

October 27, 2005

TO: Caran Colvin, Chair
Academic Senate

John M. Gemello
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

FROM: University Writing Task Force

SUBJECT: Proposed Plan for University Writing Programs

The University Writing Task Force has fulfilled the charge that our group was given in April 2004: The WTF considered the report of the external reviewers on campus writing programs, solicited and analyzed campus feedback on that report, developed our own draft strategic plan, and solicited further campus feedback on our plan. Attached is a list of our members, all of whom contributed to this effort.

Our intention was to fulfill our charge by the end of the last academic year, as we had been asked to do. However, we found that the complex issues that emerged while carefully considering a comprehensive plan to improve the writing of SFSU graduates required additional time and attention. The time we took to develop our draft plan allowed our broadly representative group to reach consensus on a number of important educational objectives.

We think our plan supports the University's important strategic goal of making writing central to education and ensuring that our graduates write proficiently. Furthermore, if implemented, our plan would keep our university current with national trends for writing programs and also would position our university to provide leadership in this area within the California State University system.

Enclosed is our plan, followed by an addendum that contains a summary of the responses we received to this plan from individuals and groups in the campus community. The WTF is prepared to provide helpful support in the months to come, as the Senate gives our full proposal its careful consideration.

Proposed Plan for University Writing Programs

Background & Introduction to the Plan

The Writing Task Force

This preliminary plan from the Writing Task Force proposes a set of interrelated recommendations on how to transform the role of writing at the University.

The Writing Task Force—a broadly representative group of twenty faculty members, administrators, and staff—was constituted by the Provost and the Academic Senate in Spring 2004 after receipt of a far-ranging, sometimes sharply critical report by three nationally recognized composition specialists on our institutional responses, or lack of responsiveness, to a range of issues related to student writing. Their chief recommendations were consonant with those that had just been advanced by the Commission on University Strategic Planning (CUSP II), and the review team was heartened that SFSU seemed poised to make improvement in student writing its highest academic priority over the next five years.

The Writing Task Force carefully weighed the consultants' findings and disseminated their report, together with documents placing it in context, to the campus community in Fall 2005. Many hundreds of faculty, administrators, staff, and students accepted our invitation to respond to a questionnaire listing the report's thirty-eight recommendations; the Writing Task Force also convened a panel of graduate and

undergraduate students to discuss their experiences in different colleges, writing courses, and tutoring centers. In addition, several programs, departments, colleges, and University committees chose to comment at length on the whole report or portions of it that would affect them most directly.

The Task Force devoted much of the Spring 2005 semester to sorting through and examining these opinions, which have informed the overall conception and specific recommendations of this preliminary plan. We again welcome you to share your reactions with us. You may do so during the period September 10 through October 15, 2005, and we will take your feedback into account before preparing our final report, to be submitted to the Provost and the Academic Senate in November.

The Need for Change

The goal of improving student writing is shadowed by deep concern about the extent to which many of our students, even those pursuing advanced degrees, fall short of the academy's standards for written English. In this, we are hardly alone. Some version of an American "writing crisis" has been decried by professors at elite colleges and universities for decades. The consternation has been greatest at urban public institutions. Although they may celebrate their commitment to both access and academic excellence, these ideals are often felt to be impossibly competing claims. Immeasurably enriched by the experiences and worldviews of the populations they serve, such institutions may seek to broaden traditional notions of excellence, but they are impelled to hold fast to certain unassailable standards and must invest substantial resources to help students meet the literacy challenges within and beyond their academic careers.

Typical in many ways, the situation at SFSU is also exceptional given its size, the high percentage of undergraduates who transfer in from community colleges, the large number of international students, and the unparalleled ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of its student body. At the lower division, the University has devised an elaborate system of responses to the range of writing profiles and problems that students present. There are, for example, separate composition and ESL sequences in the English Department, remedial or developmental courses in both sequences, grammar and editing classes for students who elude the categories of native and non-native speakers, placement and exit exams, a quasi-remedial course for the over 2,000 students per year who fail an essay test (JEPET) after having satisfied the requirements of Second Year Composition, and extensive tutoring operations. In addition, GE Segment III courses include a ten-page writing requirement, and there are Level I and II writing requirements at the graduate level. Is something more required to address persistent writing problems? How can SFSU most effectively set about realizing the foremost learning objective identified by CUSP II, "to make good writing a hallmark of its graduates"?

The Writing Task Force has discerned two fundamental recommendations in the visiting consultants' report. Endorsing both, we build on them in proposing our own version of a comprehensive writing plan for SFSU that we believe can invigorate learning and teaching in all of our programs.

Principle #1:

Eliminate High Stakes Testing

The first of these key recommendations is that performance on a single, time-limited essay should no longer be the basis for certifying proficiency in written English. The consultants draw on a body of recent research that finds "high stakes" tests like the Junior English Proficiency Essay Test (JEPET) and the Graduate Essay Test (GET) wanting in reliability and validity.

The Task Force agrees (see LOWER DIVISION section on Portfolio Assessment) . One-time testing that attempts to measure undergraduate or graduate students' writing proficiency is no substitute for a properly designed and sequenced program of writing instruction that can help develop the range of skills and abilities that capable writers have at their disposal.

Principle #2:

Promote Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines

The second key recommendation is consonant with the consultants' expansive vision of writing. Rejecting the widely held belief that writing is a set of discrete skills that can be learned and applied in straightforward ways, we, like the consultants, recognize that writing "requires that students gain mastery of a repertoire of skills and abilities including critical thinking, individual expressiveness, a passion for knowledge, the ability to integrate information gained from reading and research, an awareness of audience and purpose, context and the shape of argument."

SFSU's decades-old means of complying with CSU's Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) has been to certify proficiency in written English either when undergraduates pass a test after successfully completing a required second-year composition course or when (after failing that test, as nearly half of them typically do) they pass another required composition course (the quasi-remedial ENG 414). These

practices do not reflect that writing is an ongoing process and that the faculty as a whole share responsibility for certifying proficiency and for helping students to articulate their insights to academic and broader audiences and communities.

We recommend that SFSU develop a four-year sequence of courses that conforms to the principles and practices of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) or Writing in the Disciplines (WID). The first two years of lower division courses would continue to be taught largely in the English Department, as explained in the section LOWER DIVISION below. These rigorous composition courses would prepare students for the final two years of upper division coursework outlined in the UPPER DIVISION section of this report, which would be taught in most disciplines on campus. WAC/WID programs have been developed at all sorts of institutions nationwide since the mid-1970s, and our own English faculty have, for many years, enjoined our institution to consider WAC and WID as possible models. WAC approaches writing as a valuable learning tool that can help students comprehend, analyze, and apply disciplinary course content. If students have frequent opportunities to respond to course content in their own words, they often are able to retain information better and use that information in more sophisticated ways. WID is based on the understanding that each discipline—or, in some measure, any larger configuration of disciplines such as behavioral sciences, business, or literary humanities—has its own rhetorical conventions and standards of language use and style that students must learn in order to become full members of their chosen field. Therefore, more formal, discipline-specific writing assignments are the norm in WID courses. Most importantly, both WAC and WID programs provide students frequent opportunities to apply and improve their writing abilities.

The Writing Task Force endorses these views. Echoing CUSP II's assertion that "writing is the foundation of learning and inquiry," we would argue that students who are continually engaged in writing tasks of various kinds will learn more and understand better. It also can be expected that their instructors will have a keener appreciation of what their students have and have not yet mastered.

Specific Proposals & Implementation Issues

Because we are proposing a comprehensive writing program for SFSU, we have gone beyond the consultants' list of individual recommendations to develop a structured plan that would phase in changes at all levels of instruction and within all disciplines. Although this document organizes our proposals by presenting a three-to-five year phase-in plan for changes at each of those levels of study, it is important to note that all of our proposed changes to SFSU's writing programs are interrelated, supporting each other explicitly and individually in ways that we note. More generally, our proposals support each other by cultivating and encouraging development of a deeply rooted and widespread culture of literacy on campus.

Because ours is an ambitious goal, our document also includes a final section addressing resources required, noting future administrative options, and detailing next steps for approval of our plan. The Writing Task Force believes that implementing our proposals—which synthesize those advanced by our writing faculty, the Committee on Written English Proficiency (CWEP), Graduate Council, and the visiting consultants—will significantly improve both the writing of our students and the larger educational enterprise at SFSU.

LOWER DIVISION PROPOSALS

Overview

Nearly all explicit writing instruction at SF State takes place in the lower division and is mounted by the English Department's Composition and ESL programs. While these programs ought to retain authority over lower division instruction, they need to be better supported in general, and to adopt certain practices requiring support beyond current levels, if they are to prepare students who can readily meet the demands of the discipline- or College-based upper division writing courses that the Task Force is calling on the University to institute.

Most undergraduates, including many transfer students, must take at least one writing course at SFSU and as many as five such courses depending on their initial placement and performance on JEPET. Roughly 450 composition classes, and another 150 allied skills classes (in, e. g., reading and grammar), were offered in 2004-05, with enrollments in excess of 13,000—figures that are expected to rise by approximately 10% in 2005-06 as the University continues to attract increasing numbers of first-time freshmen. Only a handful of these classes are regularly taught by tenured and tenure track faculty. The vast majority of classes are entrusted to part time lecturers and GTAs, over 110 of them in a given semester and several who are newcomers to our Composition and ESL programs.

A full time lecturer directs the ESL program, and the efforts of the seven tenured and tenure-track specialists in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages are almost exclusively devoted to English's thriving M.A. TESOL program, which enrolls better than 225 students. Oversight of the considerably larger lower division enterprise in Composition is shared by two tenured faculty members. The Composition program as a whole has been functioning with just five tenured and tenure track faculty, one a specialist in Reading and another in English

Education, and pretty much all their teaching time is invested in Composition's M.A. and certificate programs, the training ground for GTAs and most current lecturers. Full time Composition and ESL faculty must, among other things, hire and evaluate lecturers and GTAs, schedule classes, administer placement exams, administer JEPET and advise students who fail the test, advise graduate students and English Education students, oversee the English Tutoring Center, assess program effectiveness and implement requisite changes, and maintain close working relationships with their counterparts at SFSU's principal feeder schools.

The recommendations that follow are intended to improve teaching and learning in the array of lower division writing and allied courses offered by the University.

Reduce Enrollment Caps

Even if the rest of the Task Force's recommendations were not to be adopted, students would be emerging from their Composition and ESL classes as better writers if enrollment ceilings were lowered in accordance with the norms advocated by the two fields' major national associations: from the present 18 to 15 in remedial courses and from 25 to 20 in all others. Writing instruction is exceedingly intensive labor. For example, the requirements of a typical composition class include at least eight essays and three one-on-one conferences: i.e., a minimum of 200 essays and 24 conferences per class, and instructors are often teaching four such classes per semester. Reduced class sizes would permit fuller responses to the steady flow of writing and revision assigned, greater attention to particular issues during conferences outside of class, and more carefully monitored small group activities during class.

Increase Tutoring Support Services

Another important change, addressed in greater detail in the next two sections of this report, would be to expand and strengthen tutoring provided by several support units across the campus. Although the establishment of upper division writing requirements would necessitate expanding these services, the success of that initiative would largely depend on how effectively students' experiences in the lower division are preparing them for the heightened expectations of writing in the disciplines, and many of the recommendations advanced below are designed to ensure that higher performance standards are maintained in the lower division.

Expand Accelerated English

Supported by a major 3-year grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education, SFSU's Accelerated English program has been hailed by FIPSE as a national model for mainstreaming students initially placed in remedial writing courses. This innovative program has been remarkably successful not only in improving the writing skills and retention rate of those placed in the lower of the University's two levels of remediation, but also in hastening their progress through remediation and 1st Year Composition in two semesters instead of three. Among its key features are the integration of writing and reading instruction, cohorts who study with the same writing and reading instructors over two semesters, coordination by two tenured faculty members, regular meetings in which the coordinators and instructors share their ideas about course goals and how best to achieve them, consistency across the program's multiple sections in terms of the kinds and purposes of writing and readings assigned, frequent opportunities for collaborative learning, and ample individual and group tutoring support.

In 2004-05 almost half the students placed in the lower level of remediation participated in Accelerated English, and the Writing Task Force encourages the Composition program to proceed with plans to implement this model fully as well as to extend it by developing a 4-unit writing/reading course for students placing in the second remedial level so they can complete their remediation and 1st Year Composition in a single semester. Whether or not accelerated progress through ESL remediation is feasible remains to be determined. The ESL program should explore this option even as it continues to refine its version of integrated writing and reading instruction, in ENG 201/202 and ENG 204. In addition, these courses' learning outcomes, along with the curricular and pedagogical practices that further them, should be aligned as closely as possible with those of Accelerated English.

Strengthen 1st and 2nd Year Composition

Somewhat more than half the University's first-time freshmen place in 1st Year Composition (ENG 114) or the ESL equivalent (ENG 209), which respectively offered 91 and 22 classes in 2004-05 serving about 2,600 students, a number that includes those entering from second level remedial courses in the two sequences. The figures for 2nd Year Composition are 95 sections of 214 (89 of them ENG 214) and 25 of the ESL equivalent (ENG 310), which together enrolled about 2,900 students.

If we are to rely on the verdict of the visiting consultants—themselves relying chiefly on such evidence as course descriptions in the Bulletin and textbooks assigned—each of these large-scale enterprises is deeply flawed. It strikes them that individual sections of the principal courses, ENG 114 and 214, are loosely correlated via a set of vague course goals; that their “thesis-driven” curriculum is bound to yield formulaic, insipid writing; and that an undue and unproductive emphasis on sentence-level correctness can afford scant opportunities for addressing

essential matters like sentence variety, voice, stance, persuasion, inventive strategies, the elaboration of ideas, and critical analysis.

The Task Force, with more information at our disposal than the consultants had, has concluded that what the consultants were hoping to find is, by and large, happening in these courses, especially in ENG 114. This is not to deny that there is considerable room for improvement in both courses. We recognize a need for clearly articulated performance-based learning outcomes, general agreement on the instructional approaches that most effectively support these objectives, greater consistency across sections in the nature and level of sophistication of assigned readings, greater consistency in requiring students to meet the formal and rhetorical demands of varied writing tasks, and greater consistency in grading practices together with the maintenance of high standards. Again, the Composition and ESL programs must cooperate to ensure that learning outcomes and the methods of achieving them are consonant in equivalent courses. The programs must also see to it that more advanced courses in the sequences reinforce and build on the skills and abilities developed through prior coursework.

Appoint Course Coordinators

Extramural funding enabled two faculty members to receive assigned time to oversee the Accelerated English program, and while the Task Force does not expect the University to provide a comparable level of support, the example of Accelerated English underscores the importance of awarding an appropriate amount of assigned time to a coordinator for each of the Composition and ESL programs' multi-section courses (e.g., ENG 114 and 414 until JEPET is phased out) and course groupings (e.g., ENG 209, 210, 212).

Individuals with a sophisticated theoretical and practical grasp of writing pedagogy as well as administrative know-how, the course coordinators would be responsible for making sure that the Task Force's several recommendations for improvements in lower division writing instruction are carried out. In concert with the directors of the Composition and ESL programs, the coordinators would guide the process of defining appropriate learning outcomes for a given course and convene instructors for ongoing discussions so that there is a clear corporate understanding of course goals and effective ways to achieve them. They would assess whether piloted curricular and pedagogical changes are producing the intended results, observe and evaluate the performance of instructors, and mentor new lecturers and GTAs. Regular meetings of the coordinators would foster closer ties between the Composition and ESL programs, and would help to ensure that each course is conceived as a stage in students' progress through a sequence of courses that places increasing demands on their resourcefulness as writers.

Institute Portfolio Assessment

Adopting the consultants' recommendation to institute portfolio assessment in each of the Composition and ESL programs' multi-section writing courses would represent a major—and, in the Task Force's view, a desirable—change in current practice.

Orchestrating these end-of-semester assessments would be one of the course coordinators' main responsibilities. They would need to train all instructors in the well established methods of holistic evaluation, which are followed in the scoring of the more than 2,000 JEPET essays that the Composition program has been administering each year. Among the advantages of portfolio review are that it entails a sampling of different sorts of student writing produced under varying conditions over time, and as such provides a better measure of students' proficiency than does a test like JEPET. Portfolios would be read by two or three instructors performing blind reviews of work submitted in other instructors' classes. Accordingly, the decision as to whether a student has satisfied the course's learning outcomes, and so can proceed to the next course in the sequence or to a junior-level writing course in the disciplines, is made by the community of those teaching the course, not by that student's classroom instructor. Intended to enforce more rigorous and uniform assessment across a course's multiple sections, portfolio review would be particularly valuable in 2nd Year Composition, which is presently taught by some faculty outside the English Department. The system can work effectively only if students are assigned similar writing tasks across sections and if all instructors regularly participate in discussions about course objectives and standards for evaluating portfolios.

The Task Force recommends phasing in portfolio review through one-to-two-year pilot programs for each lower division writing course, followed by across-the-board implementation once the system's effectiveness has been demonstrated and resources are in place to compensate portfolio evaluators, at roughly the same rate as JEPET and GET evaluators are now paid for their efforts.

Hire Additional Full Time Composition and ESL Faculty

As noted above, there are no tenured or tenure track faculty associated with the ESL program, and the Composition program has been making do with three tenured and two tenure track faculty members. The visiting consultants observe that a Composition program as large and complex as SFSU's cannot be expected to function properly without a complement of ten to twelve tenured and tenure track faculty, and this does not take into account the additional responsibilities that would attend helping to guide the development of a campus-wide WAC/WID program.

Effective and timely implementation of the Task Force's recommendations, especially for improvements in lower division writing instruction,

will, in our estimation, require the appointment, at least initially, of two Composition and ESL specialists in each of the next three years (most likely four in Composition and two in ESL over the 3-year period). We agree with the consultants that the normative workload of tenured and tenure track faculty in Composition and ESL should accord with the standard of 9 WTUs per semester recommended by the Workload Task Force, and we propose that a reduction from the current onerous load of 12 WTUs per semester should take effect by 2006-07. We recommend, too, that at least five of the Composition and ESL programs' most capable lecturers should be appointed to full time positions. Such recognition would induce them to become deeply invested in the massive effort required to improve writing instruction in the lower division, and the University would be less likely to lose them to community colleges, which regularly offer full time appointments to some of the many excellent part time faculty who teach in and perform administrative tasks for both programs.

Further Reflections

The Task Force's several proposals for improving the teaching and learning of writing in the lower division are aimed at preparing SFSU students to succeed in required junior-level writing intensive courses, as well as the courses they take to meet major and GE Segment III requirements. We anticipate that a new emphasis on WAC/WID will lead to heightened expectations for writing in the upper division and an increasing number of courses in which writing is an integral component of student learning. Such changes may, in turn, necessitate revisions of lower division courses. As recommendations for Composition and ESL courses are piloted, assessed, and phased in, faculty must be prepared to make adjustments, to experiment, and to be receptive to other significant changes that may be prompted by shifts in enrollment patterns, improved writing skills of transfer students stemming from new articulation agreements with feeder schools, or insights generated by recently appointed faculty.

The Accelerated English and ESL programs have had success in linking reading and writing instruction as well as the use of a cohort model, and we may discover that there are gains in student learning if, for example, many English 114 classes were to be paired with other Segment I required classes in critical thinking and oral communication or with Segment II writing intensive classes offered by any number of departments. We may decide that all 2nd Year Composition sections should emanate from English or that additional sections should be mounted by other departments. As for ENG 214, we may come to agree with the consultants that a literature-based composition course does not serve the campus well, in which case it would be imperative to establish another sort of required literature course in the General Education curriculum.

Upper Division Proposals

Overview

The most dramatic changes to university writing programs that we propose are for upper-division courses. We propose that the University phase out the requirement for JEPET/414 and that, instead, students meet the GVAR by taking a junior-level discipline- or College-based writing intensive course. This new approach to meeting the GVAR would be a major step towards developing a new campus culture of literacy, based on Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines approaches. Although we think it is important to add a fourth-year writing-intensive course, perhaps in the form of a capstone course in the major, the remainder of this section deals largely with the proposed third-year course.

WAC/WID in the Upper Division: First Steps

Of course, before disciplinary writing intensive courses could become the new method for meeting the GVAR, a number of preparatory changes would need to take place; therefore, this phase-in process would likely take several years.

The first necessary change has been outlined already: to make the lower-division writing requirements more consistent and uniformly effective, increasing the standardization of outcomes for such courses, both here on campus and through our articulation agreements with feeder schools. These changes would unfold incrementally over three-to-five years. However, they will begin almost immediately, and the first WAC/WID courses designed to meet the GVAR could be offered after a year or two of preparation.

The next most important change, which probably would take an academic year to complete, would be to recruit and hire an experienced, senior-level WAC/WID specialist who can play a decisive role in developing prototypes for appropriate writing intensive courses in several disciplines. Working closely with lower division Composition and ESL coordinators, the new WAC/WID specialist would make sure that upper division writing courses build appropriately on competencies that students had developed in prior coursework. The WAC/WID specialist also would work extensively with interested faculty from every college to assist them in devising a range of curricula and teaching

models for writing intensive courses. These models might include classes co-taught or taught with the help of teaching assistants. Initially, the WAC/WID specialist would help faculty to develop these alternative course models for pilot testing; later, those that are successful would be identified as options for adoption by faculty in a range of disciplines.

The WAC/WID specialist should become a permanent member of the Committee on Written English Proficiency (CWEP), which currently serves as a consultant for all-University literacy efforts. CWEP membership should be revisited to ensure that the committee has appropriately broad campus representation.

Writing intensive courses, unlike composition courses, typically do not focus on writing as their primary subject. However, writing intensive courses typically do include some direct instruction in forms and standards relevant to writing in the given discipline, feedback on drafts of written assignments, and requirements for revision in response to that feedback. The university community will need to develop specific course expectations and learning outcomes for these courses as well as procedures for course approvals. We strongly recommend that writing intensive courses be limited to 25 students. Students should satisfy the GVAR requirement after having completed 60-to-80 units so that the skills developed in their lower division writing classes will not have eroded and so that they will have ample time to refine these skills in subsequent coursework.

Writers continually need to revisit the stages of writing in accordance with their evolving understanding of a given subject, their own intentions, and the context informing a given writing task. While writing intensive courses include frequent and reasonably extensive writing assignments, some of the required writing may be low-stakes, informal assignments that are often not graded but instead, for example, circulate among peers for comments or simply—but valuably—provide students with opportunities to practice writing. Those that are graded typically are evaluated based both on content and presentation elements, including not only surface-level correctness, but also appropriateness for purpose, audience, and genre; organization and argumentative strategies; stylistic fluency; and accurate and conventional citation of sources.

WAC/WID and the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GVAR)

We expect that a good number of the courses designated to fulfill the GVAR will be existing major courses that would be redesigned in order to include more focus on writing (including revision and discussion of disciplinary conventions and standards). However, in some areas, it might be appropriate to develop a new course at the program, department, or college level. Again, the goal for all of these initial experiments would be to generate a number of options for how a discipline-based junior-level writing course could suffice for the GVAR.

The method that we recommend for developing these initial alternative WAC/WID course models is to recruit interested faculty (offering appropriate release time awards) to join a WAC/WID semester- or year-long colloquium. Led by the new WAC/WID specialist, this colloquium would focus on ways to adapt WAC/WID approaches to teaching writing in ways most appropriate for implementation at SFSU. The WAC/WID specialist also could provide training focused on teaching discipline-based writing and revising for those disciplinary faculty who would teach the initial GVAR courses. The WAC/WID specialist also could help to coordinate the development of related training designed to help these faculty to work with multilingual students. This seminar would be a pilot for the sort of training that will be necessary to certify instructors for the junior-level course.

The process of developing and piloting prototype junior-level discipline-based writing intensive courses probably would take another year. Students who took those initial course offerings would have them waived in as JEPET/414 substitutes; those students also might receive additional incentives for signing up, such as receiving credit toward their majors and/or credit for a Segment III course requirement.

During this transitional period, possibly working in concert with the campus' tutoring support services, the Composition and ESL programs and/or other programs and departments could develop new elective courses or supplemental instruction, some of which could be offered through the tutoring centers. Tutoring staff and faculty could then identify students who want or need more support for their writing and editing skills as well as for mastering the tasks and learning the conventions of writing in their disciplines.

After these preliminary steps, training would continue (perhaps along with compensation for faculty involved in designing or redesigning coursework), so that additional faculty in more disciplines will be prepared to teach writing intensive courses. In addition, it would be essential to appoint a coordinator for all junior-level GVAR offerings (even before phasing out the existing coordinator positions for JEPET/414). The goal would be, within three-to-five years, for all students to be meeting the GVAR with a junior-level discipline-based writing course, taught by faculty who are motivated, capable, and well-supported in this effort. This coordinator would also lead the effort to address the particular concerns of transfer students, who bring a range of skill levels to upper-division writing. Finally, the coordinator would also consult with the ESL program about how ESL students could continue their progress toward becoming effective writers through new and existing ESL courses while fulfilling their GVAR requirement by taking junior-level writing intensive courses in the disciplines.

Writing Support Services in a WAC/WID Program

Highly-visible, well-staffed support services for writing are critical to the success of any university program that intends to enhance the writing skills of its students and can play an instrumental role in developing students' overall academic reading and writing proficiency. During the initial development and pilot-testing period of the disciplinary GVAR courses and teaching approaches, the tutoring resources on campus would need to be developed and expanded considerably so that sufficiently large and trained tutoring staff would be able to adequately assess reading and writing needs and support students who seek assistance or are referred by disciplinary writing faculty. Some disciplines might find it helpful to set up policies and programs in concert with tutoring services to streamline avenues for tutoring referrals and retention procedures in GVAR courses. However, well-developed and staffed writing support services are not intended to be a substitute for the substantive writing instruction and tasks that need to take place in the discipline-based courses that fulfill university requirements.

In order for writing support services to be integrated into the fabric of a viable university writing program, a consistent WAC/WID model of tutoring support for lower division and upper division students, as well as for transfer and graduate students, needs to be developed and aligned with changes in ESL, composition, and writing-in-the- disciplines courses. An essential component of this model is the comprehensive and ongoing training of tutors in the teaching of reading, writing, and related skills as well as in working with multilingual students.

Additional WAC/WID Initiatives

While changing the means for meeting the GVAR will go a long toward infusing WAC/WID principles across the curriculum, we also propose further changes at the upper-division level. Because writing skills evolve through sustained practice, the lessons taught in lower-division required writing courses and in junior-level discipline-based GVAR courses will need reinforcement from other coursework. Therefore, we propose that, within two or three years of appointment, the WAC/WID specialist would be working with a growing cadre of discipline-based advocates of the new program to develop additional WAC/WID initiatives.

The first such initiative that we propose is for each major to develop a senior-level course that has substantial writing requirements informed by WAC/WID approaches (e.g., both informal and formal writing assignments and opportunities for revision). This course might be the capstone course for the major or another already existing course, or it might be a newly designed course that has the junior-level GVAR requirement as a prerequisite. The degree to which this additional course is writing intensive would be at the discretion of each program or department. Such a course would acknowledge the importance for students to undertake serious writing tasks throughout their academic careers: of conceiving writing not as a special activity that occurs (and matters) only in composition classes and courses that satisfy the GVAR, but as a means of inquiry and discovery applied throughout college studies.

We propose, as well, that the Composition and ESL programs (and possibly other programs or departments on campus) develop more elective writing courses and workshops that might be of interest to students from a range of disciplines (for example, a course concerned with writing research papers). Finally, we propose that the General Education Council revise expectations for Segment III courses to go beyond the current page-based writing requirement, instead including more emphasis on writing instruction and revision.

The new WAC/WID specialist would doubtless be influential in raising expectations for upper-division writing in these ways and in engaging more faculty in developing students' writing competencies throughout their education at SFSU. To be successful for both students and faculty, the infusion of WAC/WID approaches into more and more courses will require an ongoing investment in faculty training and student tutoring support. The payoff for these investments would be students who graduate with writing skills appropriate to their chosen fields and, for some, to graduate study.

Graduate Proposals

Overview

The major change that we propose to address writing at the graduate level is that programs and departments articulate and, if necessary, develop their own writing assessment methods for admissions and degree completion. This change builds on the consultants' recommendation that SFSU eliminate the Graduate Essay Test (GET).

Two levels of writing assessment—one for entry-level students and one for students to fulfill before graduation—already exist for graduate programs at SFSU. However, the initial requirement is at times vague or not enforced until after admission. The final requirement may also be vague and sometimes functions less as an indication of students' graduate writing skills and more as an item for advisors simply to check off as students complete other degree requirements.

We propose that assessment at both levels be discipline-specific and that it allow departments to choose methods appropriate to their field. We propose also that whichever assessment methods departments choose be rigorously defined and that they be enforced meaningfully and consistently. We base these proposals on the belief that, first, all graduate programs should expect that their entering students will be ready to study specialized subjects at an advanced level and, second, graduating students will recognize the importance of good writing to their future careers. Graduate programs can use the proposed assessments of incoming and outgoing students as tools for identifying how best to increase their focus on writing throughout graduate studies. All graduate students, whether native or non-native speakers of English, should have opportunities and incentives to improve their writing and to understand its importance in whatever field of study they pursue.

Assessment at Time of Admission

Graduate students should possess, on admission, adequate knowledge and skills to pursue advanced studies in their disciplines. This readiness to undertake graduate-level work includes a fairly high level of proficiency in writing.

We propose that each graduate program specify minimum levels of writing proficiency for admission to its program and detail how it will measure those levels. The program would then file a plan with the Graduate Division indicating its strategies for assessing students' writing abilities prior to admission. Students would be required to pass the Level One assessment prior to admission to any SFSU graduate program; those students who do not meet the requirements would receive conditional admission to graduate programs until the program considers their writing adequate for graduate study. Requiring students to pass the assessment before admission is a key change from current practice in many programs. Moving the initial assessment prior to admission will eliminate the need for the GET examination.

Departments could choose one or more assessment methods from a range of possibilities for both native and non-native speakers. The University Task Force on Graduate Program Review, two of whose members are also members of the Writing Task Force, recently recommended a score of 4.0 on the GRE Analytic Writing Assessment. Other possible assessments include writing samples from schoolwork or employment, personal statements, achieving an adequate TOEFL or IELTS score or successful completion of an appropriate writing course. Graduate programs wanting assistance in developing writing proficiency criteria and assessment methods appropriate to their field could seek it from the new campus WAC/WID specialist.

Each graduate program's plan for assessing writing proficiency on admission would necessarily begin as advisory. During this transitional period, admissions committees would rate candidates according to the planned assessment strategies but would not necessarily have to turn candidates away because they failed to establish minimum writing proficiency. Departments and programs would thus have opportunities to adjust their evaluation methods as necessary based on their ongoing experiences.

Many programs navigate a tension between providing students access to graduate study and requiring that students meet the standards of graduate study. This tension may be particularly acute with writing because of the time required to acquire writing skills, especially for non-native speakers of English. Departments may choose to conditionally admit students who do not meet Level I writing requirements. Those students will require support at the departmental, college, and university level. Such support might include discipline-specific writing courses (including writing-intensive upper-division courses), learning assistance services, and writing and editing courses designed for non-native speakers of English. If a program recommends conditional admission for a student that it deems not able to write at the level expected for graduate students, it is incumbent upon the program to provide the student with the appropriate educational resources to acquire the expected writing skills. If the program cannot provide such resources, the program should not recommend that the Division of Graduate Studies admit the student unless the University has a plan for how it will provide such resources. Such a plan would need to include an understanding of how many under-prepared students the University can reasonably support across all graduate programs and by what criteria the University would admit a subset of these students if programs recommended admission for more students than available resources can support.

Increased Focus on Writing throughout Graduate Education

While graduate students should be expected to become better writers while pursuing their degrees, few students can significantly improve their writing on their own, and some graduate programs may need to increase their focus on writing skills. Assessment of their students' writing may encourage certain programs to revisit their curricula and teaching methods in order to provide more—and more appropriate—writing instruction. In addition to special courses for conditionally admitted students, departments and programs might redesign Culminating Experience courses to include more attention to writing.

The WAC/WID specialist will be an important resource for these efforts, since graduate program faculty will not always be prepared to deal with all students' writing problems. The WAC/WID specialist will need to work with existing learning assistance services on campus to provide writing support for graduate students. Tutoring centers and the ESL program would doubtless have to afford more support for both native and non-native speakers of English. Graduate level writing courses, taught by specialists in writing instruction, could be created. As with undergraduates, a broad array of tutorial assistance and coursework will be necessary to help graduate students improve their writing. This assistance will have to be provided either by individual departments or by the University.

Whatever mix of methods is deemed most appropriate by each graduate program, sufficient instruction and support should be provided throughout students' education to prepare all of them to complete Level Two writing requirements.

Assessment in Order to Complete Graduate Degree

Before graduation, students should be able to demonstrate a mastery of their discipline appropriate for the awarding of an advanced degree. This includes being able to write at a professional level. In many cases the graduate Culminating Experience will be the vehicle best suited for students to demonstrate the full range of their professional attainments.

As with the Level I assessment, we propose that graduate programs consult with the new WAC/WID specialist to develop discipline-appropriate Level II assessment methods. We aim to encourage a diversity of means for accomplishing the shared goal of high-level writing competence for all students who earn graduate degrees at SFSU.

Once programs and departments have specified minimum levels of writing proficiency for program graduates, we propose that they communicate their Level II assessment plan to the Graduate Division. As with the Level I graduate requirement and with all of our proposals, these plans would take time to implement in full. Ultimately, there would be no alternative to satisfying the Level II writing requirement, though students could return for reassessment if they were initially unsuccessful in their attempt to meet graduation requirements.

Implementation Proposals

Overview

In line with the University's ambitious goal of ensuring that all SFSU degree recipients are capable writers, we are proposing a series of major changes in how the institution approaches writing instruction. Such changes need to be phased in at an appropriate pace, in large measure because the several components of our proposed comprehensive writing plan are closely and complexly allied, and also because we must make sure that we can effectively carry out whatever we are trying to do at a given point. We believe that it will take at least three-to-five years for individuals and programs across campus to coordinate their efforts, understand and adapt to new methods, innovate, experiment, assess outcomes, and, finally, refine approaches for full-scale implementation. Further, the changes that we propose will require a steadily increasing infusion of resources over this period to support faculty hiring, program improvement, faculty development, and tutoring centers, and a responsible, as well as flexibly responsive, financial plan that keeps pace with programmatic changes will need to be formulated and adhered to.

Resource Planning

We expect that a large amount of the resources required to implement changes will be for program development. We insist on the importance of new hiring, most importantly of a WAC/WID specialist, but also of additional faculty (both tenured/tenure-track and full time lecturers) in both the Composition and ESL programs, several of whom would likely become course coordinators (or replace existing faculty who move into such roles). Individual departments also might need new hires to help to deliver WAC/WID course offerings. Approximately 200 sections of classes meeting the GVAR requirement will have to be offered each year (but 90 sections of ENG 414 will be eliminated). The number of new junior-level writing sections that would need to be offered is uncertain, because we do not yet know how many existing courses could be redesigned to serve as GVAR replacements, though adoption of our recommendation that enrollment ceilings in writing intensive courses be limited to 25 will surely incur additional costs.

Reducing class sizes in lower division writing courses, reducing the workloads for full time faculty who teach those courses, and providing sufficient sections so that lower division students can complete writing requirements prior to achieving upper division status and so that upper division transfer students can complete ENG 214 in their first semester at SFSU would all require a substantial investment of resources. Finally, we anticipate new staff appointments, to support both growth and enhanced coordination.

Providing a sufficient number of qualified, well-trained tutors, developing programs that teach skills rather than “fix” work, housing tutoring and training activities in adequate facilities, and properly overseeing these activities and facilities will require new resources to support currently highly-utilized student tutoring services such as the Community Access and Retention Center (CARP), the English Tutoring Center (ETC) and the Learning Assistance Center (LAC). For example, in 2004-05 over 2,000 students registered at LAC for over 5,000 sessions with tutors; because of steadily increasing demand and a budget that has not kept pace with that demand, students who showed up for drop-in appointments typically found that none could be arranged after mid-morning, and those seeking regularly scheduled appointments rarely could be accommodated three weeks after the Center had opened.

In addition, new resources would need to be provided for faculty training. The key to a successful WAC/WID program will be a large group of faculty from across the University dedicated to improving student writing and trained in the best methods for doing so. Absent continual training and support, faculty dedication will soon wane.

The costs of these new resource requirements would need to be budgeted over the five years of implementation, with, again, the goal of aligning incremental increases in expenditures with the phase-in of new programs.

Open Issues

Because our proposed changes would involve new personnel and phase-in periods with pilot programs, we propose that consideration of two major administrative changes that were recommended by the external consultants be put on hold for the first two or three years of implementation, then revisited in light of the situation at that time.

The first of these administrative questions is whether to create a centralized tutoring center for writing. It is unclear whether such centralization, were it to occur, would best take the form of a single campus facility, of a single administrative unit with multiple facilities, or simply of closer coordination among existing tutoring resources (e.g., shared recruiting, training, and materials) with, perhaps, clearer divisions of responsibility and simplified access to resources.

The second administrative question, raised by the visiting consultants, is whether to create a writing department, separate from the Department of English. Again, there are uncertainties, among them what existing programs would belong in such a new writing department. This is a far-reaching proposal beyond the parameters that the Writing Task Force has set for itself.

In regard to both of these questions, we believe that the needs of the campus will be clearer after other changes that we propose, particularly concerning WAC/WID, have time to unfold. We recommend that, at the appropriate time, the Committee on Written English Proficiency (CWEP), a Senate committee that has a broad charter, to consult on writing programs, take the lead in following up on these recommendations to be sure that they receive proper consideration.

Next Steps

In our proposals for writing at all levels of instruction, we have recognized that there is no fast and cheap way to address problems that are both systemic and longstanding. While some of these writing problems may be inherited, to some extent, from other institutions and from the larger culture, we feel the responsibility for addressing them as an important part of our University’s mission. We have heard from experts and interested parties both on- and off-campus, and we have considered a wealth of both success stories and cautionary tales. We know that some of what we have proposed may be controversial. However, we hope and expect that our campus will rise to our shared challenge and respond constructively to our proposals.

After gathering and reviewing campus-wide responses to our “Draft Plan for University Writing Programs” in October, the Task Force will either recast this draft document, incorporating useful suggestions, or else prepare an addendum explaining why we are prepared to stand behind our original draft. We aim to submit a final draft to the Provost and the Academic Senate no later than November 1, 2005. The document will doubtless occasion much spirited discussion and debate within the Senate during subsequent months.

We anticipate that, during the ensuing review process, campus units needing to provide resources in order to fulfill approved initiatives (e.g., the Composition and ESL programs, the Learning Assistance Center) would develop budgets and schedules, followed by requests for hiring, facilities, and so on. In addition, the University administration would need to decide how best to manage the assignments, structures, and support that might be necessary to recruit and appropriately house new hires (such as the proposed WAC/WID specialist and the coordinator of junior-level writing intensive courses) and to coordinate the efforts of writing instruction and writing support activities conducted by multiple campus units (including negotiating articulation agreements).

The Task Force recommends that it continue to meet throughout the next year while the Senate and other campus bodies consider its recommendations. It will serve as an advocate for its recommendations, sending representatives to meetings where its proposals are discussed.

We also would expect campus groups such as CWEP and the GE Council to consider the roles that they might play in implementing approved initiatives and to make whatever internal changes might be appropriate (including membership and advisory roles). We also would encourage the GE Council to consider how changes to campus writing requirements might affect GE requirements.

As a result of these concurrent activities, and ideally within the coming academic year, our proposals could start to become realities, beginning a process of change that will ultimately make the improvement of student writing an endeavor of the entire campus community, thus providing multilateral support for our students to accomplish higher levels of writing proficiency. Then SFSU will have initiated the concerted campus-wide effort to live up to its commitment to make good writing a hallmark of its graduates.

Comments from the Campus Community Addendum to the Proposed Plan for University Writing Programs

In analyzing the comments that the University Writing Task Force received from individuals and groups from the campus community (both in comments on the Senate website and those forwarded directly to the WTF Chair, Dan Buttlare) on our group's proposed strategic plan, we found that:

- § Our strategic plan received considerable positive feedback from individuals and groups across campus that support its recommendations.
- § The concerns raised about our strategic plan are ones that WTF members had already recognized and also had considered through debate and discussion.
- § Most importantly, the concerns raised are ones that the Senate can address as part of the process of working out a final implementation plan, based on our strategic plan.

What follows is a brief summary of what our group recognizes as the major substantive concerns raised by those offering feedback on WTF's plan.

Resources: Some respondents raised the concern that funding for new campus writing initiatives would inevitably drain resources from other worthwhile academic programs and activities. However, the Provost charged the WTF to propose the best possible plan and to assume that, if approved, appropriate resources would be forthcoming, in line with the emphasis placed on writing in the University's strategic plan. Our plan identifies some of the many new resources that would need to be provided in order to properly implement our proposals. Our plan also proposes extended and carefully phased-in guidelines for implementation.

Transfer students: Some respondents raised the concern that improvements to the lower division writing programs might be insufficient to prepare all undergraduate students for a new method of meeting the GVAR, in part because so many of our students transfer here after meeting their lower division written English requirements. A final implementation plan would need to address these concerns in more detail and at several levels: by working much more closely and regularly with SFSU feeder schools in terms of articulation and assessment; by identifying specific academic support and course work needs that transfer students have; and by helping to facilitate the transition to SFSU and toward meeting the goals of our improved writing program.

Multilingual students: Some respondents raised the concern that multilingual students may need more and different course work to support our proposed new emphasis on WAC/WID. Specifically, respondents asked that any implementation plan give special consideration to retaining the benefit of the 400-level courses currently required for multilingual students in the ESL program. In addition, respondents stressed the importance of hiring a WAC/WID specialist/coordinator that has knowledge of ESL pedagogy and experience in working with multilingual populations. Respondents also expressed concern about the role of "supplemental instruction" that might be perceived as a replacement for the semester-long course work already in place to serve multilingual learners. Our plan addresses these concerns as ones that would require attention at all academic levels, including changes in course

offerings and coordination, staffing and training, tutoring, and entrance requirements for graduate programs. The WTF acknowledges the specific concerns described above and recognizes that, as mentioned in our strategic plan, any WAC/WID initiative would need to provide opportunities for careful collaboration with the ESL program and faculty while developing the implementation plan.

Interdisciplinary studies: Some respondents raised the concern that students, particularly Liberal Studies students, might not experience integrated interdisciplinary writing course work. Our plan addresses this concern by proposing a range of designs for GWAR courses (offered by both departments and colleges), support for more sections and teacher training, and possible coordination with changes in writing expectations for GE courses.

Testing options: Some respondents raised the concern that eliminating the JEPET and the GET would penalize students whose writing already was adequate for their level and courses of study. Some of these respondents also suggested reforms to the existing JEPET and ENG 414 requirements. Our plan addresses concerns about eliminating high-stakes testing by proposing writing-intensive coursework, both required and elective, that would allow students with already strong writing skills to practice those without penalty in course work that is relevant to their major disciplines and special interests. Also, our plan does not undermine existing course challenge options. Finally, our plan recognizes disadvantages of the existing GWAR requirements and proposes phasing in alternatives that will obviate current frustrations.

University Writing Task Force Members 2004-2005

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Health and Human Services:	Robert Spina, Kinesiology Mary Beth Love*, Health Education
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Chair of Graduate Council:	Kathleen Mosier, Psychology
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*Replacement

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