CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA
ACADEMIC SENATE

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPORT TO

THE ACADEMIC SENATE

AA-006-234

Elimination of Blanket Requirements for Mandatory Writing Assignments

Academic Affairs Committee	Date:	03/06/2024
Executive Committee Received and Forwarded	Date:	02/28/2024
Academic Senate	Date:	03/13/2024 <u>First Reading</u>

Background

Your Name: Aaron DeRosa

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Title of Referral: Elimination of Blanket Requirements for Mandatory Writing Assignments

Names and Titles of proponents:

Keith Forward, Interim AVP of Academic Programs
Aaron DeRosa, Interim Faculty Director Undergraduate Programs and GE
Kristi Prins, First-Year Writing Program Coordinator
Karen Trujillo, Assistant Professor, English and Modern Languages

Keywords: GWAR, Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement, Written Communication, GWT, Graduate Writing Test, Meaningful Writing, GE

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

Deadline Date: 3/1/2024

Justification for deadline: Anticipating significant curricular changes for AY 25-26, we would like to implement this for the AY 24-25 curricular cycle so as to speed up the curricular review process. This means we will need to revise the curriculum management system (Curriculog), which opens for proposals in March.

Background:

The Office of Academic Programs recommends that AS-621-867/EPC "Mandatory Writing Assignments in All Classes" be removed as a curricular requirement, and that the writing requirement in CPP's GE program be removed (GE-008-134 and GE-016-056).

Improving CPP students' written communication skills has long been a challenge. To date, three policies lay out the campus's position on written communication: one policy mandates writing assignment in all classes (1987), the GE policy requires "meaningful" and "significant" writing assignments in all GE classes (2007, 2014), and the Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) policy addresses the Chancellor's Office graduation requirement (2023).

The GE policy (GE-008-134) and the Mandatory Writing Assignment policy (AS-621-867/EPC) were passed with the intent of improving students' writing proficiency. Assigning writing, however, does not necessarily teach students how to write. This was explicitly recognized when, in 2007, the Senate voted to strengthen the language for "meaningful" and "significant" writing assignments in GE coursework to require faculty feedback and writing pedagogy in these courses.

Unfortunately, these two policies are not often followed, and the university is unable to enforce them without significant implications for faculty workload or cost to the campus. Providing meaningful and timely feedback on writing assignments in courses whose enrollment caps soar to 100 and above is not possible. The blanket mandates also imply a one-size-fits-all model for

writing that undermines programs' intentionality in cultivating student writing.

In practice, faculty submitting new course proposals stretch, if not fabricate, assignments to showcase writing when it may or may not be viable or even pedagogically appropriate to do so. The immediate effect is that it takes time to produce this additional content for new course proposals. The more subtle effect is the hollowing out of meaning of written communication pedagogy that undermines efforts to improve students' writing. Writing assignments can take many forms (e.g., resumes, reports, emails, essays) and are present in most classes, but teaching writing requires intentionality that these policies do not yield.

By removing the mandatory writing assignment policies, we are not diminishing the university's commitment to written communication, reducing the overall writing being done at the university, or undermining existing programming. On September 20, 2023, the Academic Senate voted to approve AA-008-223, "Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement," which not only addresses the Chancellor's Office mandate for assessing student writing, but also lays out an alternate and intentional pathway to address student writing proficiency on campus. The "Writing in the Disciplines" program introduced in that policy creates an infrastructure in the form of a trained coordinator and a senate committee to collaborate with faculty to embed writing instruction pedagogy within curricula. It also establishes clear connections between first-year writing composition and the upper division GWAR requirement and assessment practices to strengthen written communication pedagogy on campus. Meanwhile, the GE Committee is tasked with mapping the newly-implemented GE SLOs—including written communication—to the GE categories and recertifying courses to align to those learning outcomes.

Most importantly, the removal of the mandate does not change any current Extended Course Outline (ECO). The proposal eliminates the mandate for new course proposals to require writing and does not retroactively apply to current courses in the catalog. Any department that chooses to revise its courses' student learning outcomes and/or assignments to remove written communication would be subject to standard curricular review practices, including evaluation by deans, college curriculum committees, and either university or senate committees (depending on the nature of the course). This will allow for departments to intentionally draw down the writing in their courses over time, should they choose. And it affords space for the GE program to be intentional in its creation of standards and scaffolding of student educations.

It is worth mentioning that General Education is a university-wide interdisciplinary program akin to a major. While students have greater flexibility in their course selection than they do in majors, the design of GE is intentional and subject to regular program review and assessment. Over the last few years, CPP faculty have engaged in wide discussions and consultation about the meaning and purpose of GE and continues this work in light of upcoming changes to the system-wide GE categories. Implementing this policy frees the GE Committee to make decisions about standards and expectations in the best interest of the program and student learning.

Discussion

The Academic Affairs Committee discussed this referral and held an additional meeting to cover our concerns with proponents of the referral (Keith Forward, Interim AVP of Academic Programs; Aaron DeRosa, Interim Faculty Director Undergraduate Programs and GE; Kristi Prins, First-Year Writing Program Coordinator; Karen Trujillo, Assistant Professor, English and

Modern Languages) and Academic Senate GE Committee Chair Cory Aragon. During this meeting, we discussed initial concerns that faculty and committee members had to this referral. Primarily, some were concerned that the removal of the blanket requirement might impact all current GE courses. This is not the case, since the referral would not affect ECOs, and it was decided that a revised proposal should be submitted, clarifying how this referral would remove outdated blanket requirements for new classes while leaving current ECOs intact.

Academic Affairs committee members also inquired about the workload for faculty and the GE committee that would be required for this referral. We discussed how the blanket requirement has created issues for GE classes when enrollment numbers are raised too high and faculty are unable to teaching writing effectively. After discussions with proponents, it was made apparent that removing this blanket requirement *now* would reduce the workload for faculty revising or proposing future GE courses, especially given that all GE courses need to be re-certified next academic year. The upcoming recertification process is when faculty and departments may decide to remove or adjust writing SLOs for ECOs.

Essentially, this referral is meant to lay a new and stronger foundation for upcoming GE changes and writing learning outcomes for our campus.

Recommendations

The Academic Affairs Committee recommends the Senate consider adopting the revised proposal submitted in this report.