

DATE: July 1, 2011

TO: Christopher Brazier, Chair
Curriculum and Educational Policies Council

Donald J. Para, Provost and Senior Vice President
Academic Affairs

Lisa Vollendorf, Chair
Academic Senate

FROM: Rebekha Abbuhl, Chair
Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) Committee

SUBJECT: GWAR Committee Report for 2010-2011

The Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) Committee convened on September 3, 2010 and elected the following committee officers:

Rebekha Abbuhl, Chair
Karin Griffin, Vice Chair
Colleen Dungan, Secretary

The committee met on the first and third Fridays of each month from 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

GWAR Committee Membership:

The following individuals served on the GWAR committee during the 2010-2011 school year:

Rebekha Abbuhl (Linguistics)
James Ahumada (Student Representative)
Lori Brown (Information Systems)
Colleen Dungan (Dance)
Roswitha Grannell (Geological Sciences)
Karin Griffin (University Library)
Gary Griswold (English)
Nathen Jensen (Center for International Education)
Bron Pellissier (Learning Alliance)
Susan Platt (Testing, Evaluation, and Assessment)
Maryam Qudrat (Civil Engineering)
Linda Sarbo (GWAR Coordinator)
Sue Stanley (Associate Dean, CHHS)
Richard Tuveson (Family and Consumer Sciences)
Mark Wiley (Associate Dean, CLA)
Carol Zitzer-Comfort (Liberal Studies, English)

The major activities of the GVAR Committee will be summarized in the following sections.

Proposed revisions to the GVAR Policy

The committee has been charged with proposing a set of revisions to the current GVAR policy. To help inform our discussion, the committee reviewed and discussed (1) the recommendations from the Academic Writing Assessment Taskforce (AWATF); (2) the 2006 GVAR committee self study; (3) best practices for assessment as recommended by the Council of Writing Program Administrators; and (4) assessment models in comparably sized and populated universities across the country. These sources noted that universities are increasingly moving away from a one-test model to models that help students address their writing difficulties. This includes the use of formative examinations (examinations that are designed to assess students' writing strengths and weaknesses in order to place students into appropriate courses) and writing instruction.

Taking into consideration CSULB's mandate on writing assessment, the committee drafted a tentative policy for assessing writing at the university. The main areas of difference between the proposed and existing GVAR policy are summarized below.

Proposed undergraduate pathways

Pathway I: Students who receive an upper-range score (exact scores to be determined) on the university's GVAR Placement Examination (GPE; to be further discussed and created) will be required to successfully complete (with a C or better) a General Education capstone course certified as "writing intensive" (see "writing intensive" discussion below).

Pathway II: Students with a mid-range score on the WPE must successfully complete the following: (1) a GVAR course (e.g., ENGL 301B); and (2) a General Education capstone course certified as "writing intensive."

Pathway III: Students with a low-range score on the GPE must successfully complete the following: (1) ENGL 301A or equivalent; (2) a GVAR course; and (3) a General Education capstone course certified as "writing intensive."

Graduate

Pathway I: Students with an upper range score on the GPE must successfully complete the following: A writing intensive course or activity within the student's major as determined by the student's department.

Pathway II: Students with a mid-range score must successfully complete the following: (1) A GVAR course; and (2) A writing intensive course or activity within the student's major as determined by the student's department.

Pathway III: Students with a low-range score must successfully complete the following: (1) ENGL 301A or equivalent; (2) a GVAR course; and (3) a writing intensive course or activity within the student's major as determined by the student's department.

Under this proposal, satisfaction of the university's writing requirement would no longer be accomplished by receiving a certain score on the WPE or by submitting a passing portfolio.

In examining possible models of writing assessment, the fiscal and quality control considerations were extensively discussed along with considerations of the various populations we serve (e.g., nonnative speakers, transfer students, international students, etc.). The committee looks forward to continuing these discussions in the fall and inviting feedback from all interested stakeholders.

Writing intensive

A subcommittee of the GVAR committee drafted a set of criteria for designating courses as "writing intensive." The subcommittee met with Drs. Lisa Vollendorf and Keith Freeseemann for their feedback on the committee's proposed policy and on our "writing intensive" criteria. The proposed criteria are as follows:

One in three capstone courses taken by a student must meet the following criteria:

1. The number of students shall be capped at 25.
2. Writing intensive courses shall be taught by faculty who have participated in professional development as approved by the GVAR committee.
3. The required number of words produced in the course shall be 5000, including 2000 words of finished prose.
4. Opportunities for both feedback and revision must be included throughout the course.
5. Writing assignments and instruction must be an integral, ongoing part of the course.
6. 70% of the student's final grade shall be based on writing; however, no assignment shall be worth more than 30% of the student's grade.

The enrollment and fiscal implications of these criteria were discussed and the committee looks forward to continuing their discussion on writing assessment at the university with various stakeholders.

GVAR Questionnaire

To help inform the committee's discussion on writing assessment at the university, the committee has sought input and feedback from as many individuals as possible (and will continue to do so in the upcoming academic year). As part of this process, the committee created and distributed two online questionnaires, one for students and one for faculty, concerning writing instruction and writing assessment at the university.

Four hundred sixty-three students from a variety of disciplines responded. Of these students, 45.6% were transfer and 54.4% were not. Concerning language background, 74.1% were native speakers of English and 25.9% were not. These students indicated *inter alia* that they were satisfied with the quality of their writing skills, with the quality of the writing instruction that they had received, and with the quantity of writing instruction they had received.

In contrast, of the 301 faculty who responded, the vast majority (73.5%) indicated that students are not receiving enough writing instruction. The vast majority (71.0%) were not satisfied with their students' writing skills. In addition, the majority (61.1%) felt that students' lack of writing skills were impeding students' success in their major. These faculty members were from a wide variety of disciplines.

GWAR Coordinator's report

The GWAR Coordinator regularly reported to the committee. The GWAR Coordinator also clarified the special circumstances waivers procedure to the committee. Students interested in filing a special circumstances waiver for the WPE must meet the guidelines posted on http://www.csulb.edu/divisions/students2/testing/test_information/wpe/bulletin/documents/GWARGuidelinesforWaiverPetitionsandPetitionForm.doc. Extensive screening is conducted before petitions are presented to the committee. Petitions that are approved by the GWAR committee fall into one of two categories: (1) the student provides alternative demonstrations of her or his writing skills, or (2) the student has made consistent efforts to improve her or his writing and no longer has access to the campus and therefore cannot enroll in a GWAR course.

The GWAR Coordinator also reported on training for GWAR advisors and instructors. The GWAR Coordinator also drafted a self-study report for the GWAR Committee's review.

WPE Development Chair's report

The WPE Development Chair regularly reported to the committee.

The committee passed a request for an exception to policy allowing students in an off-campus program to take a GWAR-certified course without having taken the WPE first.