




### Memorandum of Understanding

This MOU has been read and approved by:

Director:  Date: 5/12/2026  
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**Program Review Summary  
Memorandum of Understanding**

The Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) Program  
May 2026

This document summarizes the Program Review findings and serves as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the consensus reached by the Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) Program and the Division of Academic Affairs. It is based on the program review results, including the self-study report submitted in April 2025 and the external review completed by Dr. Adler in November 2025. This report and MOU describe the goals and actions to be undertaken by all parties during the next program review cycle.

The GWAR Program most recently underwent program review in 2010, with an MOU finalized in March 2013. Since that time, the program has undergone several significant changes:

- 2007–2016: The GWAR Program transitioned from a summative writing assessment (the Writing Proficiency Exam, WPE) to a diagnostic model through the development and implementation of the GWAR Placement Exam (GPE).
- 2012: The Academic Senate and President approved a revised GWAR policy.
- 2020: The GWAR Course Review Committee (GWARC) received an expanded charge to support the development and review of GWAR Writing Intensive (WI) courses.
- 2020-2021: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the GWAR Program granted GPE waivers to qualifying students and implemented a hybrid testing model offering both online and in-person options. Ensuring the security and validity of online assessment became a central priority.
- 2021-2023: The CSU issued guidance to suspend the use of single high-stakes examinations to fulfill GWAR requirements (update to Executive Order 665, March 2022).
- 2023: The GWAR Program suspended all GWAR assessment components for new and continuing graduate students to comply with updated Chancellor's Office policy.
- 2023-2024: The Curriculum and Educational Policies Council and the Academic Senate reviewed proposed revisions to GWAR policy to align with the Chancellor's Office directive (February 23, 2021) to eliminate high-stakes testing as the primary mechanism for meeting GWAR.

Resources reviewed for the report:

- Self-study Report, April 2025
- External Review Report, November 2025
- 2013 MOU (for 2010 review)



- GWAR website
- GWAR policies

### **Strengths were identified in the reports**

1. **Policy Alignment and Responsiveness.** The GWAR Program has demonstrated sustained responsiveness to systemwide policy changes. It has transitioned from a high-stakes, summative Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE) to a diagnostic placement model through the GWAR Placement Exam (GPE) and is actively supporting campus policy revision efforts to align with updated CSU directives (e.g., revisions to Executive Order 665) eliminating high-stakes testing.
2. **Structured Writing Pathway Model.** The program employs a clearly defined three-pathway structure based on GPE performance:
  - Pathway 1: Direct placement into a Writing-Intensive (WI) course (GPE score  $\geq 11$ ), with 66 certified upper-division WI courses available
  - Pathway 2: Completion of a GWAR portfolio course prior to WI enrollment (GPE scores 8-10), with six approved courses (e.g., ENGL 301B, ENGR 310, HIST 302)
  - Pathway 3: Completion of ENGL 301A and a portfolio course prior to WI enrollment (GPE score  $\leq 7$ ), with limited course availability (approximately four sections of ENGL 301A annually)

This tiered model provides differentiated support aligned with students' writing proficiency levels. However, following recent GWAR policy revisions, this pathway model has been eliminated to align with CSU policy.
3. **Writing-Intensive (WI) Course.** The GWAR Program assesses upper-division writing competence through Writing-Intensive (WI) courses, in which students demonstrate proficiency by earning a grade of C or better. WI courses are 3-unit courses requiring a minimum of 5,000 words of writing, with writing comprising at least two-thirds of the final grade. These courses emphasize revision, iterative feedback, and writing development, and are usually capped at 25 students to support instructional quality.
4. **Shared Governance and Campus-Wide Collaboration.** The GWAR Committee (GWARC) includes faculty representatives from all colleges, along with ex-officio members from key administrative and academic support units. Faculty actively participate in portfolio evaluation and GPE reading sessions multiple times per year, supporting consistency in writing assessment standards across disciplines. The program is supported through collaboration with multiple campus units, such as the Testing Office, advising centers, and academic colleges, ensuring operational continuity.
5. **High Program Reach and Participation.** The program serves a large student population, with approximately 7,000-9,000 students completing the GPE annually. Between 2016 and 2024, the majority of students were placed directly into WI courses (Pathway 1),



with 60,945 enrollments, compared to 12,877 in Pathway 2 and 901 in Pathway 3, indicating that most students demonstrate readiness for upper-division writing.

6. **Faculty Engagement in Assessment and Reading.** Faculty participation in portfolio evaluation and GPE reading sessions supports consistency in assessment practices and reinforces faculty engagement with writing standards across disciplines.

### **Concerns were noted in the reports**

1. **Limited Program-Level Assessment.** While the GEAR program has demonstrated responsiveness to CSU directives, there is limited evidence of systematic program-level assessment of student learning outcomes or sustained “closing the loop” practices. As the program transitions away from high-stakes testing, there is a need to more clearly define its role and establish a cohesive, assessment-informed framework to guide continuous improvement.
2. **Structural Barriers.** The GEAR pathway structure presents several challenges for students and program operations. The multi-pathway model may extend time to completion and increase unit burden for students placed in lower pathways, and the GPE continues to impose additional costs despite the shift away from high-stakes testing. Limited course availability in certain pathways and reliance on distributed resources across campus further complicate student progression.

### **Opportunities for development identified in the reports**

1. **Alignment with CSU GEAR Policy.** The current revision of CSULB GEAR policy provides an opportunity to streamline program requirements, reduce excess unit burdens, and eliminate financial and structural barriers associated with placement testing and multi-course pathways. These changes may improve time to degree and ensure course availability is better aligned with student demand.
2. **Strengthening Program-Level Assessment Practices.** The program can develop systematic assessment processes that evaluate student learning outcomes, writing proficiency gains, and the effectiveness of WI and preparatory courses. This includes establishing shared metrics, rubrics, and mechanisms for using assessment data to inform program improvements.
3. **Enhancement of WI Course Support.** The GEAR program can expand communication, training, and support for WI instructors to ensure consistent implementation of writing pedagogy, assessment practices, and expectations. This includes addressing emerging issues, such as the role of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in student writing.
4. **Clarification of Program Identity and Institutional Role.** As GEAR transitions away from an exam-based model, the program can redefine its role as a central driver of writing development across the curriculum rather than primarily a compliance mechanism.



5. **Leadership in AI and Writing Pedagogy.** The program is well positioned to take a leadership role in developing institutional guidance on the use of artificial intelligence in writing instruction and assessment, aligning with emerging disciplinary and systemwide priorities.

### Recommendations

It is therefore agreed that the Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) Program will collaborate with the Division of Academic Affairs to:

1. Implement a comprehensive program-level assessment plan that includes both direct and indirect measures of student learning. The program will document and report “closing the loop” activities demonstrating how assessment data inform program improvements and decision-making. The program will provide an annual progress report (due September 1) to the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Studies, the Vice Provost for Academic Programs, and the Coordinator for Assessment. The review cycle will span 2024–2031, with a comprehensive self-study due in June 2031 for the 2031–2032 academic year review. (*Concern 1 and Opportunity 2*)
2. Develop and implement procedures, structures, and communication plans to support the revised GWAR policy upon Senate approval. This includes ensuring alignment with CSU requirements and facilitating a smooth transition away from exam-based assessment models. (*Concern 1 and Opportunity 1*)
3. Reevaluate and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the GWAR Chair (if applicable), Coordinator, advisors, and committees following implementation of the revised policy to ensure effective program coordination and oversight. (*Concern 2 and Opportunity 4*)
4. Establish a clear programmatic stance on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in student writing and develop guidelines to support faculty and students in its appropriate use within writing instruction and assessment. (*Opportunity 3 and 5*)
5. Expand faculty development opportunities for Writing-Intensive (WI) instructors, including training on writing pedagogy, assessment practices, and AI-informed instructional strategies. Consider establishing a faculty learning community to support ongoing dialogue and consistency in WI course delivery. (*Opportunity 4 and 5*)
6. Enhance communication with WI instructors by restructuring the GWAR website or developing a centralized Canvas resource to provide updated guidance on program requirements, expectations, and best practices. (*Opportunity 4 and 5*)

This MOU has been read and approved by:

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