Criteria for Departmental Rhetoric Programs (revised July 2015)

Calvin College’s Rhetoric Across the Curriculum (RAC) program exists to help all academic departments at Calvin educate students well in the arts of writing, research, public speaking, and other forms of rhetoric, and to ensure that the skills needed for effective rhetorical expression form part of every academic program at the college. These skills are best developed progressively over the course of a deep and diverse education, in a variety of disciplinary contexts. Each academic department will therefore maintain and assess its own departmental Rhetoric Program according to the following general guidelines.

I. Attention to the full range of rhetoric-related skills. Departmental rhetoric programs should aim to develop students’ competence in the following rhetoric-related areas:

- Writing
- Oral rhetoric (public speaking)
- Visual rhetoric (communicating with images)
- Information literacy (research fluency)

Effective written, oral, and visual expression in a variety of genres is crucial for all college graduates. Rhetorical skills should be explicitly taught and practiced throughout the curriculum. Different disciplines will prioritize the forms of rhetoric differently, but all students should be educated in all three areas, both in core courses and in their major programs.

College graduates must be adept at research (finding, critically evaluating, integrating, and properly citing appropriate sources). Information literacy skills vary across disciplines; therefore they cannot be taken for granted but must be explicitly taught by different disciplines, with assistance from library staff when needed.

Departmental rhetoric programs should be guided by the general principles of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Information Literacy Across the Curriculum (ILAC) as well as by the appropriate pedagogical standards outlined by national bodies in their disciplines.

- WAC principles summarized: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/671/1/
- ILAC principles summarized: http://libguides.calvin.edu/c.php?g=209335&p=1785042

II. Appropriate pedagogy. Departmental programs should embrace the following general principles:

a. Variety. Students learn best when assigned both “high-stakes” (graded) and “low-stakes” (process-based or “write-to learn”) exercises. They should learn and practice researching, writing and speaking in a variety of rhetorical types and conventions appropriate to their disciplines. These should include less formal genres (e.g. journals, electronic discussion boards, oral presentations, poster projects) as well as more formal academic genres (e.g. research papers, lab reports, critical and analytical essays, speeches).

Some courses in the major should address research fluency and introduce students to discipline-appropriate resources. Informal research exercises (e.g. research logs, annotated bibliographies, article summaries, book reviews) can help students to develop useful habits and dispositions of inquiry and critical thinking.

b. Frequency. Writing and composing often is essential. Ideally students should always be at work on some rhetoric-related project—whether researching, planning, drafting, or revising. Multiple short assignments, especially with opportunities for revision, are generally more effective than single long assignments.
c. **Feedback.** Response—written and oral, from professors and peers—coupled with opportunities for revision is essential for improving writing and research skills. Opportunities for revision should be built into course syllabi, and when possible, research and writing projects should be staged to allow for feedback. Providing constructive feedback on student research and writing is time-consuming; the College must commit itself to ensuring that faculty workloads allow adequate time for this essential part of good teaching.

**III. Integration throughout major and core curriculum.** Students should have opportunities to develop appropriate rhetorical skills at all levels of the curriculum, both in major courses and core courses.

1. **Introductory courses** in the major should acquaint students with *differences* between general characteristics of rhetoric taught in core courses and those used in their particular discipline, and with research skills that are particular to the discipline and not likely to have been introduced in core courses.

2. Through the **sequence of courses in the major**, students should be progressively apprenticed in the various kinds of writing, rhetoric, and research used in the discipline. As students advance through the major, instruction should become more discipline-specific, including disciplinary communication strategies, genres of writing, specific research tools and sources, and appropriate citation practices.

3. A **senior capstone course** is often the best place for students to synthesize what they have learned. Valuable assignments include research papers that build on work accomplished in previous courses, and portfolios drawn from a student’s whole career that can be analyzed to discern progressive development.

4. **Departmental curricular maps and SLOs** should incorporate the following core principles: *Students will be able to:*
   - Find, analyze, and make critical use of appropriate sources for research in the discipline.
   - Present their ideas and arguments cogently and eloquently in writing.
   - Present their ideas and arguments cogently and eloquently in oral and visual form.
   - Cite and acknowledge with integrity the research and writing of others that informs their work.

**IV. Faculty awareness and development.** Each department should maintain a Rhetoric Program liaison who will serve as the primary contact between the RAC committee and the department. These liaisons, together with department chairs, should help to ensure that all departments:

- Familiarize colleagues (especially new ones) with departmental programs (these are published at [http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/departmental/](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/departmental/); departmental cross-links are encouraged).
- Promote departmental awareness of the Rhetoric Center ([http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/rc/](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/rc/)) and of the RAC website ([http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/)), especially the sections “Faculty Resources” ([http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/faculty-resources/](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/faculty-resources/)), “Student Resources” ([http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/student-resources/](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/student-resources/)), and “Writing with Integrity” ([http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/integrity/play-it-safe.html](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/rhetoric/integrity/play-it-safe.html)).
- Ensure that departments regularly revisit and assess their rhetoric programs, especially when revising departmental course offerings.
- Encourage colleagues to participate in rhetoric-related faculty development workshops.
- Encourage colleagues to avail themselves of the research expertise of the college librarians.

**V. Ongoing assessment.** Assessment of departmental rhetoric programs should be integrated with overall departmental assessments. Assessments of rhetoric programs should be both descriptive (reviewing what type of rhetorical skills are currently being practiced in the courses) and outcome-based (related to student learning objectives). Analysis of student learning outcomes should be both quantitative and qualitative. The departmental liaisons may consult the RAC co-directors or members of the committee ([http://www.calvin.edu/admin/comm/rhetoric/](http://www.calvin.edu/admin/comm/rhetoric/)) about effective assessment.