

Adopted: June 6, 2017

**ACADEMIC SENATE
Of
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY
San Luis Obispo, CA**

AS-839-17

**RESOLUTION ON ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE GRADUATION WRITING
REQUIREMENT**

- 1 RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate approve the GWR Task Force report:
2 Alternative Approaches to The Graduation Writing Requirement:
3 Sustaining Writing & Writing Education Across All Levels of a
4 Student's College Experience; and be it further
5
6 RESOLVED: That the attached report be forwarded to Provost Enz Finken and
7 President Armstrong.

Proposed by: Dawn Janke, GWR Task
Force Chair
Date: May 5, 2017

**ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE GRADUATION WRITING REQUIREMENT: SUSTAINING
WRITING & WRITING EDUCATION ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF A STUDENT'S COLLEGE EXPERIENCE
2015-2017 Academic Senate GWR Task Force Final Report**

Submitted on May 10, 2017

By

Dawn Janke, Task Force Chair

**All task force members reviewed this report before submission
as an official document to the Academic Senate.**

Alternative Approaches To The Graduation Writing Requirement: Sustaining Writing & Writing Education Across All Levels of a Student's College Experience

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A. Charge of the 2015-2017 Academic Senate GWR Task Force

An academic senate task force was formed for AY 2015-2017 to explore programmatic revisions to the university's Graduation Writing Requirement (GWR) as a consequence of the 2014-15 Academic Senate GWR Task Force on students' timely completion of the requirement.

The 2014-15 task force reported that current GWR campus practices meet neither the requirement of EO 665, the recommendation of the most recent WASC review, nor the goals previously expressed in the Cal Poly and CSU Academic Senate resolutions concerning the timely completion of the GWR. In spring of 2015, in response to the 2014-15 GWR Task Force report, a senate resolution passed (AS-809-15) that outlined actions the university should take to address the issue of timely GWR completion, including the recommendation that "programs/departments develop a concrete action plan so that their students take the GWR during junior year." In the fall quarter of 2016, a year after the resolution, 96% of the 1033 students who fulfilled the GWR via the WPE had senior-level standing.

Issues with the GWR program extend beyond students' timely completion, however. While the program's pathways and processes are well established, the instruction (or lack thereof in the case of the WPE) and assessment measures are neither consistent nor effective in helping students to improve their writing skills for degree attainment and post-degree success. A more meaningful program that helps students improve upon their writing skills earlier in their upper-division coursework would impact their success more positively. The 2015-17 GWR task force, then, explored alternative approaches to the GWR for the university's consideration.

Members of the 2015-2017 Academic Senate Task Force on exploring programmatic revisions to the GWR included:

- Dawn Janke, Writing and Rhetoric Center
- Leanne Berning, CAFES
- Kaila Bussert, Kennedy Library
- Bruno Giberti, APP
- Brenda Helmbrecht, CLA & GE
- Gita Kolluru, CSM
- Kathryn Rummell, CLA
- Brian Self, CENG
- Debra Valencia-Laver, CLA
- Clare Battista, OCOB (2015-2016)
- Don Choi, CAED (2015-2016)
- Matt Luskey, CTLT (2015-2016)

B. Background of the Graduation Writing Requirement (GWR)

B.1 CSU Executive Order 0665 The California State University Chancellor's Office established the GWR, an upper-division writing assessment mandate for its 23 campuses, in 1978, and the

requirement was more recently codified in 1997 as Executive Order 0665, Determination of Competence in English and Mathematics. Two key points of EO 0665 are as follows:

1. As soon as possible after students are admitted, campuses shall inform them of writing skills proficiency requirements for graduation, as distinct from lower division curricula and tests. Certification of writing competence shall be made available to students as they enter the junior year. Students should complete the requirement before the senior year.
2. Certification of graduation writing proficiency is an all-campus responsibility. Certification may rely on evidence of writing ability as demonstrated in written coursework, essay examinations, or other measures of student writing competence. Measures may be developed which best fit individual campus needs. However, certification by examination shall include a common essay written and evaluated under controlled conditions and scored by at least two faculty readers.

B.2 The GWR at Cal Poly Cal Poly largely has followed the same process for its GWR program for at least thirty years. The GWR at Cal Poly invites all students who have completed 90 units to fulfill the requirement via one of two pathways:

- Earn a passing score on a timed, in-class essay exam AND earn a C or better in a GWR-approved, upper-division, quarter-long English course;
- Earn a passing score on a two-hour, handwritten essay exam, the Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE), which is offered two or more times each quarter.

At the same, there have been various changes in the periphery to provide support for writing development in our students and writing instruction for our faculty — practices that were designed to support meeting the GWR and to improve writing more generally. A few examples of these include:

- GE 2001 created a writing across the general education curriculum program with two primary components:
 - **All GE courses must have a writing component.** In achieving this objective, writing in most courses should be viewed primarily as a tool of learning (rather than a goal in itself as in a composition course), and faculty should determine the appropriate ways to integrate writing into coursework. While the writing component may take different forms according to the subject matter and the purpose of a course, at least 10% of the grade in all GE courses must be based on appropriate written work.
 - **Writing Intensive (WI) courses are located in Areas A1, A3, C1, C2, C4, and D5.** These courses include a minimum of 3000 words of writing and base 50% or more of a student's grade on written work. Faculty teaching WI courses will provide feedback to students about their writing to help them grasp the effectiveness of their writing in various disciplinary contexts. A significant selection of writing-intensive upper-division courses will be made available. The

GE Program is committed to providing the resources to support both the required writing component and WI coursework. The kind and amount of writing will be a factor in determining class sizes, and the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) will provide support and training for faculty.

Unfortunately, lack of funding and larger student enrollments have necessitated increases in class size in areas C1, C2, C4, and D5, and the WI component of these courses has in some cases been removed.

- In 2010, the University Writing and Rhetoric Center (UWRC) implemented a portfolio program whereby students who fail to satisfy the GWR after two or more attempts may opt to fulfill the requirement by taking ENGL 150 and earn a passing score on a GWR Portfolio. The GWR portfolio option also also been extended to the small number of former students who left Cal Poly without completing the GWR. The portfolio option allows for some concentrated work on addressing some writing deficits, especially in those students who would benefit the most from direct instruction. Students work with graduate writing consultants to develop and revise previously failed exams. This sustained 10 weeks of writing practice and support comes at end of the student's academic career, however, and thus cannot provide the scaffolding for further practice and development.
- In 2013, the university supported the hiring of a Writing Instruction Specialist, housed in the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT). This position was created to foster college, department, and faculty writing support across the disciplines. The CTLT has long supported faculty development in writing instruction through such programs as Writing in Generally Every Discipline (WINGED) as well as other writing workshops and writing support groups, often in collaboration with the UWRC.

It is important to note that in 2000, the Academic Senate (AS-550-00) resolved that "students be allowed to satisfy the GWR either by passing the Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE) or *by being certified writing-proficient in a designated upper-division, writing-intensive course*" (italics mine); the senate further resolved that a "writing skills committee collaborate with the General Education Program and other interested faculty to work out the specifics of how students will be certified writing- proficient in upper-division, writing-intensive classes, and to explore ways to increase the effectiveness of advising that will encourage students to attempt the GWR early in their junior year." Despite this resolution, no concerted action was taken and GWR certification continues to be offered solely through the English Department.

During any given quarter, there are over 9,000 students eligible to fulfill this requirement. Generally, each year about 1,500 students complete the requirement in a GWR-approved English course and over 3,000 students complete the requirement by passing the WPE.

C. Concerns with Cal Poly's Current GWR Practices

The task force agreed that Cal Poly's current GWR practices are not effective in meeting the goal of the requirement: assurance of competence in writing skills at the upper-division level. While only a small number of students leave the university without fulfilling the requirement,

and the majority fulfill the requirement on their first attempt (on average over the past eight years 73% of students pass the WPE on their first attempt), it is clear, when considering institutional writing assessment results and employer survey responses, Cal Poly students do not yet demonstrate the desired advanced levels of writing proficiency at the upper-division level. Instead, there is evidence that their writing skills seem to plateau after the sophomore year.

C.1 Practical Concerns Inconsistencies abound within both GWR options at Cal Poly.

- **Inconsistent test topics.** Since the WPE is based on an unannounced topic, students who opt for the WPE receive no foreknowledge of the topic about which they will be writing, and the topic is different for each exam (and not normed for test reliability). While all topics are related to higher education and connected to the student experience at Cal Poly, some students may have more prior knowledge of or familiarity with a particular topic. Topic generation is time consuming for the WPE coordinator, as well, because multiple topics are selected and designed into exam prompts each quarter. In the GWR classes, instructors decide on their own what the exam topic will be. Some use old WPE topics, others follow the WPE model of an article from a news source but design their own prompts, and still others use readings and prompts related to course content. Furthermore, in the GWR courses, because faculty are encouraged to use the first GWR attempt of the quarter as a way of helping students determine if they need additional writing support before another attempt at completion, that first attempt often comes in the first week of class. Thus, faculty often write prompts separate from course content since students haven't yet mastered enough content at that point. Subsequent attempts in a course are typically included on a midterm and/or final exam, meaning that the question may cover course material and the student might have longer to respond (i.e., in a three-hour final). Although topics related to course content most closely mimic an authentic writing task, there is still the problem of writing under pressure, writing by hand rather than with a keyboard, and writing without the tools that most writers use for editing and revising their writing (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, reader input).
- **Inconsistent test periods.** The WPE is given in a two-hour period that is proctored by university staff. In contrast, students who opt for one of the 64 or more sections of GWR-approved English courses offered each academic year are tested in a wide range of test periods. Some classes are 50 minutes, and thus students only have 50 minutes to produce an essay, whereas other classes are 110 minutes, so students have longer to respond.
- **Inconsistent scoring.** Each WPE essay is graded in a large-scale scoring session where each essay is assigned to two faculty readers from across campus that may or may not have special expertise in writing and writing instruction. The faculty readers take part in a norming session where they learn to work with the WPE scoring rubric. Many have been scoring the exam for over 15 years, so they have special expertise in the WPE, and everyone who scores the exam is both trained to assess ahead of time and normed before the scoring session. Yet, WPE norming may not be the most effective means by which students are assessed and faculty develop their writing assessment skills. GWR-

approved English course instructors have advanced degrees in English and therefore have more specialized expertise in writing assessment, but they are not necessarily trained to assess student writing using a common rubric like those who assess the WPE are trained to do. In addition to the varied levels of writing assessment knowledge and standards, WPE essays are scored by at least two readers to account for discrepancies in standards/expectations, whereas the essays produced in GWR-approved English courses are reviewed only by the instructor.

- **Inconsistent number of attempts.** A single WPE test session is just that. Students pay for the exam and are given one attempt in the 120-minute session. When students fail, they must re-register and attempt again, and must wait until the next quarter to do so unless they are graduating that term and can make another attempt during final exam week. Students also are offered the option of enrolling in ENGL 150 and completing the GWR Portfolio Program if they have more than one failed attempt, but since it is not required that they do so, some students make four or more attempts at the WPE before realizing they need more direct support for GWR completion. In GWR-approved English classes, students are offered at least two, and often three, attempts to fulfill the requirement within the same quarter.
- **Inconsistent feedback for students.** With the WPE, students are presented with a numerical score only as feedback post exam and that score alone does not help students identify their writing issues. To do so, students must schedule an appointment with a WPE counselor at the Writing and Rhetoric Center to help them understand their score. This counselor is not one of the graders of the essay, so the counselor uses the WPE scoring guide to infer why the student failed the exam. The counselor attends the WPE scoring session and is therefore prepared to discuss the student's exam using the scoring guide as reference, but this roundabout approach to offering students summative feedback on their writing, especially when the writing is a degree requirement, is not the most effective and meaningful approach to helping students address writing issues and develop their skills. In contrast, students in GWR-approved English courses have multiple attempts in one quarter to pass the exam, and indeed, the success rate for completing the GWR in a classroom setting is higher than the success rate for those making a first attempt on the WPE, largely because students meet with their instructors to discuss their writing prior to a second attempt. Note: the pass rate for students who take the WPE exam twice is comparable to the pass rate for students who take a GWR-approved English course.

Although there are inconsistencies across the testing environments, there are benefits to taking the GWR in an English course rather than taking the WPE. These include multiple attempts in one quarter to pass the exam, a more situated writing experience for students, and one-on-one feedback from an expert in the field. However, the English Department cannot staff enough sections of these courses each year to meet the needs of GWR-ready students.

C.2 Pedagogical Concerns More important than the inconsistencies above, however, are the pedagogical problems with Cal Poly's current GWR options. Whether students take the WPE or a GWR-approved English course, there is a disconnect between what the GWR requirement

tests and what experts in the field of writing studies advocate. In GE A1 and A3 courses, as well as in lower- and upper-division English courses, students are taught that writing requires an understanding of audience and purpose, as well as the process of drafting, revising, and editing. However, the GWR as presently conceived does not test for careful and intentional writing; rather, it tests for extemporaneous writing skills on an unannounced topic.

Because the WPE is designed to measure students' writing skills in one instance without formative feedback during the writing process, the exam does not help students develop as writers. And while the in-class essay exam in GWR-approved classes allows students an opportunity for feedback from the instructor prior to a second attempt, the majority of the writing students produce in GWR-approved English classes outside of the in-class exam is written over time and involves drafting, feedback, and revision. The message sent by measuring writing proficiency via an in-class essay exam, then, is inconsistent with the message sent by other writing assignments.

In short, the task force concluded that the university's two pathways to GWR completion are not pedagogically sound and send mixed messages to students. The task force established that the university must define what writing skills it wants students to gain during their upper-division coursework, and how those skills most meaningfully can be assessed by the GWR.

D. Methods for Exploring Alternative Approaches to the GWR

During the task force's first meeting in the fall of 2015, members listed the positives and negatives associated with both current approaches to GWR fulfillment on campus. As well, in an effort to examine how other campuses approach upper-level writing instruction, during winter and spring quarters of 2016 the task force examined GWR programs at other campuses within the CSU and conducted research on upper-division writing requirement programs at peer institutions across the country (see the appendix for these findings).

Based on discussion and findings, the task force concurred that we want students to write at all levels of their college experience, we want them to be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and we want them to reflect on how to use writing to meet a variety of purposes. The task force also agreed that the exam is no longer an appropriate approach to GWR completion for our students. Instead, task force members believe that a program that offers multiple pathways to completion, with courses in GE and in the majors, would be most effective. In effect, students' writing success is the most important consideration when weighing the effectiveness of alternative approaches to the GWR.

E. Alternative Approaches to Cal Poly's Current GWR Practices

While the task force determined to move away from the WPE for GWR completion, task force members did not agree upon one alternative in its stead, as more time needs to be dedicated to exploring how any change would impact the university, particularly in terms of the resources needed to support such change(s). Mainly, the task force established that the university should

offer a flexible approach to GWR completion. A number of ideas were entertained, and of them, the task force submits for consideration the following alternative approaches to the current program. These alternatives are presented somewhat in order from less change/fewer potential resource implications to more change/greater potential resource implications.

E.1 Replace the exam-based approach with one upper-division, writing-intensive (WI) General Education (GE) Area C4 or D5 course In this model, the upper-division GWR-approved English courses will remain as an option for students, and all (or select) other GE Area C4 and D5 courses will be GWR-approved. This approach aligns with Senate Resolution AS-550-00 that “students be allowed to satisfy the GWR either by passing the Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE) or by being certified writing-proficient in a designated upper-division, writing-intensive course.” In this option, students who complete any one of these designated courses with a C or better will fulfill the GWR, and completion of the GWR will not be based on the results of one in-class essay exam, but instead by successful completion of writing projects that follow a process-oriented approach with feedback and opportunities for revision. In some ways, this approach reflects the status quo minus the exam-based approach to GWR certification and designates the possibility of all GE upper-division writing courses in both C4 and D5 as contributing to GWR certification. However, the task force recommends a more robust approach to this implementation by requiring that the university recertify all upper-division WI GE courses, reduce class sizes to support writing instruction, and train faculty to deliver effective methods of writing instruction. In effect, the university would need to restore the upper-division WI GE curriculum established in 2001. Note: engineering majors who follow a different GE template could only fulfill this with one course in the C4 area while many other students would actually end up taking two upper-division WI courses in GE.

E.2 Replace the exam-based approach with at least two upper-division courses from a menu, including one course from an upper-division, WI GE course and another from a program-specific upper-division, WI course This approach would augment the upper-division writing instruction in which students currently engage (WI GE in C4 and D5 at the upper-division level for all majors except engineering), and while more complex than the first option, this approach is worth exploring because of the GE and discipline-specific writing instruction it offers to students. It is unclear whether or not all programs of study would have a designated upper-division course in which discipline-specific writing is assigned, expected, or taught. Because the university aims to graduate students who can communicate effectively, and because we know that effective communication is constructed based on rhetorical situations, students would benefit from a more thoughtful approach to writing education—one in which they have sustained writing practice not only in their GE courses but also in their major courses. Again, completion of the GWR in these two classes would be measured by completion of writing projects assigned in the courses rather than by completion of an in-class essay exam.

The committee as a whole was concerned that not all departments have the ability (expertise, time, faculty, etc.) to deliver discipline-specific writing courses, but if the GWR is designed to be an all-campus responsibility, and if the university wants to help students gain both general and discipline-specific writing skills, then moving toward this approach may lead departments and

colleges to determine how better to incorporate writing assignments and provide formative and summative feedback on those assignments into designated upper-division courses in the majors. The university just hired a new writing instruction specialist in the CTLT who can help instructors, departments, and colleges across campus address such concerns.

E.3 Replace the exam-based approach with a WI curriculum that combines GE and discipline-specific courses In this approach, students would be required to take at least two WI courses at the upper-division level. Departments would submit courses for WI certification and faculty teaching those courses would have appropriate training and support. WI courses could be GE or discipline-specific, thus providing maximum flexibility for departments. This approach also allows GE-heavy programs to certify some courses within their department as WI, but not necessarily all. For example, the History Department might offer most GE D5 classes as WI, but in order to maximize SCUs might also offer one or two each quarter that aren't WI and thus have larger cap sizes. Departments who want to provide their students with discipline-specific WI courses could do so with one or both courses in their program.

E.4 Replace the exam-based approach with a more thoughtfully designed writing-infused curriculum across the disciplines In the case of this alternative, like the one above, students would engage in sustained writing practice throughout their time on campus. What makes this option distinct from the previously mentioned option is that in this case students would not necessarily be required to take any specific courses in order to fulfill the GWR. Instead, the institution would rely on a writing-infused curriculum as a whole (both at the lower- and upper-division) to help students develop the expected level of writing proficiency for a college graduate. In short, in this approach, students' fulfillment of degree requirements would also fulfill the GWR because writing would be embedded in all courses. Two primary challenges for this option are programmatic oversight and ensuring that transfers and study abroad students receive the same writing instruction that other students do.

E.5 Replace the exam-based approach with a more comprehensive communication across the curriculum requirement that develops advanced proficiency in written, oral, and visual communication skills The New London Group (1996) coined the term "multiliteracy" in their seminal article, *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures*, in which they advocated for a new approach to writing education, one in which students learn to reach a variety of audiences through multiple modes, including written, aural/oral, visual, spatial, gestural, and tactile methods of expression. While such an alternative approach to the current GWR program would be a major overhaul, it is worth considering how broadening the requirement to include written, oral, and visual presentation skills might better prepare the institution's graduates for post-degree professional and civic success, particularly given the campus's comprehensive polytechnic identity.

F. Important Considerations

The task force further concluded that to enhance students' writing skills across all levels of their college experience, it will be necessary to consider the following components when designing

and implementing any alternative approach to the GWR: the timeline for change, costs of implementation, program infrastructure and oversight, faculty development and support, course offerings and enrollment capacities, and assessment methods.

F.1 Timeline for implementation Task force members want to ensure that the shift from an exam-based approach to a course-based approach occurs gradually to allow enough time for instructors and courses to be GWR-certified, particularly because the assessment of students' writing proficiency will include projects for which students engage in a drafting process and receive formative feedback and time for revision. Further, the task force does not believe it will serve the campus community well if any particular department or program is overburdened either to develop new courses that significantly impact their curriculum plans or to serve large portions of the student population at a given time. As such, the shift from an exam-based approach to GWR completion should happen incrementally, with the final phase being one in which the WPE is no longer necessary to support any student on campus.

F.2 Costs of implementation Currently, the two-thirds of Cal Poly students who take the WPE pay a \$35 exam fee that generates annual revenue to pay for administration and management of the current GWR program. This income will be lost when the university shifts away from the exam-based approach to requirement completion, but task force members indicated that a course-based model would only work if the institution commits to providing the required resources to enrich and support faculty assigned to teach GWR-certified courses. In addition, much of what is presented below will result in additional costs to the university, such as those related to an increased number of GWR-certified class sections with appropriate class sizes and the instructors to teach those sections, as well as those related to developing a training and certification program.

F.3 Program infrastructure Tracking of enrollment and completion may become an issue with any new approach to the GWR. Task force members indicated that it is worth preserving the intention of the junior-level timing for GWR completion, particularly because it helps identify students' varying needs for writing support. The task force wondered how best to determine students' eligibility/placement in terms of GWR completion. Current practice allows any student with 90 or more completed units to attempt GWR completion. Ninety units signifies junior standing, but only in general—not when considering degree applicable units. In addition, some students have 90 units completed earlier in their college careers because of AP or transfer credits. The task force considered entertaining an alternative marker for GWR eligibility to account for this discrepancy in current practice. One option is to consider students' expected academic progress or degree progress instead of completed units.

In addition to the question of eligibility based on unit completion, task force members wondered if all students were prepared to fulfill the requirement immediately upon completion of 90 units. At a few other CSU campuses, the WPE is used not to determine writing proficiency but instead to determine how many writing courses students needed to complete in order to demonstrate proficiency effectively. And two other CSU campuses are currently exploring how to use directed self-placement (DSP) to help students determine GWR readiness. DSP invites

students to consider a variety of factors (e.g. writing anxiety, performance in previous writing courses, language(s) spoken) before enrolling in writing courses for GWR completion. Further, any model that requires students to fulfill the requirement in an upper-division GE course may prevent students from doing so in a timely manner because students may not meet course prerequisites in order to be eligible to enroll in GWR certified courses before their senior year. The university would want to consider how best to address this issue moving forward.

Finally, task force members were concerned by the human and financial capital it would take to develop a new tracking system in which the university could monitor for GWR eligibility, enrollment, and completion in a course-based system. On at least one campus the task force researched, students' degree progress alone indicated completion of requirements, so, no additional tracking was needed. The university might consider adopting a similar approach.

F.4 Program oversight Task force members also agreed that oversight and consistency would be necessary among designated GWR courses. The main question the task force considered was what oversight would look like with a newly revised program. A GWR coordinator already exists on campus, but that individual alone does not have the resources to oversee GWR-related assignments and assessment across hundreds of GWR-approved sections offered by different instructors while also monitoring student completion of the requirement. The university will want to ensure that if writing instruction and assessment become a formalized part of a broad range of GWR courses then that writing pedagogy is aligned with expected GWR outcomes and the instructors who teach those courses are supported accordingly. Implementation of a GWR advisory board with representation from across colleges and chaired by the GWR coordinator therefore would be important. In the outside programs the task force examined, there seemed to be a tension between loose oversight on some campuses and localized/contextualized oversight of pathways and assessment on others. The task force supported a model in which a GWR advisory board certified either a course, or an instructor (preferred), or both as GWR-approved. The GE Governance Board oversees upper-division GE WI courses, approves newly developed courses, and is building a mechanism along with the Academic Senate Curriculum Committee to ensure the WI component of those courses is being met, but not all WI GE classes are GWR classes, and not all GWR classes are GE classes. The GE and GWR boards likely would partner in oversight of WI, GWR-approved courses.

F.5 Faculty development and support In addition to general oversight, the task force also noted that instructors who teach GWR courses, especially those outside the English Department, would need to engage in some sort of professional development training and earn GWR-educator certification before offering GWR courses. GWR-certified courses must include actual process-oriented writing instruction and formative feedback (i.e., drafting, feedback, and revision of writing projects must be included in course design), and faculty who teach those courses would benefit from training in terms of how best to implement and support the process-oriented approach to writing into their already-packed course content. Faculty who teach GWR-approved courses also must be trained to support multilingual students effectively when offering feedback and account for language difference when assessing multilingual writers, both of which may require training and/or ongoing support. And, since not all faculty

members will have the desire to teach GWR WI courses, the university might consider giving faculty an incentive, such as additional weighted teaching units for GWR courses, which would send a message to faculty across the curriculum that the university values writing and writing education in all disciplines and at all levels. Several task force members indicated that it would also be worth exploring how to assign a writing expert to each college who can support faculty teaching writing in the disciplines. As well, the option to embed peer-writing consultants in the classes, who could assist instructors by offering students feedback and support throughout the drafting, revising, and editing process, might be worth considering in terms of supporting GWR instructors' additional teaching responsibilities.

F.6 Course offerings and enrollment capacity Regardless of the approach, the task force agreed that a new course-based GWR program must adhere to reasonable class sizes with a maximum capacity of between 20 and 25 students in each section, which is in line with best practices recommended by the National Council of Teachers of English (2014)[1] and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (2015). Currently, class enrollment size in sections of GE C4 and D5 courses varies. As an example, in spring 2015, most of the non-English C4 and D5 sections had a capacity greater than 30 seats (39 C4 sections and 24 D5 sections had greater than 30 seats; 13 C4 sections and 8 D5 sections had a total capacity of 30 seats; 14 C4 sections and 1 D5 section had under 30 seats). Some sections, which technically are considered WI, were taught as large lecture courses, such as HUM 320, PHIL 340 and POLS 325, and instructors do not assign writing projects in those courses. Obviously, any newly designed GWR program must not allow large-lecture courses to offer the GWR.

One simple but important task will be to determine how many sections of upper-division WI courses the university would need to distribute across the colleges in order to meet student demand. If in any given quarter over 9,000 students are eligible to complete the requirement, then an increase in course offerings must occur. Technically, about 4,500 students should complete the requirement each year. The institution's current practice will not support student need. In winter 2017, as an example, the currently approved 31 GWR course sections offered 815 seats (range = 24-30 seats/section), and not every enrolled student took the course for GWR credit. Even if every student were enrolled for GWR credit, then the university would need to increase capacity by about 700 seats each quarter in order to serve the student population and avoid any barriers to graduation. And ideally those seats would be offered in sections with 25 or fewer seats (note that of those sections offered in winter 2017, the majority—20 of the 29 sections—had an enrollment capacity greater than 25). Given the classroom shortage Cal Poly currently faces, capacity is a significant factor to consider.

As a point of contrast, expanding the analysis to all upper-division GE courses in areas C4 and D5 plus non-GE GWR courses, there were 125 sections offered supporting 3,606 students in Winter 2017. The range in class size was 8-70, with an average of 28.85 students per section. Reducing this to 25 students per section would require an additional 19-20 sections. And it is apropos that winter be selected as the comparison quarter as enrollments in many GE courses do not meet the typical course capacity of 30-32 students per section. The pattern of enrollments suggests that students seem to wait for spring to get classes rather than enroll in

winter classes they do not want to take (even if it fulfills a graduation requirement) or at a time they find undesirable. This means that the fuller courses in fall and winter would necessitate even more course sections to decrease the course capacity to 25 students per section.

F.7 Assessment Methods In the Chancellor's Office 2002 review of campus's Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement programs, the review committee noted that while a standardized procedure for exams was outlined in EO 0665, procedures for assessing writing produced in courses was not clearly outlined. They further noted that in the courses, in most cases student writing is evaluated by the instructor of record. The 2002 review committee therefore recommended "that campuses implement measures to ensure consistency and common standards across courses." In line with the 2002 review committee's observation, the task force indicated that implementing a common rubric or method of writing assessment in the GWR-certified classes would be appropriate. The university could consider a portfolio-based model of student writing assessment to gain a more standardized and comprehensive understanding of students' writing skills across levels and/or undertake targeted assessments that sample and assess student writing. Particularly, the task force saw the course-based model useful in that GWR evaluation(s) in the classes could then more thoughtfully align with campuswide writing outcomes. In the case of writing outcomes at Cal Poly, GE Area A (A1 and A3) specifically commits to helping students achieve the university-learning outcome of effective communication. Upper-division, WI GE courses were designed to foster transfer of those skills to the upper level, which should serve to help support students in their efforts of developing advanced levels of writing proficiency needed for graduation, thereby fulfilling the university's GWR. It is anticipated that upper-division, WI courses in the major would aspire to do the same.

G. Conclusion

In sum, each approach suggested in this report has merit, and it is clear that some approaches may lend themselves to more rapid adoption. Still, the task force wants to see a new program built out over time rather than disrupting the curriculum altogether. If the organization intends to change the program, then it is worth engaging in a thorough examination of all options rather than quickly settling on the path of least resistance. All models that involve a course-based approach to GWR completion in place of an exam-based approach must include teacher certification, course certification, and enrollment control (ideally with a capacity of 25 students in each section).

It is also worth considering how a more innovative revision of the program now may address future-oriented academic, professional, and civic needs. A collaborative conversation with stakeholders across campus will help the university develop goals and models for achieving those goals—that conversation must include knowledgeable writing faculty and discipline-based faculty. And the campus community must believe in the value of sustained writing and quality writing education in order to help support student achievement at the university and beyond.

Whatever approach the university chooses to adopt, the task force recommends that rollout of the revised GWR program happen incrementally over several academic years and that the program be universal enough to support students who enroll in upper-division WI courses outside of Cal Poly, students who take courses abroad, and graduate students enrolled in distance education programs. The university's main commitment should be to design and implement a program that better supports students' writing education and that is not a barrier to graduation.

As such, the task force recommends that this report serve only as a beginning to the conversation of how best to increase and sustain student writing and writing education across all levels of the college experience. As a next step, a committee of writing experts and college representatives should be established to begin the plan for moving toward a course-based approach to the GWR. A cost analysis and feasibility study of the above alternative approaches could be performed. Or, the university may choose first to adopt option E.1 and gradually certify instructors and courses in line with the capacity to do so. Then moving forward the university could adopt other models (or elements thereof) until the university reaches a point where students have opportunities to practice writing and receive writing instruction at all levels across the disciplines.

[1] NCTE data shows that underserved student populations benefit most from small class sizes, and that performance of all students is affected positively by smaller class size.

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Appendix
Institutional Comparisons of Upper-division Writing Proficiency Requirements

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement</i>	<i>Assessed via Exam?</i>	<i>Assessed via Coursework?</i>	<i>Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?</i>	<i>Who has oversight of the Program?</i>
CSU, Bakersfield	Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR), assesses writing	Yes GWAR	Yes	Yes, but mostly in CLA	GWAR coordinator
CSU, Channel Islands	GWAR, assesses writing	No	Yes	Yes: 9 units of upper-division interdisciplinary GE courses, which are writing intensive	Seems to be part of GE
CSU, Chico	GWAR, assesses writing	No	Yes	Yes: writing proficiency courses	Departments create WP courses; GWAR coordinator out of Academic Programs oversees
CSU, Dominguez Hills	GWAR, assesses writing	Yes Graduation Writing Exam (GWE)	Yes	Yes, but limited: Advanced Composition or a few other courses are certified as writing courses through Interdisciplinary Studies	The testing office administers the GWE, and it's unclear who oversees course certification

Institution	Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement	Assessed via Exam?	Assessed via Coursework?	Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?	Who has oversight of the Program?
CSU, East Bay	University Writing Skills Requirement, assesses writing	Yes Writing Skills Test (WST)	Yes, in two tiers dependent on students' skills	Yes, but limited to English, Marketing, and Science	The testing office
CSU, Fresno	Upper-Division Writing Requirement, assesses writing	Yes Upper-Division Writing Examination (UDWE)	Yes	Yes: approved writing courses as indicated with a W in the catalog	The testing office administers the UDWE, the University Writing Competency Subcommittee reviews and approves W courses
CSU, Fullerton	Upper-division Writing Course Requirement, assesses writing	No	Yes	Yes: every major identifies the course(s) their students must complete	The University Board on Writing Proficiency as an agency of the Academic Senate
Humboldt State	GWAR, assesses writing	Yes Graduation Writing Proficiency Examination (GWPE)	No	No	GWPE Coordinator and Testing Center
CSU, Long Beach	GWAR, assesses writing	Yes GWAR Placement Examination (GPE), as placement into coursework	Yes	Yes: depends on placement (upper-division GE writing intensive course)	Oversight seems to be with Undergraduate Studies

Institution	Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement	Assessed via Exam?	Assessed via Coursework?	Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?	Who has oversight of the Program?
CSU, Los Angeles	GWAR, assesses writing as a prerequisite to the upper-division writing requirement in the majors	Yes Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE)	Yes	No: one course, UNIV 401, is offered through the writing center as an alternative to the WPE, but the GWAR is a prerequisite; students are also required to take two upper-division writing courses in their major	Unclear but it looks like the English Department and the writing center have joint oversight over the GWAR/WPE and then responsibility shifts – they are hiring a WAC director
CSU, Maritime Academy	Graduation Requirement in Writing Proficiency, assesses writing	Yes Graduate Writing Examination (GWE)	Yes	No: students either take the GWE or take English 300—Advanced Writing	Faculty Coordinator
CSU, Monterey Bay	GWAR, assesses writing	No	Yes	Yes: GWAR-certified courses	Unclear
CSU, Northridge	Writing Skills Graduation Requirement, assesses writing	Yes Upper-division Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE)	No	No	Advisory Board including membership from Undergraduate Studies, the Learning Resource Center, Academic Programs, the English Department, and the Testing Center

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement</i>	<i>Assessed via Exam?</i>	<i>Assessed via Coursework?</i>	<i>Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?</i>	<i>Who has oversight of the Program?</i>
Cal Poly, Pomona	Graduation Writing Test (GWT), assesses writing	Yes Graduation Writing Test (GWT)	Yes, but only in cases where students cannot pass the GWT	No: CPU-401 is the only course, and it seems to be offered through the Learning Resource Center, which absorbed the writing center several years ago	Academic Programs Committee (?); Testing center offers GWT
CSU, Sacramento	GWAR, assesses writing	Yes, as placement Writing Placement for Juniors (WPJ)	Yes	Yes: a writing-intensive course as a follow-up to placement exam	GWAR Coordinator, Writing Programs
CSU, San Bernardino	Upper-division Writing Requirement	Yes Writing Requirement Exemption Exam (WREE)	No	No	Testing Office
San Diego State	GWAR, assesses writing	Yes, Writing Placement Assessment (WPA) with scores of 10 or above as fulfillment of the GWAR – otherwise as placement into upper-division classes	Yes, in addition to the WPA	Yes, but limited	Unable to determine, but seems to be shared between the Rhetoric and Writing Studies Department and Testing Services

Institution	Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement	Assessed via Exam?	Assessed via Coursework?	Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?	Who has oversight of the Program?
San Francisco State	GWAR, assesses writing	No	Yes, as the only mechanism of assessment	Yes	Responsibility is shared among the Division of Undergraduate Studies, the Committee on English Proficiency, and Academic Affairs with a full-time WAC director
San Jose State University	GWAR, assesses writing	Yes (Writing Skills Test – WST) required by all students as placement	Yes	Yes: W course as designated by the major	Unclear – WST is through the testing office and courses designated by major
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo	Graduation Writing Requirement (GWR), assesses writing	Yes, Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE)	Yes, as an alternative to the WPE	No: courses offered only through the English Department	Responsibility is shared between the GWR Coordinator and English Department
CSU, San Marcos	All university graduation requirement for writing	No	Yes	Yes:	Academic Affairs
Sonoma State	GWAR, assesses writing	Yes Writing English Proficiency Test (WEPT)	No	No	Unclear

Institution	Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement	Assessed via Exam?	Assessed via Coursework?	Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?	Who has oversight of the Program?
CSU, Stanislaus	GWAR, assesses writing	Yes Writing Proficiency Screening Test (WPST) to determine preparedness for upper-division writing in the disciplines	Yes	Yes: Writing Proficiency (WP) courses are developed and offered in the disciplines capped at 25 students	The University Writing Committee, the Faculty Coordinator for the WPST, and the Graduate Council in partnership with the Vice Provost
Arizona State University	Upper-division Literacy & Critical Inquiry Requirement, assesses written, oral, and critical thinking skills	No	Yes	Yes, preferably chosen from within the major	Unknown
Franklin Olin	Communication Competency in GE, assesses communication	No	Yes	Yes: courses are in the GE concentration of Arts and Humanities	Part of GE and portfolio based
Illinois Institute of Technology	Communication Across the Curriculum program, assesses oral and written communication	No	Yes	Yes	Not sure but seems to be an all-campus responsibility, ½ of program in GE and ½ in the majors

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement</i>	<i>Assessed via Exam?</i>	<i>Assessed via Coursework?</i>	<i>Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?</i>	<i>Who has oversight of the Program?</i>
Iowa State University	Communication Proficiency Policy – WOVE requirement, assesses written oral, visual, and electronic communication	No	Yes	Yes: courses are offered both through the English department or in the major	Departments seem to be responsible for oversight of the requirement
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Undergraduate Communication Requirement, assesses communication	No	Yes	Yes	Shared responsibility in Humanities and major programs – each major identifies the pathway for its students and a committee on academic performance tracks student completion
Michigan Technological University	Upper-division Communication or Composition Course -GE HASS (Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences), assesses writing	No	No	Yes	Seems to be part of the GE program

Institution	Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement	Assessed via Exam?	Assessed via Coursework?	Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?	Who has oversight of the Program?
Missouri University of Science and Technology	General Education Assessment – communication intensive focus, assesses oral and written communication skills	Yes: juniors take a proficiency exam that tests GE skills in reading, writing, math, and critical thinking; majors have a senior exam, not essay-based	Yes	Yes	Requirements are tracked by degree progress – there is no formal assessment of student writing; testing is handled through the testing center
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute	Communication Intensive Requirement (HASS - Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences requirement), assesses communication skills	No	Yes	Yes: students complete one course in the major and one writing intensive course in the HASS	Committee appointed by academic senate including a member from each college and a director
Rochester Institute of Technology	GE Requirement - Developing Writing Excellence: Three Writing-Intensive Courses, assesses writing	No	Yes	Yes: courses are certified writing-intensive	Committee with representation from across campus
Rose Holman Institute of Technology	Communicating Effectively Requirement, assesses communication skills	No	Yes	Yes: courses are in rhet/comp and most majors	Unknown

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Type of Upper-division Skills Requirement</i>	<i>Assessed via Exam?</i>	<i>Assessed via Coursework?</i>	<i>Is coursework offered across the Curriculum?</i>	<i>Who has oversight of the Program?</i>
Texas A&M University	W/C Graduation Requirement, assesses written and oral communication	No	Yes	Yes: courses are in the majors – not in GE	An advisory committee under academic senate with representation from colleges, writing center, and ASI approves courses
UC Davis	University writing requirement, assesses writing	An Upper-division Composition Exam (UDCE) offered only to students who want to challenge the requirement	Yes	Yes	Each college prescribes a sequence of classes for its students
University of Delaware	Second Writing Course Requirement (junior- or senior-level writing course), assesses writing	No	Yes	Yes, and writing fellows embedded in writing-intensive courses	Seems to be routed at the college level (i.e., colleges specify which courses students should take)
Virginia Tech	Visual expression, Writing, and Speaking Requirement—ViEWS, assesses multiple literacies	No	Yes	Yes, with notably small enrollment caps in classes	Oversight is at the department level; requirement differs major to major; plans are approved through the Core Curriculum Committee

MEMORANDUM

Cal Poly | Office of the President



To: Dustin Stegner
Chair, Academic Senate

Date: July 17, 2017

From: Jeffrey D. Armstrong
President

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey D. Armstrong", is written over the printed name.

Copies: K. Enz Finken
M. Pedersen
C. Sunata
D. Janke

Subject: Response to Academic Senate Resolution AS-839-17
Resolution on Alternative Approaches to the Graduation Writing Requirement

I am pleased to acknowledge and support the above-entitled Academic Senate resolution. This memo also acknowledges receipt of the GWR Task Force report, Alternative Approaches to the Graduation Writing Requirement: Sustaining Writing & Writing Education Across All Levels of a Student's College Experience. I appreciate the well thought out alternative approaches suggested by the task force. Using the report as a foundation, I encourage further conversations of how to design and implement a program that not only provides more support for our students' writing education across all levels of the college experience but also provides a path to a timely graduation.

Please extend my thanks to the GWR Task Force members and Academic Senate members for their attention to this important matter.

RECEIVED

AUG - 1 2017

ACADEMIC SENATE