

California State University, Stanislaus

7/AS/07/UWC/UEPC – Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) Implementation Policies

**RESOLVED:** The Academic Senate of California State University, Stanislaus accepts the attached GWAR Implementation Policies; and be it further

**RESOLVED:** The attached GWAR Implementation Policies will become effective at the start of the 2007-2008 Academic Year; and be it further

**RESOLVED:** That said policies should be incorporated into the *Faculty Handbook* and that the appropriate changes required to reflect these policies be made to Writing Proficiency Screening Test (WPST) brochures and the University Catalog, and further that copies of the GWAR Implementation Policies and the attached FAQ be sent to all WP course instructors, department chairs, and Academic Advising.

**RATIONALE:** In 20/AS/05/UWC/UEPC the Academic Senate asked the University Writing Committee (UWC) to recommend changes in the policies for oversight of the GWAR program. The attached policies are the outcome of that endeavor.

The GWAR requirements at California State University, Stanislaus are that:

1. students must first successfully complete the Writing Proficiency Screening Test (WPST);
2. students must then complete a designated, upper-division Writing Proficiency (WP) course with a minimum grade of C-. These WP courses will be a part of the regular curriculum in the disciplines in which writing is integrated as an instructional device in a way appropriate to the discipline.

While the UWC and UEPC can find no pre-existing statement of GWAR Implementation Policies, the policies attached hereto are congruent with long-established practice on our campus. With respect to the proposed change to extant practice, UWC and UEPC note that plagiarism is an increasingly significant concern that was not adequately addressed by established practice. Plagiarism is becoming easier to do and more common in all of its forms from extensive "assistance" with writing papers to directly copying from the web or elsewhere. While guarding against plagiarism has always been the responsibility of the instructor, we think in the face of its increasing prominence it is advisable that the UWC make this explicit in the WP course guidelines. Therefore the underlined text [10.d] has been added.

Approved by UEPC 1/25/07  
Approved by AS 3/20/07  
Approved by President 5/1/07

California State University, Stanislaus

**GWAR Implementation Policies**

1. The Writing Proficiency Screening Test (WPST) is administered a minimum of 4 times per year. The prompts for the WPST are designed and tested by the WPST coordinator, with the goal that every student should have the necessary background and experience to address the prompt.
2. The WPST Coordinator organizes WPST grading sessions shortly after each test offering. Each exam is graded holistically and independently by two trained readers referring to a six-point rubric that measures basic writing skills common to all disciplines. If the two readers' evaluations agree within one point, they are added to form a total score. If not, the exam is re-read by the chief reader who will resolve the discrepancy. The minimum passing score is seven.
3. WPST exam scores are posted to the student information system, and WPST status [Pass/Fail/Not Taken] for each student appears on course rosters for WP courses. Instructors have the responsibility to withdraw students who have not passed the WPST.
4. The WPST should be taken as soon as possible after successful completion of the Critical Thinking course. To encourage this, each semester the WPST Coordinator contacts instructors of the critical thinking course, asking them to tell their students to take the WPST as soon as possible after passing their course.
5. Students who take an equivalent exam, as determined by the University Writing Committee (UWC), or pass the GWAR while matriculated at another CSU campus may transfer credit for the WPST and/or GWAR to our campus. Such transfers are posted to the student information system and appear as PASS on grade rosters for WP courses.
6. The WPST Coordinator meets with students who have failed the WPST to advise them of their weaknesses and recommend ways to address them. Options range from ESL classes to individual or group sessions in the Writing Center. While the WPST score reports always advise students who have failed that they should schedule such a meeting, those who have failed at least once before are also sent a separate, strongly worded letter with a copy to their major department, urging them to do so.
7. Courses must be approved by UWC before being granted WP status.
8. Each WP Course offering is reviewed the first time an instructor new to the course teaches it and periodically for each course/instructor combination at five-year intervals.
9. Courses not previously approved for WP credit cannot be used to satisfy the GWAR, even on an independent or individual study basis. However, UWC will routinely approve petitions to award GWAR credit for a WP course given as independent study because of scheduling difficulties. Such courses must be supervised by an experienced instructor of the course, and adhere to the original approved course proposal.
10. The initial certification and subsequent re-certifications are based on three criteria:
  - a) WP Courses have curricular content; i.e. the course is not just a writing course.
  - b) WP courses integrate writing with the rest of the course, both in content and in pedagogy.

- c) WP courses provide meaningful assessment of and developmental feedback on writing.
  - d) WP courses include instruction and warnings about plagiarism.
11. To be granted and maintain WP status, courses must be classified C-4, with enrollment capped at 25 students because of the additional interaction with students and effort involved in teaching WP courses.
  12. The UWC monitors WP course enrollments to assure that no course routinely enrolls more than 25 students or routinely includes students who have not successfully completed the WPST prerequisite.
  13. If a WP course proposal or offering seems to be out of compliance with established policies, before refusing certification or re-certification, the UWC contacts the instructor(s) and department informally and formally in an attempt to resolve the problems.
  14. The WPST coordinator meets annually with staff in Outreach and Academic Advising to ensure that those staff are kept up-to-date on GVAR requirements and that those requirements are communicated effectively to incoming and current students.

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## Frequently Asked Questions about the GVAR

1. What kind of writing should I assign in my WP course, and what standards should I use to assess writing quality?  
**Answer:** WP instructors and their departments are in charge of defining what specific and general skills comprise competent writing in their discipline and how this may be developed and measured. The UWC requires only that instructors develop such definitions and standards, that they integrate them with curricular material, and that they teach their standards in a developmental way. We are also proposing to require that insrtuctors teach about plagiarism, and actively guard against it.
2. My WP course has been selected for review by UWC. What materials does the UWC want me to submit, and how will these be evaluated?  
**Answer:** The UWC needs copies of the course syllabus and all other course handouts, a few samples of student writing showing developmental feedback, and a short cover letter from the instructor explaining how disciplinary writing is defined and taught in the course. The UWC reads these materials to find evidence that the instructor has a vision of what constitutes competent writing in the discipline and leads the students in a significant and developmental attempt to develop these competencies. The Committee does not second-guess either the definition of competent writing or the teaching methodology as long as they are clearly defined, integrated with course material, and developmental in nature.
3. What is meant by "developmental feedback"?  
**Answer:** Developmental feedback includes instructor and/or peer review of early drafts of some manuscripts that suggests what students can do to improve their work. The instructor should work with students iteratively to help them learn to perfect their writing. The Faculty Development Center regularly offers writing workshops illustrating a variety of developmental feedback techniques you may wish to try.
4. I have a student who has passed the WPST, but seems to lack basic writing skills in my class. How can this happen?  
**Answer:** One need not be a very good writer to pass the WPST; it tests only the most basic ability to form sentences and organize them into an essay. Nevertheless, you can be assured that students who pass the WPST have demonstrated at least that much ability in a controlled environment and you can hold them to that expectation in your class.
5. As the instructor of a WP course, can I admit a student who has not yet passed the WPST?  
**Answer:** As with any course prerequisite, the instructor has the authority to allow a student to take the course without having taken the WPST. Note, however, that this does NOT waive the University requirement that the student must pass the WPST before graduation. There are several other reasons why instructors should do this rarely, if at all:
  - a) Most instructors do not have the time or experience to teach the very basic writing skills that are screened by the WPST. This test is there to make life easier for you (see FAQ #4).
  - b) Students are confused, and instructors embarrassed, if a student passes a WP class but then has difficulty passing the WPST. This can happen because of undetected plagiarism or other grading mistakes.
  - c) Good instructors subconsciously tailor the level of their teaching to the ability of their students. If a class includes students lacking the most basic skills, it lowers the level of instruction for everyone.
6. How can I effectively grade my students' writing assignments in my WP class and still have time left to

teach my other classes?

**Answer:** Grading writing is an intense and time-consuming process, and that is why WP course enrollments need to be capped at 25. Beyond that, it is helpful to think of it as "responding to" rather than "grading"; in brief comments, react to each student's writing both in terms of its content and presentation. Avoid the temptation to try to point out each detailed mistake, or rewrite papers for students. Attend workshops at the Faculty Development Center to learn other techniques that have worked for your colleagues.

7. Can I offer a section of our department's WP course that does not require the WPST, and that does not carry WP credit?

**Answer:** No. In a given semester, GVAR credit cannot be awarded on a section-by-section basis.

8. Can I let a student take my WP course without having to do the writing assignments if they do not need GVAR credit for the class?

**Answer:** No. The writing in WP courses is to be integrated with course content. If those parts can be separated, the course does not qualify for GVAR credit.

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