

FYW, MSU 2030, and the 2030 Boyer Report: Resonances and Student Success

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Both MSU's 2030 Strategic Plan and the recently released 2030 Boyer Commission Report provide innovative, inspirational directions for higher education broadly and MSU specifically. In what follows, we point toward some of the alignments MSU's First-Year Writing Program (housed in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures) shares with the 2030 plan and report.

- *MSU 2030: Empowering Excellence, Advancing Equity and Expanding Impact*; see, especially Student Success and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (<https://strategicplan.msu.edu/strategic-plan>)
- MSU's First-Year Writing Program (<https://wrac.msu.edu/about-first-year-writing/>)
- Boyer 2030 Commission Report: *The Equity/Excellence Imperative: A 2030 Blueprint for Undergraduate Education at U.S. Research Universities* (<https://ueru.org/boyer2030>)

We highlight correspondences and alignments between MSU's Strategic Plan, the 2030 Boyer Report, and First-Year Writing (FYW) at MSU. Our curriculum and goals in the FYW program are fundamentally grounded in the idea, per Boyer 2030, that **excellence in education can only be achieved via equitable practices and opportunities**. FYW is an important component of the means by which MSU works to “close opportunity gaps,” and we continue to work toward that goal in the experience we deliver for students and in the support we provide for our teachers.

If you have questions or want to discuss any of the information in this document, please email Dr. Lindquist at lindqu11@msu.edu.

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Integrated DEI

FYW

The FYW program features a curricular design and set of practices consistent with Writing Studies' disciplinary goals of accessibility and anti-racist education, and values of inclusion and equity. FYW courses feature

- a curriculum that positions reflective practice as central to learning and to students' assessment of their own work
- a low-stakes, process-oriented assessment model that makes success accessible to all students, regardless of the language communities in which they participate or their prior educational opportunities
- an emphasis on students' own educational and life experiences as assets for their continued learning
- writing experiences that value cultural rhetorical practices including storytelling

MSU 2030

Update curricula by infusing DEI components throughout degree programs, minor programs and general education courses (DEI Section, Objective Four).

Boyer Report

"It is not true that universities can have equity only at the expense of excellence—and excellence only at the expense of equity. What if excellence were defined as the difference between what a student entered and left college with? Areas of growth might include breadth and depth of knowledge, the ability to marshal evidence to make complex arguments and express them well, the ability to apply knowledge to new situations, the skills to work well with diverse others, the freedom of mind and creativity to think differently and imaginatively" (p. 8).

Gateway Courses and High-Impact Practices

FYW

FYW classes are capped at 24, so they function as intimate communities of practice where students can develop meaningful relationships with their peers and feel a sense of agency over their own learning and their educational goals. Students are invited to inquire into their educational and professional futures, even as they learn how their prior experiences as language users, learners, and participants in culture and society can serve them as assets in their learning and lives as writers.

MSU 2030

Redesign gateway courses to improve learning outcomes and eliminate opportunity gaps (Student Success Section, Objective One).

Boyer Report

We must consider "the 'high-impact practices' (HIPs)—hallmarks of transformative educational practices—that teach students the critical life and problem-solving skills they need to thrive outside the classroom. They include such experiences as first-year seminars, faculty-mentored research, study abroad, internships, and living-learning communities. HIPs require considerable time and effort from students, meaningful



interactions between students and faculty, collaboration among individuals with diverse perspectives, consistent feedback and iteration, real-world application and practice, and opportunities for reflection. Some students especially benefit from these practices: for example, among students who participate in HIPs in their first year, studies show that Black students' gains in first-to-second-year retention rates and Hispanic students' gains in first-year grade point averages (GPAs) are greater than those of white students" (p. 23).

World Readiness

FYW	Students explore concepts and gain experience with social and ethical issues related to literacy, communication, and knowledge production, along with developing rhetorical skills in navigating different communication contexts and in expressing ideas with attention to audience, context, and purpose. In FYW, students learn strategies for writing not anchored to one particular context, but rather, capacities for learning that transcend any particular tool, technology, or setting—best preparing students for a world in which they will engage and write with tools and technologies we can't yet imagine.
MSU 2030	Ensure all graduates develop leadership, entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, ethics and digital and technical/analytical abilities appropriate for a world transformed by technology and automation (Student Success Section, Objective Four).
Boyer Report	Higher education “must simultaneously prepare undergraduates for life as productive citizens and economic actors where the best way to do both is to prepare students for life itself—life in our times and with an anticipated future in mind, which is to say, for world readiness” (p. 11).

Ethics and Intellectual Habits

FYW	FYW classrooms are spaces of connection, communication, and sharing, where students are invited into relationships with others and their languages, literacies, and lived experiences. FYW positions listening as an ethical rhetorical practice necessary for not only effective communication, but also for ethical action. Students are prepared to inquire into social problems as a way to engage and make contributions to creatively, innovatively addressing them.
MSU 2030	Transform the intellectual habits of students by intentionally integrating ethics and the arts into curricular and cocurricular experiences (Student Success Section, Objective Four).
Boyer Report	“Indeed, the precipitous decline in the humanities comes at the very moment when the central substance of those fields—cross-cultural understanding; ethics; the pursuit of meaning; communication of complex, nuanced ideas; critical thinking—are



desperately needed both for providing the purchase on enduring human questions so necessary for mental health and a fulfilling life and for effectively addressing society’s most pressing problems. Turning the tide on global climate change, racism, poverty, and authoritarian threats to democracy depends on changing societies and cultures—what humans value, how they behave, and why” (p. 14).

“Andrew Delbanco, president of the Teagle Foundation and Boyer 2030 Commissioner, suggests the best forum is the classroom—not large crowds, not on social media—but in a classroom where students know each other’s names: ‘Certain habits of mind—distinguishing between arguments and opinions, admitting self-doubt, rethinking assumptions—are,’ Delbanco argues, ‘imperative for collective life. If these habits are not nurtured in the college classroom, where else will they be found?’” (p. 22).

Sense of Belonging and Student Identities

FYW FYW classes are designed to enable and cultivate a sense of belonging for all students. A primary aim of WRA 101 is for students to develop productive understandings of their own goals as learners and to reflect on, write around and about, and refine these goals across the semester.

FYW has replaced placement into WRA 101 by way of standardized (SAT and ACT) test scores with a new Directed-Self Placement diagnostic model, which allows students to make decisions about their pathways based on their experiences and needs and learners, and which forecasts the experience of reflection and self-assessment that students will find in WRA 101.

MSU 2030 Establish a comprehensive sense-of-belonging initiative that recognizes the individual identities, affinities and aspirations of each student (Student Success Section, Objective Five).

Boyer Report “Perhaps most importantly, we must examine institutionalized academic practices and entrenched campus cultures to assess whether they contribute to learning and well-being or, unintentionally, are themselves part of the problem. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed higher education’s capacity for adaptation and change. From discontinuing use of inequitable standardized testing for admissions to reform of inequitable high-stress course designs and learning evaluation practices, the Boyer 2030 Commission urgently recommends that universities build upon what has been learned during the pandemic and continue thoroughgoing review and reform of university policies, practices, and campus cultures to promote mental health and wellness for all” (pp. 48–49).



Learning Goals and Our Teaching Community

FYW

FYW classes have a common curriculum designed as an expression of our shared learning goals. This curriculum has these essential features:

- an emphasis on transferable learning via reflective writing;
- a philosophy of assessment driven by values of inclusion, access, and equity; and
- a scaffolded series of writing experiences that invite students to inquire into their own educational histories, present experiences, and future education and professional aspirations.

Classes are taught by a cohort of instructors who work together—in mentoring groups, via program workshops, and through other means—to discuss and address pedagogical considerations and to develop strategies for more effective and ethical learning.

MSU 2030

Ensure continuing quality and improvement of academic programs by clearly articulating learning outcomes; regularly and appropriately assess and align outcomes (Student Success Section, Objective One).

Boyer Report

“Emphasize the departmental (rather than individual faculty) responsibility for the curriculum of courses, quality of teaching, and design of assessments. Departments should develop a collective approach to, and reputation for, teaching excellence—and be rewarded for that. Studies find that faculty’s sense of peer influence and community is instrumental in shaping use of evidence-based teaching, in some instances, more important than rewards.” (28)