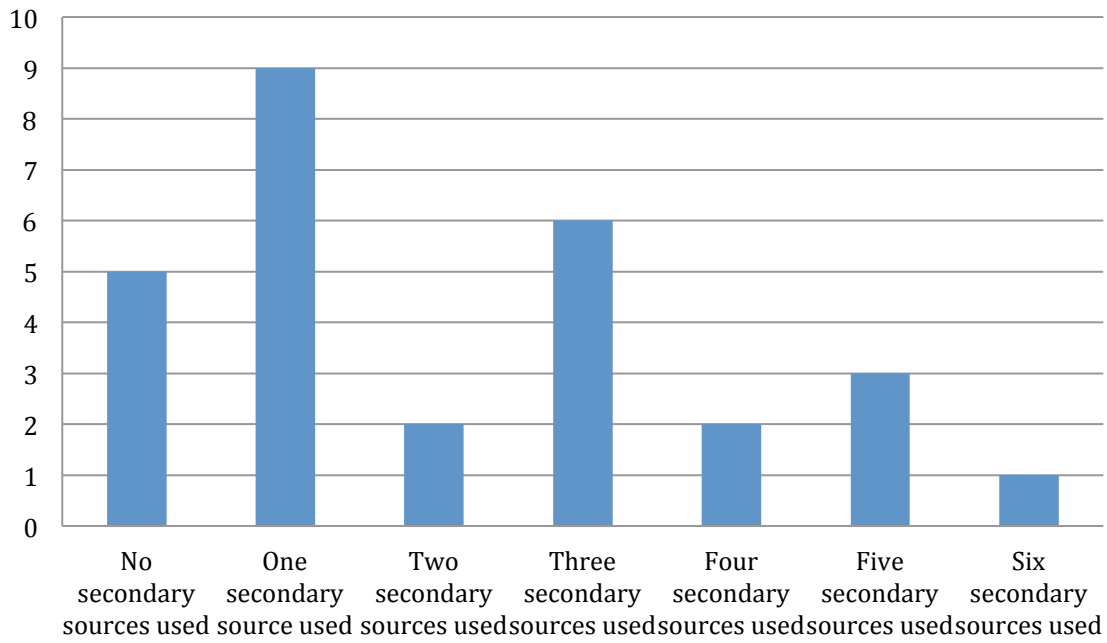
■ Criticism or Analysis   ■ Historical   ■ Informational (Dictionary)



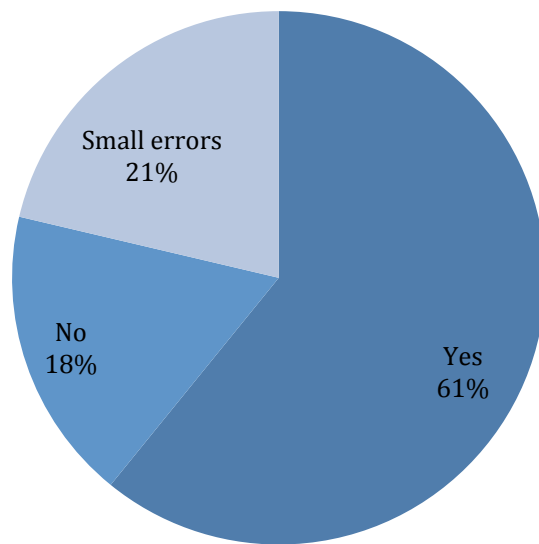
## Purpose of the Quote



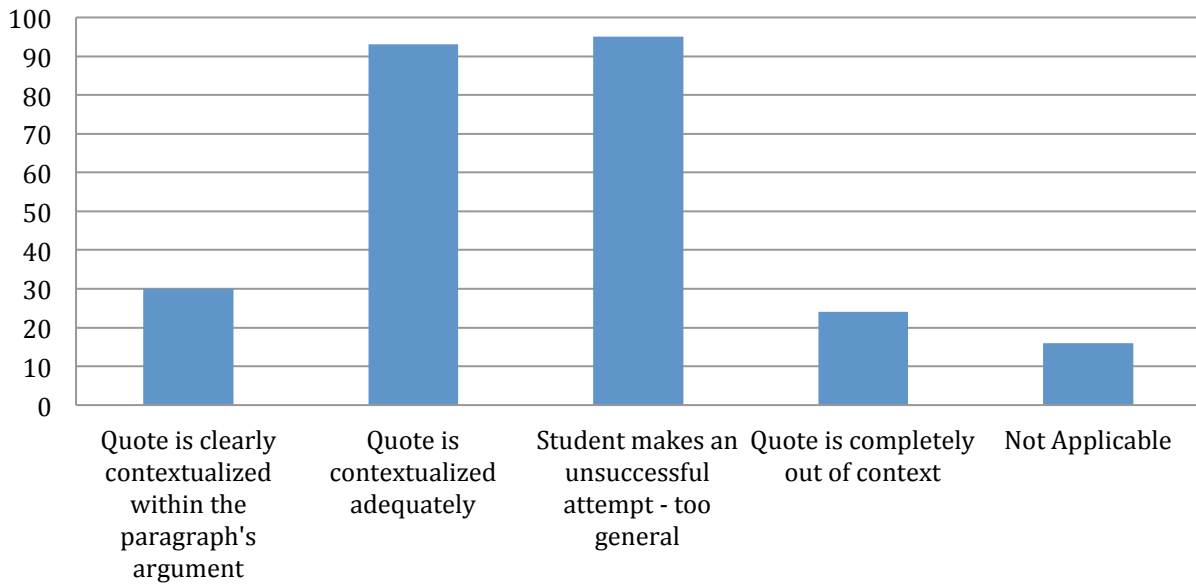
**Total Secondary Sources per Individual Papers**



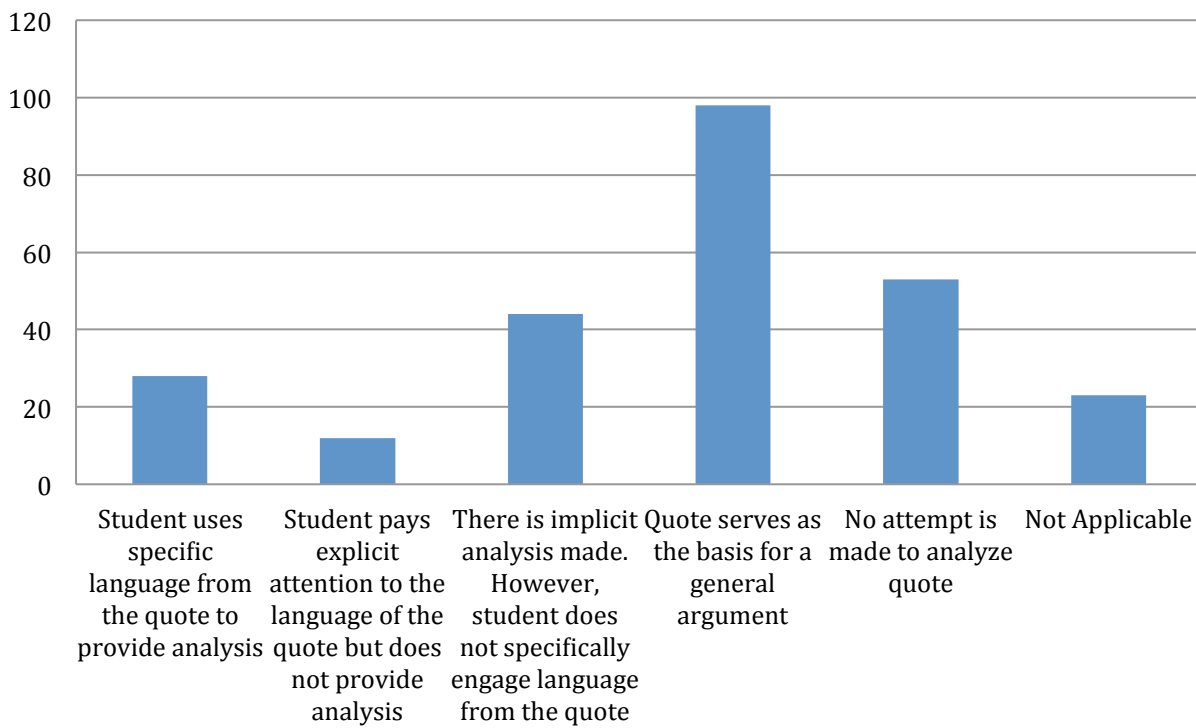
**Is the quote formatted in correct MLA style?**



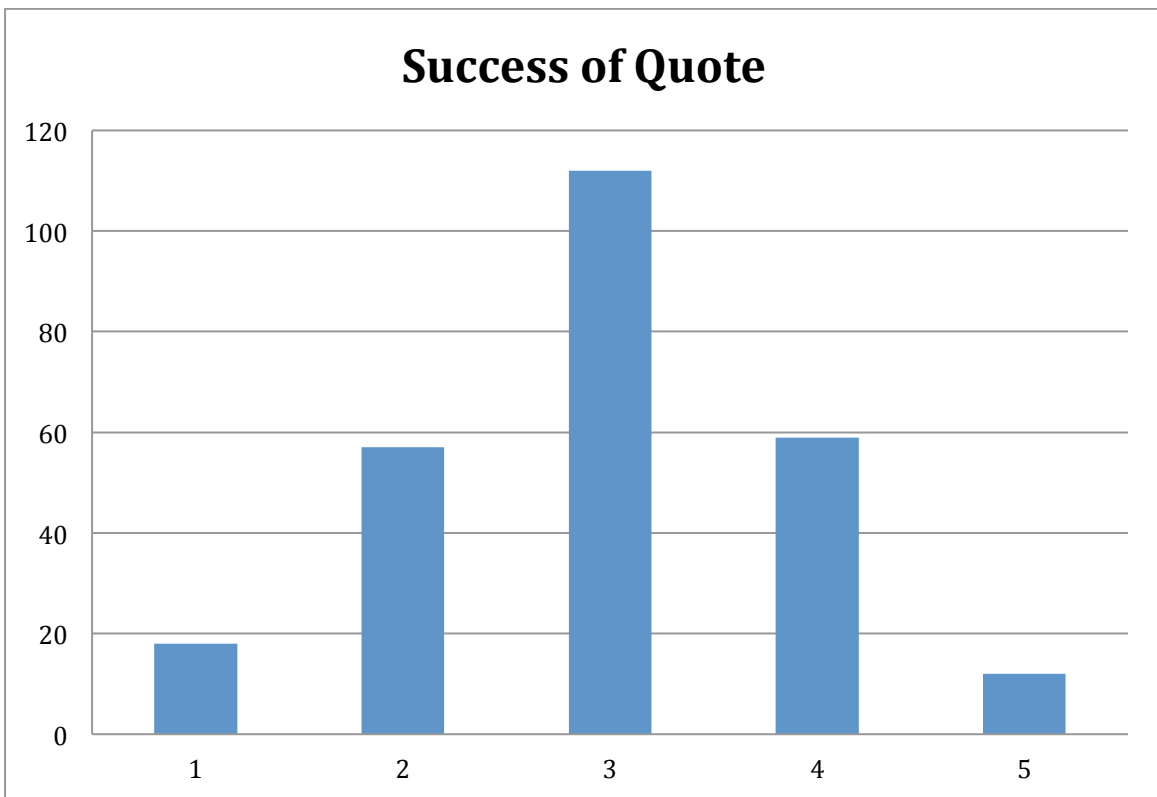
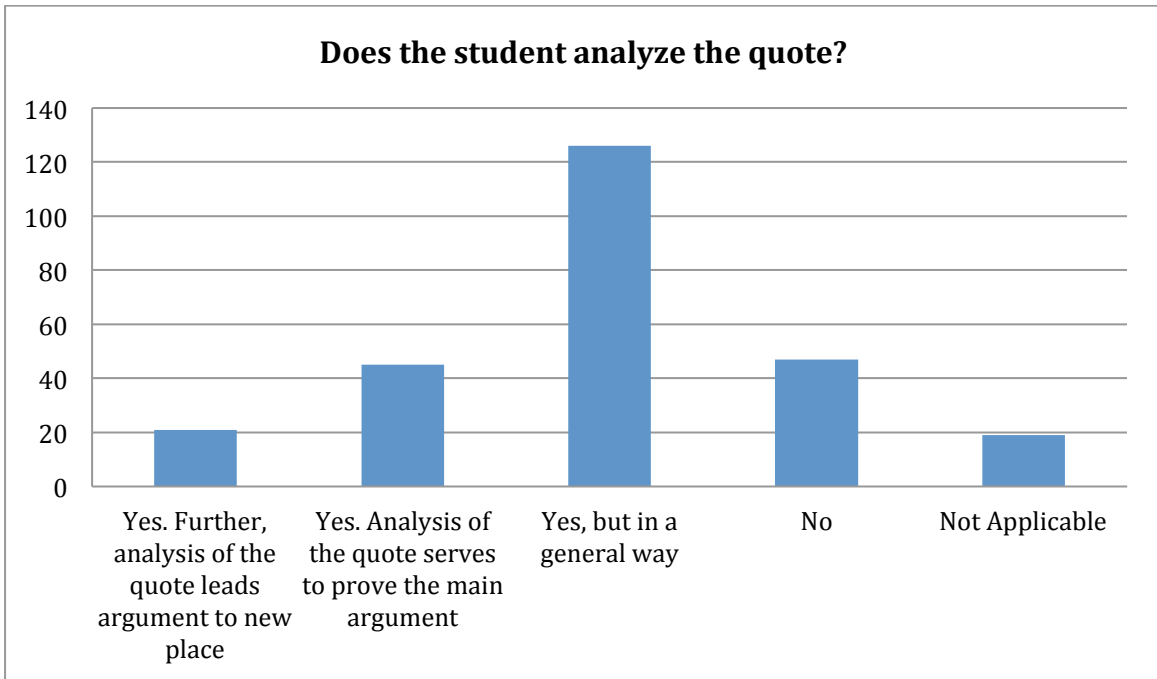
**Does the paper contextualize or situate the quote within the larger text or argument?**



**Does the student close read or analyze specific language from the quote?**







**Appendix 4:**  
**Coding Forms [Syllabus Analysis, Writing Prompt Analysis, and Final Paper Analysis - Quotes]**

## Syllabus Analysis

**Faculty Name \***

**Course Number and Title** \*For example, 2800: Critical Methods

**Is this a WID course? \***

- Yes
- No

**Instructor Status \***

- Full-Time Faculty
- Adjunct Faculty
- GTA
- Visiting Professor

**Is there a GTA attached to the course? \***

- Yes
- No

**GTA Name**

**Total Pages of Assigned Writing for the Course** \*Please use a numerical value

**Total Number of Writing Assignments** \*Please use a numerical value

**What percentage of the grade derives from written work?** \*Please use a numerical value

**Please list your individual assignments, including page length.** \*For example, close reading, 2 pages; theoretical analysis, 4 pages; research paper, 10 pages.

**How many assignments require drafting or revision?** \*Please use a numerical value

**How many assignments allow for optional drafting or revision?** \*Please use a numerical value

**How much class time in minutes is dedicated to drafting or revision over the semester?**  
Please use a numerical value

**How many assignments require peer response?** \*Please use a numerical value

**How much class time in minutes is dedicated to required peer response over the semester?**  
Please use a numerical value

**Does your syllabus explicitly mention writing requirements? \***

- Yes
- No

**Does your syllabus explicitly mention class time to be spent on writing instruction? \***

- Yes
- No

**Does your course include ungraded or extra-credit writing assignments? \***

- Ungraded writing assignments
- Extra-credit writing assignments
- Both ungraded and extra-credit writing assignments
- Neither ungraded nor extra-credit writing assignments

**Describe your ungraded or extra-credit writing assignments, including page length or word requirements.** For example, ungraded weekly blog post, 200 words; extra-credit response to reading, one page.

## **Final Writing Prompt Analysis**

### **Is there a prompt?**

- yes
- no

### **What kind of assignment does the prompt address?**

- A specific question/topic on a specific text or texts
- A specific question/topic on a student-chosen text or texts
- A more general question/topic on a specific text or texts
- A more general question/topic on a student-chosen text or texts

### **Does the prompt specifically state learning objectives?**For example, "a successful paper will synthesize a critical argument with close reading to ..."

- yes
- no

### **Does the prompt include grading criteria?**

- yes
- no

### **Does the prompt address secondary sources?**

- yes
- no
- yes, but prohibits them

### **Does the prompt include instructions on locating and/or using secondary sources?**

- yes
- no
- Not Applicable

### **Does the prompt mention opportunities for feedback and/or revision?**

- yes
- no

**Briefly summarize the assignment: Does it require**

- a clear, argumentative thesis
- close reading of one or more primary literary texts
- an engagement with a teacher-assigned critical text
- an engagement with a student-chosen secondary source
- a comparison of two literary texts
- a critical review
- a creative component

## **Final Paper Analysis - Quotes**

**Paper Code** 2A, 3B, 5C etc

**Quote source:** Assign a letter **A, B, C, D**

**Type of source:**

- Primary text (Literary or Cultural)
- Secondary text (Criticism or Analysis)
- Secondary text (historical)
- Secondary text (informational) i.e. dictionary

**What is the purpose of the quote?**

- Uses specific language from primary source in a general way
- Summary from a primary source
- Proof for a previous argument from a primary source
- Establishes a general argument from a primary source
- Establishes a comparison with another primary source
- Establishes a basis for a close reading from a primary source
- Uses specific language from a secondary source
- Glosses a critical or analytic term from a secondary source
- Provides analysis of a primary source through the lens of a secondary source

**How is the quote presented?**

- Complete sentence from source
- Phrase from source worked into student's language
- Block Quote
- Paraphrase

**Is the quote formatted correctly?**

- No
- Small errors
- Yes

**Does the paper contextualize or situate the quote within the larger text or argument?**

- Quote is completely out of context
- Student makes an unsuccessful attempt - too general
- Quote is contextualized adequately

- Quote is clearly contextualized within the paragraph's argument
- Not Applicable

**Does the student close read or analyze specific language from the quote?**

- No attempt is made to analyze quote
- Quote serves as the basis for a general argument
- There is implicit analysis made. However, student does not specifically engage language from the quote
- Student pays explicit attention to the language of the quote but does not provide analysis
- Student uses specific language from the quote to provide analysis
- Not Applicable

**Does the quote lead to further analysis and argumentation?**

- No
- Yes, but in a general way
- Yes. Analysis of the quote serves to prove the main argument
- Yes. Further, analysis of the quote leads argument to new place
- Not Applicable

**How successful is this quote?**

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unsuccessful - Provides little benefit to the argument						Very Successful - Quote extends the arguments of the paper