

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA
ACADEMIC SENATE

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPORT TO

THE ACADEMIC SENATE

AA-008-223

Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement

Academic Affairs Committee

Date: 11/16/2022

Executive Committee
Received and Forwarded

Date: 03/15/2023

Academic Senate

Date: 04/05/2023
First Reading

Your Name: Laura Massa

Your Email: lmassa@cpp.edu

Title of Referral: Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement

Names and Titles of proponents:

Laura Massa, AVP Academic Programs

Keith Forward, Faculty Director Undergraduate Programs and GE

Keywords: GVAR, GWT, Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement

Is there a deadline by when this referral needs to be considered by the Academic Senate?:

Yes

Deadline Date: 04/28/23

Justification for deadline: Approving a new course-based approach to meeting the GVAR requirement before the end of this academic year will allow us to form a committee and begin the course development process in the next academic year, and be ready to implement the program by the Fall 2025 deadline.

Background: In March 2020 the Chancellor's Office suspended all in-person testing for the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GVAR) and directed campuses to develop an alternative approach to satisfying the in-person testing requirement through a course or series of courses. Subsequent memos notified us that the GVAR requirement was under review and we should await further direction. In April 2022 we received a memo clarifying the new policy. Both memos are attached. The revised policy is linked in the recommended resources. Among other changes, the revised policy specifies that in-person testing is no longer allowed as an approach to satisfying the GVAR requirement, and that it does not apply to graduate or other post-baccalaureate students.

In response to the initial March 2020 memo, CPP suspended the Graduation Writing Test (GWT) used to meet GVAR, and the Office of Academic Programs worked with Academic Senate to form a committee to develop a proposal for meeting GVAR through a course or series of courses. The proposal the group developed in fall 2020, and revised in fall 2022 is attached. This proposal includes the identification of writing intensive courses in academic programs, and a committee to oversee the requirement.

The April 2022 memo directs that campuses have a course-based approach to satisfying GVAR in place by Fall 2023. On October 13, 2022, Provost Brown requested and Alison Wrynn, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs, Innovations and Faculty Development, approved a request to delay the implementation until Fall 2025. The delay was approved to give the campus time to adopt an approach to meeting GVAR through course work and approve those courses. The GVAR requirement will remain suspended until Fall 2025 at the latest.

Recommended Resources:

Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement Determination of Competence in English:
<https://calstate.policystat.com/policy/11516578/latest/#autoid-drz47>

Committee members: Brianne Davila, Aaron DeRosa, Gwen Urey, Kristi Prins, Olga Griswold, Erin DeRosa, Jennifer Andelin

Attachments:

See below, after discussion/recommendations.

1. Attachment1_LJB to Provosts GVAR Suspension March 12 2020_Laura Massa.PDF
2. Attachment2_Clarification on the CSU Policy on the Gradua_Laura Massa.PDF
3. Attachment3_GVAR Proposal_Laura Massa.pdf
4. AA-008-223 open meetings flyer.pdf

Discussion

The committee met and discussed this referral in November 2022 through March 2023, during which we consulted with committee members' constituents. We also held two open meetings (advertised to all faculty on campus with a faculty@cpp.edu email invitation) via Zoom (March 1st and March 3rd) to receive additional feedback, which were attended by faculty, staff, and members of the administration from across campus, including members of the GVAR committee.

Several concerns have been raised during this process and were primary points of discussion.

1. Research shows that a barrier exam like a GWT does not promote students' growth in writing. The GVAR Committee explained that the proposed referral is based on research in relevant fields, like rhetoric, on what are considered more equitable and best practices.
2. As per the CLASS Dean's office, EML alone cannot address a campus-wide, writing-intensive requirement that would replace the GWT.
3. The requirement of 4000 words proposed was of concern for many. The GVAR committee clarified that this minimum requirement is less than other CSUs (many of which have a 5000- or 6000-word requirement). They also noted that the 4000 words includes words that are substantially revised and edited. It is also best practice to create a variety of writing assignments of different lengths to help build skills and provide feedback to students at various stages.
4. ***There is no mandate that every department must offer one or more writing-intensive courses***; however, departments should plan to offer a course or some courses that may fulfill students' needs, support their degree progress, and prepare them for professional writing in their fields. Feedback from organizations, companies, and alumni where our students have interned or have been employed indicates that writing skills are insufficient

or have held our graduates back from career growth. Encouraging discipline-specific *growth* in our students' writing is an important step to addressing a pressing student need.

5. There are a few points to keep in mind as departments decide on which classes to propose as writing-intensive:
 - a. Not all classes with writing assignments are appropriate for teaching *how* to write. Large classes with one long term paper are most likely not the best options.
 - b. Large classes may not be the best option for converting to a writing-intensive class given the impacts it may have on FTEs (unless departments are able to balance enrollments with other classes). Upper-division courses within the major or department that already have lower enrollment caps could help keep FTEs and department budgets balanced.
 - c. Identifying major required, core courses that could be converted to a writing-intensive course would help reduce the number of additional units students have to take outside their department and core curriculum.
 - d. Upper-division GE courses may also work as writing-intensive classes, but faculty should be mindful of which courses would be best for students' development in their fields.
 - e. For some departments, a supervisory course that would have no more than 25 students and be worth at least 3 WTUs for faculty may be a reasonable option for majors.
 - f. Departments must coordinate with each other if a course in one department is recommended or required to be taken from another department.
 - g. Creating a new course may work well for some departments, but an attempt to identify currently existing courses should be made to help streamline implementing this requirement, avoid additional workload demands, and avoid adding too many required units to a student's curriculum.
6. Enrollment caps: The referral recommends a cap of 25 students in writing-intensive courses. Some departments may want smaller courses (e.g., a cap of 20) if it works with their budgets and still helps meet student course-offering needs.
7. The WTU limit is intended to make sure that faculty workload cannot be exploited (e.g., a professor should not be assigned multiple sections of a course worth 1 WTU, which could triple the number of students beyond what is pedagogically sound and a sustainable workload). Some departments pointed out that they offer a 1-unit lab that would include sufficient writing for a writing-intensive class, and the 1-unit labs mentioned are also co-requisites with lecture classes, so the overall workload for professors teaching the writing-intensive class would still have an appropriate cap and would equal 3 or more WTUs to prevent overworking faculty who would teach these courses.
8. Grading: There were many questions raised about the grading and some of the pedagogical recommendations. The original referral suggested that:

51% or more of a student's grade must be determined by their written communication skills through written assignments and/or take-home essay exams (e.g., written exams designed to allow for revision), which are evaluated for both content and quality of writing; students must pass the course with a C or better to fulfill the UWR requirement.

Academic Affairs committee members consulted with GVAR committee members and based on the discussions, we updated this section to state:

Evaluation of student learning in the course must prioritize writing proficiency, either through points/percentage-based grading (e.g. 51% of grade based on writing skills) or alternative grading formats (e.g., more than half of a course's standards/outcomes or labor contract weight are written communication-based).

The reasoning behind this was to allow greater flexibility for pedagogy and approaches to writing in different disciplines while still making it clear that writing instruction should not be watered down, deprioritized, or ignored.

9. Departmental conversations about preparing students strategically throughout the curriculum (finding ways to prepare students for an upper-division, writing-intensive course throughout other core courses) would be ideal. These discussions should be held throughout departments as they assess how writing is addressed in all major-required and internal GE courses their students take.
10. The University and Colleges should be prepared to support departments with resources to ensure that this requirement may be implemented without penalizing departments that step up to contribute the necessary writing-intensive courses for our students. Department Chairs will also need to continue advocating for appropriate resources to ensure that writing-intensive courses may be offered.

Recommendations

The Academic Affairs Committee recommends adopting the revised new university writing requirement policy proposal (Attachment 3) in order to establish a writing committee (UWAC) and have writing-intensive courses ready to offer in time for the Fall 2025 deadline.

Attachment 1:

Academic and Student Affairs
401 Golden Shore, 6th Floor
Long Beach, CA 90802-4210

www.calstate.edu


Loren J. Blanchard, Ph.D.
Executive Vice Chancellor

Tel: 562-951-4710
Email: lblanchard@calstate.edu

March 12, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: CSU Provosts

FROM: Loren J. Blanchard, Ph.D. 
Executive Vice Chancellor

SUBJECT: Temporary suspension of the California State University Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR)

The current suspension of in-person classes due to COVID-19 across our system, as well as [Executive Order N-25-20 issued by Governor Gavin Newsom](#) requiring adherence to social distancing guidelines, leads us to issue a temporary, limited suspension of the California State University Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR). Campuses that utilize in-person testing to meet the mandate of [Executive Order 665 Revised](#), shall immediately suspend the GWAR requirement. CSU campuses that have moved to utilizing completion of a specified course or courses to meet this requirement may continue to do so.

The temporary suspension is sought to facilitate student progress toward degree completion while faculty redesign curricula to ensure students have the instruction and practice needed in order to achieve university writing outcomes without the use of in-person testing. We ask that campuses work with their campus-based Academic Senate, through the shared governance process, to determine an alternative metric to satisfy the in-person testing requirement via a course or series of courses, beginning with the 2021-22 academic year.

If you have questions regarding these guidelines, please contact Dr. Alison Wrynn, Associate Vice Chancellor, Academic Programs, Innovations and Faculty Development at awrynn@calstate.edu or 562/951-4672

LJB/amw

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Sacramento
San Bernardino
San Diego

San Francisco
San José
San Luis Obispo
San Marcos
Sonoma
Stanislaus

Attachment 2:

Academic Programs, Innovations and Faculty Development
401 Golden Shore, 6th Floor
Long Beach, CA 90802-4210

www.calstate.edu

Alison M. Wrynn, Ph.D.
Associate Vice Chancellor,
Academic Programs, Innovations and Faculty
Development
Phone 562-951-4672
awrynn@calstate.edu

MEMORANDUM

Date: April 25, 2022

To: AVPs for Academic Programs and Deans of Undergraduate Studies

From: Alison M. Wrynn, Ph.D. [Alison Wrynn \(Apr 26, 2022 12:18 PM\)](#)
Associate Vice Chancellor, Academic Programs, Innovations and Faculty
Development

Subject: Clarifications on the CSU Policy on the Graduation Writing Assessment
Requirement (GWAR)

We would like to provide clarification on the recently revised Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) policy, as questions have arisen in relation to effective dates. We apologize for any confusion.

- The GWAR remains suspended until the start of the fall 2023 semester for campuses whose students were required to take an examination to fulfill GWAR. No student shall be asked to take an examination to meet GWAR; this includes students with catalog years prior to fall 2023.
- If your campus met GWAR with a course-based requirement for undergraduate students, you may continue to have students take the courses as part of their degree programs.
- If your campus is transitioning away from a writing exam and does not yet have sufficient GWAR courses for students, or if asking students, especially seniors, to take an additional course delays their degree completion, *the GWAR requirement should be waived*.

If you have any questions or if your campus needs additional time to develop writing policy and to create GWAR experiences within classes, please contact Dr. Brent Foster, Assistant Vice Chancellor and Dean, Academic Programs, at bfoster@calstate.edu.

- c. Sylvia A. Alva, Executive Vice Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs
Robert Collins, Chair, Academic Senate, CSU

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Attachment 3:

The University Writing Requirement at Cal Poly Pomona

The Alternative GWT Committee was formed on August 26, 2020, to address changes to the Graduate Writing Test passed down by the CSU Chancellor's Office in a memo dated March 12, 2020. The Committee revised and adopted their proposal following the CSU Chancellor's Office memo dated April 25, 2022. This document summarizes, then details, the committee's work.

Summary

CPP faculty value writing proficiency as a core component of student success; in the professional world, communication skills often serve to distinguish high-achieving professionals from their peers. Formerly, each student at CPP demonstrated their writing proficiency through the Graduate Writing Test (GWT). This imperfect and inequitable measure of student writing did little to acknowledge faculty's disciplinary perspectives or support the University's commitment to writing instruction. It also failed to cohere with the Academic Senate's policies on "meaningful writing" housed in the GE program (AS-2230/67GE). Meaningful writing is best understood within a disciplinary context, and the committee proposes the attached referral draft to align faculty recognition of the importance of discipline-specific writing (memos, reports, essays, proposals, grants, etc.) with writing instruction at CPP.

This proposal serves to satisfy the CSU Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) by constituting a University Writing Requirement appropriate to CPP's polytechnic education. The highlights of the proposal include:

- Eliminating the GWT examination
- Allowing students to demonstrate writing proficiency through successful completion of Senate-approved upper-division writing-intensive courses
- Supporting major programs in identifying pre-existing courses within the major that meet the qualifications for a writing-intensive course (either as-is or with modification)
- Affording opportunities for students to satisfy this requirement through approved upper-division GE courses or courses in another discipline outside their major
- Replacing the Academic Senate GWT Committee with the University Writing Assessment Committee, which will oversee and support these efforts.

Proposal

1. Undergraduate University Writing Requirement (UWR)
 - a. Students will satisfy CPP's University Writing Requirement (UWR) by taking an upper-division writing-intensive course designated by a "W" in the University Catalog. Writing-intensive courses may be offered by the major-granting academic unit, another academic unit, or the General Education program.
 - i. No writing-intensive courses may be designated as such by a major program in another academic unit without that unit's approval.
 - b. **Eligibility:** Students will be eligible to take a W course after completion of 60 semester units per EO 665.
2. The University Writing Assessment Committee (UWAC)
 - a. The UWR will be overseen by an Academic Senate-appointed permanent university committee.
 - a. The University Writing Assessment Committee (UWAC) will replace the senate GWT Committee.

- b. The UWAC shall consist of one representative from each college, a Writing in the Disciplines Coordinator who will serve as chair, a representative from the Office of Assessment and Program Review, a representative from CAFE, and the University Writing Center Coordinator.
 - c. The UWAC will be responsible for the following:
 - i. Certifying courses as meeting the requirements for a writing-intensive “W” designation (listed below).
 - ii. Conducting regular review of course certification, as described below.
 - iii. Reviewing petitions of substitution for W-certified courses and transmitting the decision to the petitioning academic unit and the Registrar’s Office. Student petitions must be accompanied by evidence of equivalence, including:
 - 1. Course syllabus;
 - 2. Sample writing or writing prompt from the course;
 - 3. Evidence of a grade of “C” or better for the course.
 - iv. Coordinating with CAFE for faculty development and resources to ensure writing instruction is sound, equitable, and consistent.
 - v. Coordinating with the Learning Resource Center and the University Writing Center to provide adequate support to faculty and students in W courses.
 - vi. Facilitating the collection of representative samples for University assessment.
 - vii. Evaluating assessment data to ensure equitable outcomes and take steps as necessary to promote student success in written communication.
3. UWR Course Certification and Approval Process
- a. **Basic Qualifications:** To receive writing-intensive “W” certification, a course must be at the upper division level and a minimum of 3-units. If a course is less than 3-WTUs, it must be a co-requisite with another course and the cumulative units must equal at least 3 WTUs and the student enrollment cap should not surpass 25 students. Academic units may propose new courses or designate existing courses to the UWAC.
 - b. **Learning outcomes:** To be designated as writing-intensive (W), a course must require, at minimum, students’ demonstration of the following abilities (this list does not exclude other learning outcomes appropriate to the discipline and/or course):
 - i. Understand the role of audience (i.e., professional, public, expert, informed novice) and purpose (i.e., to persuade, report, propose, review) in written communication
 - ii. Use appropriate disciplinary conventions (i.e., organization/structure, style and tone, formatting, and citation practices)
 - iii. Critically engage with disciplinary content (i.e., through analyzing arguments, drawing conclusions, proposing recommendations)
 - iv. Leverage credible sources to develop informed ideas
 - v. Incorporate feedback and self-assessment to revise written work
 - c. **Pedagogical practices:** To be designated as writing-intensive (W), a course must meet the following criteria:
 - i. Amount of Writing: Students produce at least 4000 words (approximately 7 single-spaced pages/15 double-spaced pages, excluding references, including substantially-revised words) of individually-composed formal writing that demonstrates upper-division written English proficiency within the course’s given discipline
 - ii. Types of Writing: Students are assigned a variety of writing tasks that are sequenced and/or distributed throughout the semester, and not concentrated at the end

- iii. **Integrating Information Literacy and Critical Thinking in Writing:** Students demonstrate the ability to analyze, organize, synthesize, and express their own and others' data or ideas; evaluate and incorporate source materials; and use disciplinary conventions appropriate for relevant audiences and purposes in their writing
 - iv. **Processes of Writing:** Students practice different writing processes (including brainstorming, drafting, substantive revising, and editing of major graded written assignments in response to instructor—and possibly peer—feedback and resources)
 - v. **In-Class Attention to Writing:** Meaningful class time is devoted to instruction in writing (i.e., analyzing audience needs and expectations, including conventions like the formal elements of technical reports or the level of formality expected in memos)
 - vi. **Grading:** Evaluation of student learning in the course must prioritize writing proficiency, either through points/percentage-based grading (e.g. 51% of grade based on writing skills) or alternative grading formats (e.g., more than half of a course's standards/outcomes or labor contract weight are written communication-based).
 - vii. **Class Size:** Course enrollment cannot exceed 25 students without approval from the UWAC
- d. **Application Process:** Course certification and recertification are run through the UWAC.
- i. An academic unit proposing a new course for which certification is sought shall indicate on the proposal form that W certification is requested, and concurrently submit a proposal for W certification in Curriculog.
 - ii. Proposals for W certification of preexisting classes, or recertification, shall be reviewed directly by the UWAC and need not be reevaluated by College and University Curricula Committees.
 - 1. W courses in the GE program must also be reviewed by the GE Committee.
- e. **Recertification:** The Office of Academic Programs shall keep a record of all W certified courses. After seven consecutive years, W certification shall expire. In the sixth year of certification, the Office of Academic Programs shall notify the academic unit that the course must be recertified.
- i. If a course syllabus changes so that it no longer meets the requirements for W certification before the seven-year expiration, that course's W certification will be automatically revoked.
 - 1. A course that is denied W recertification will be allowed a grace period of one academic year to revise and resubmit for recertification. If the course has been denied W certification, it shall no longer be specified as a writing course but may continue to be offered as a regular course.
- f. **Special Cases**
- i. Students shall receive credit for having met the requirement upon completion of the academic unit-specific upper-division writing course with a grade of "C" or higher, as long as the course was W certified at the time the student was enrolled, independent of the student's catalog year.
 - ii. Completion of another CSU's upper-division baccalaureate writing requirement with a grade of C or higher shall be transferrable to CPP.

Attachment 4:

**Open discussions of
Academic Affairs referral
AA-008-223 GVAR**

When:

Wednesday March 1, 2023, 3-5pm or
Friday March 3, 2023, 11:30am-1pm

Where: Zoom

<https://cpp.zoom.us/j/81080790479>

Zoom room ID: 810 8079 0479

**Relevant documents will be shared
via [this OneDrive folder](#)**

