ACADEMIC SENATE POLICY #S09-14
San Francisco State University
Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) Course Criteria

Rationale

In its Spring 2007 revision to the University Policy on Written English Proficiency (S07-14), the Academic Senate approved a change in the way that undergraduate students will demonstrate that they have met the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) prescribed in CSU Executive Order #665: “Undergraduates who are first-time college students in Fall 2008 or later will satisfy the GWAR requirement by earning a C- or better in a GWAR-designated course in their major department or college.” The University Committee on Written English Proficiency (CWEP) was directed to develop criteria for all GWAR courses, and to forward those criteria to the Academic Senate for its approval. CWEP was also charged with the responsibility for approving and implementing the GWAR courses.

CWEP solicited input from every college (including input provided by the 84 faculty members, representing 47 departments, who attended a Writing Colloquium in January, 2008), reviewed models of criteria from other universities and national standards, and collaborated with the Academic Policies and Executive Committees of the Academic Senate to develop GWAR-course criteria for SF State. CWEP distilled the information from the breakout groups of the Writing Colloquium into a set of GWAR-course criteria, and shared this and other relevant information with the Academic Policies and Executive Committees of the Academic Senate. Relevant background information includes the following:

1. “Writing in the disciplines is founded on an integrative relationship between writing and knowing . . . a specialized conception of disciplinary knowledge is integrated with a specialized conception of writing.” (Carter, Michael. “Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines.” College Composition and Communication 58:3, February 2007.)

2. Research correlates improved teacher morale, greater student engagement and increased academic performance with reduced class size (and with small writing intensive courses). Numerous professional organizations support reducing class size (e.g., the National Council of Teachers of English; the American Association of University Professors); in their rankings, US News weights class size heavily. “The exact number of students must derive from various calculations of teachers’ time reading and responding to student writing; no specific study says twenty is the very best number, but all agree that smaller is better” (17; Alice Horning, “The Definitive Article on Class Size,” WPA: Writing Program Administrator 31 (2007): 11-34; see also Richard Light, Making the Most of College, and the 2008 National Survey of Student Engagement).

3. Students improve their writing and their grasp of course material if they write regularly and receive feedback on their writing early in a term.
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The Academic Senate approves the following Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) course criteria for the purpose of facilitating the transition to a new way to fulfill the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement. The Committee on Written English Proficiency (CWEP) will submit an assessment report on the implementation of the GWAR courses, the GWAR policy, and the GWAR-course criteria to the Academic Senate no later than October 1st, 2014.

GWAR-course Criteria:

Criterion #1, Class Size: Courses satisfying the GWAR should have an enrollment maximum of 20-25 students. In rare cases, if departmental conditions warrant, and a rationale is provided to justify the exception, CWEP may approve a course that exceeds the maximum.

Criterion #2, Number of Pages/Words: The overall assignments for the course will include a minimum of 15 pages, meaning the equivalent of 4000 words, of formal writing that demonstrates upper-division written English proficiency within the given discipline.

Criterion #3, How Writing Will Affect the Final Grade: At least 60% of the grade in GWAR courses must be based on written assignments and take-home essay exams (e.g., exams designed to allow for revision), which are evaluated for both content and quality of writing.

Criterion #4, Revision of Assignments: GWAR courses must include substantive revision of major, graded, written assignments in response to feedback.

Criterion #5, Types of Assignments: GWAR courses should include a variety of writing assignments that are sequenced and or distributed throughout the semester, rather than concentrated at the end.

Criterion #6, In-class Attention to Writing: GWAR course syllabi should reflect significant class time devoted to instruction in writing conventions within the given discipline.

Criterion #7, Number of Units: GWAR courses, or course sequences, should be at least 3 units.

***Approved by the Academic Senate as its meeting on April 28, 2009***