

**A REVIEW OF THE CSU
GRADUATION WRITING ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENT (GWAR)
IN 2002**

CSU GWAR Review Committee

Bethany Shifflett, Chair

August 2003

Available online at:
<http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/RelatedDocs.shtml>

**A Review of the CSU
Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR)
in 2002**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
List of Figures and Tables	3
Preface	4
Introduction	6
A History of the CSU Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement	6
Stability, Flexibility, and Transformation in the CSU	8
Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes	8
Enrollment Pressures	9
Changes in the CSU Student Body	9
GWAR Policy Development and Implementation @ 2002	12
Flexibility in Choice of Assessment Method	13
Specific Procedures for Standardized Essay Exams on Individual Campuses	13
Variety in Writing Samples	16
Timed-Essay Writing Samples	16
Length of the Reading Passage	16
Complexity of the Passage	21
Rhetorical Challenges	21
Writing Samples from Academic Courses	21
Quality of the Writing Samples	22
Passrates	22
Passrates for students who take an essay examination	22
Passrates for students who take an academic course	24
Review Committee's Analysis of Selected Writing Samples	25
Timing of the Administration of the Writing Assessment	26
Incentives for Early Assessment	26
Resources for Student Success	27
GWAR Courses	27
Inability to Satisfy the Requirement	27

All-Campus Responsibility	28
Readers of Timed Essays	28
Readers of Writing Samples in Courses	28
Reader Recruitment	29
GWAR Oversight Committee	29
Matriculation	30
Reciprocity	30
Emerging Issues in GWAR @ 2002	31
GWAR and Non-Native Speakers of English	31
GWAR and Assessment of General Education	32
GWAR for Graduate Students	32
Conclusions and Recommendations	33
References	38
Members of the GWAR Review Committee	39
Appendices	
A. Campus GWAR Process Diagrams	
B. Campus GWAR Process Summary	
C. Campus GWAR Passrates	
D. Selected Campus Responses to 2001–02 GWAR Survey	
E. CSU Executive Orders Pertaining to GWAR	
F. Campus GWAR Websites	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 25 years since the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) was instituted, the California State University (CSU) has undergone considerable change, including an emphasis on the assessment of student learning outcomes, large increases in student enrollments with modest (at best) increases in funding, and dramatic changes in the student body. All of these developments in the academic environment have had an impact on the assessment of student writing skills.

As required by Executive Order 665, a review of GWAR was undertaken by a committee of CSU faculty, administrators, and students. To conduct the review, the committee collected information from each CSU campus about local GWAR policies, processes, and products in 2001–02 and organized the data by looking at the key features of systemwide GWAR policy, which include the following:

Flexibility in choice of assessment method: Ten campuses require a writing exam; two campuses require completion of a course; three campuses require both an exam and a course; and seven campuses require either an exam or a course.

Procedure for evaluating student writing samples: Nearly all campuses using a standardized essay exam follow the policy requiring essay exams to be written under controlled conditions and evaluated by at least two readers. Although the policy for standardized essay exams is quite specific, systemwide GWAR policy is silent on procedures for writing samples produced in academic courses. It appears that, in most GWAR courses, student writing is evaluated by the instructor of record. In these cases, the committee recommends that campuses implement measures to ensure consistency and common standards across courses.

Variety in writing samples: Systemwide GWAR policy permits many types of writing samples to be used for certification, and campuses vary in the nature of the writing task expected of the student. Campuses differ by offering students shorter or longer reading passages, more or less complex reading passages, and varying rhetorical situations.

To evaluate the quality of the student writing performance, the review committee considered two types of evidence. Information on student passrates showed that no campus had a passrate exceeding 90 percent for first-time test takers and that passrates are low for students who have to repeat the test because they did not pass the first time. The data also show that student passrates in GWAR courses are similar to passrates in other academic courses.

The second type of evidence was a sampling of actual student GWAR essays that were scored by campus evaluators and then reviewed by the committee. The committee, by and large, concurred with the judgments of campus evaluators. The committee believes, however, that campuses should devise writing prompts that challenge students to demonstrate the comprehensive writing skills expected of college graduates, not just the proficiencies required of students when they enter the university.

Timing of the Administration of the Writing Assessment: Although students are expected to complete the assessment in the junior year, many do not, despite the fact that CSU institutions use a variety of incentives and motivators. Data on passrates show clearly that students who must retake the test or course need extra services and assistance to help them pass.

All-campus responsibility: CSU faculty from disciplines across the curriculum have participated in GVAR processes as instructors of GVAR courses, readers of timed essay examinations, and members of oversight committees. To ensure all-campus responsibility, it would be helpful if campuses would treat GVAR like they do all other academic programs and require a program review every five to seven years.

In addition to considering these systemwide GVAR policies, the review committee also examined emerging issues. The most significant of these is the large numbers of non-native speakers of English in CSU classrooms. The heterogeneity of today's student body places extraordinary demands on CSU faculty and heavy burdens on students who succeed in their coursework but have not attained proficiency in standard written English.

Another interesting finding from campus data lies in the many different ways GVAR is implemented—or not implemented—in graduate programs. Instead of offering a campuswide certification, most graduate programs delegate the assessment method to the department level. Some campuses were unaware that a GVAR requirement at the graduate level exists.

With the flexibility and independence encouraged by the Board of Trustees, CSU institutions have developed assessment procedures that are, with a few exceptions, rigorous and sound. In some areas, the review committee has offered recommendations for improving campus GVAR processes. By and large, however, the campuses have identified assessment methods appropriate to their individual missions and student populations, and they have adapted to an evolving academic milieu.

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

List of Figures

Figure 1:	CSU Fall Systemwide Enrollment of Ethnic Groups	11
-----------	---	----

List of Tables

Table 1:	Key Features of GVAR 1978–1997	12
Table 2:	Methods by Which Students Can Make Their Initial Attempt to Meet the Writing Requirement	13
Table 3:	Content of Campus GVAR Examinations	14
Table 4:	Amount of Time Students Have to Complete the Single-Essay Exam	14
Table 5:	Customary Number of Readers Who Read an Exam Essay	15
Table 6:	The Scale of the Assessment Instrument	15
Table 7:	The Passing Score When There is a Scoring Range of 0–12	15
Table 8:	Percentage of Students Passing a Timed-Essay Examination 2001–02	23
Table 9:	Passrates for Students Taking an Academic Course 2001–02	24
Table 10:	Percentage of Full-Time Equivalent Students by Grade Outcomes and Student Level Using Systemwide Parameters 2001–02	25

PREFACE

Skills in written communication are essential to student success both before and after college graduation. In the California State University, the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) certifies that students have indeed acquired writing skills needed in the workplace or in graduate school. The requirement ensures that all students in all majors have the ability to write competently. To implement the requirement, CSU campuses currently rely upon the policies outlined in Executive Order 665, a document that presents guidelines for two writing assessments: (1) an entry-level assessment to place first-time freshmen in appropriate courses, and (2) an exit assessment, the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement.

In addition to promulgating processes and procedures, Executive Order 665 also calls for a review of GWAR at the undergraduate level every five years. In the Fall of 2002, Executive Vice Chancellor David S. Spence began the most recent review process by convening a committee chaired by a member of the Academic Senate CSU, Bethany Shifflett, Professor of Measurement and Evaluation at San José State University. The other members of the review committee include:

- 1 member of the Development Committee of the English Placement Test (EPT), nominated by the EPT Development Committee Chair
- 1 member of the English Council, nominated by the President of the English Council
- 3 faculty members, nominated by the Academic Senate CSU
- 1 student, nominated by the CSSA
- 1 assessment coordinator, appointed by the Chancellor
- 1 undergraduate dean with GWAR responsibilities, appointed by the Chancellor
- 1 provost, appointed by the Chancellor
- 1 staff member from the Chancellor's Office, appointed by the Chancellor

In December 2002, at the request of the GWAR review committee, CSU campuses were asked to provide the following:

- A flow-chart diagram of the campus GWAR process (see Appendix A)
- A written description of the GWAR process (see Appendix B)
- Information on GWAR passrates in 2001–02 (see Appendix C)
- Sample policies, scoring rubrics, essay topics, essay exams, and course papers
- Short narrative answers to questions on the following topics: purpose and timing of GWAR, readers and evaluators for GWAR, resources for students who do not pass GWAR, campus GWAR policies and processes, GWAR and ESL students, and GWAR for graduate students (see Appendix D)

This information was reviewed by the committee, and the following report presents the committee's analysis of the data collected and its recommendations for future actions. These recommendations will help to ensure that GWAR achieves its aim: students graduating from the CSU with proficient writing skills.

This report aims for an overview of the multiplicity of ways that CSU campuses have implemented GWAR and attempts to showcase some of the promising GWAR practices originating on CSU campuses. The report is not a detailed study and analysis of the policies, processes, and products of each individual CSU campus. Instead, it is general and comparative and is intended to promote internal campus discussions of student writing skills at the undergraduate and graduate levels, the definition of baccalaureate-level writing, the assessment of baccalaureate-level writing, and the processes by which the CSU can ensure that its graduates can write well.

INTRODUCTION

When *Newsweek* published a cover story in 1975 entitled “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” colleges and universities across the nation resonated to the charge that contemporary students, the first generation to have grown up with television, were unable to write with the fluency and skill expected of college graduates. Reasons for the decline in writing ability were as numerous as the methods used by universities to try to reverse the trend of less-than-optimum skills. Citing the increasing influence of television, schools overcrowded with baby boomers, the greater demographic variety in students seeking a college education, and a host of other factors contributing to weak writing skills, university faculty and administrators pursued many routes to improve students’ ability to write effectively. “Freshman English” courses, with a traditional emphasis on reading literature, became “composition” courses, centered on building and refining prose skills. Writing Across the Curriculum programs were instituted to ensure an all-campus responsibility for student writing, as well as to reinforce in disciplinary courses the skills taught in composition classes.

Additionally, some universities and university systems mandated tests that would show that students had attained a minimal level of writing skill before they were granted a baccalaureate degree. Since 1972, for example, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia has operated a statewide testing program for the 30+ institutions that comprise the public university system. The standardized Regents Test consists of two parts: a 60-item multiple-choice reading test, and a timed essay. (See http://www.gsu.edu/webfs01/reg/wwwrtp/public_html.) Similarly, since 1984, all students in public colleges in Florida have been required to pass a statewide exam called the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) in order to move from lower- to upper-division work. CLAST is a five-hour exam that covers mathematics, English language skills, and reading and includes a timed essay. (See <http://www.myfloridaeducation.com/sas/clsthome.htm>.)

The California State University was also part of this nationwide trend to certify—in some way—that its graduates could write effectively. In 1976, a resolution by the CSU Board of Trustees announced “the need for continued attention to the area of student writing skills” and stipulated that CSU students should “demonstrate their competency with regard to writing skills as a requirement for graduation.” Thus was born the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR), which has been refined and codified in a series of memoranda over the past three decades.

A History of the CSU Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR)

The Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR), which requires that all CSU students demonstrate competence in written communication before they are granted a baccalaureate degree, emerged from a resolution of the CSU Board of Trustees in 1976. That resolution endorsed the development of an assessment at both the beginning and the end of the students’ progress through the university: “a systemwide writing proficiency/diagnostic examination for entering lower-division students,” as well as a final assessment for upper-division students, which would be “a requirement for graduation.” From the very beginning, then, the entry-level test was specific and concrete: it was “systemwide”; it was an “examination”; and its purpose was “diagnostic.” For 25 years, this assessment has been known as the English Placement Test (EPT), a standardized exam comprising a multiple-choice test and an essay portion, administered to students who are not otherwise exempt when they matriculate in the CSU. The EPT is used to place entering freshmen in the appropriate baccalaureate or prebaccalaureate courses.

The other assessment alluded to in the Trustee resolution, however, was more nebulous and open-ended: it was simply a “requirement for graduation.” To define more precisely the characteristics of this assessment, many systemwide groups considered the issue and made recommendations. The groups included the Academic Senate CSU, CSU English Council, Student Presidents’ Association, and the Advisory Committee on Student Writing Skills.

The result of these deliberations was Coded Memorandum EP & R 78–27, dated May 3, 1978, and addressed to the CSU Presidents by Alex C. Sherriffs, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. This document addresses several points important in the development of the GEAR:

- It reinforces the importance of the assessment.
- It finds that there are “persuasive arguments against imposition of a single systemwide upper-division writing proficiency examination.”
- It recommends that the requirement “ideally should be completed before students enter the senior year.”
- It states that student writing skills are “an all-campus responsibility.”
- It allows individual campuses the freedom to implement the requirement in a number of ways, ranging from department-level certification to campuswide certification.
- It offers flexibility in the types of writing samples to be used in the assessment, including “written coursework, essays, subjective examinations, and similar materials produced by students.”

In other words, whereas the entry-level assessment (now known as the EPT) was systemwide and standardized, the exit assessment (now known as GEAR) was designed to be flexible and campus-appropriate.

Ten years after these parameters had been established, they were codified in Executive Order 514 issued by Chancellor W. Ann Reynolds on November 6, 1987. The one significant addition found in the Executive Order was a mandate for a specific procedure when standardized examinations were used: The process must include “a common essay examination written and evaluated under controlled conditions and graded by at least two faculty members.”

At the same time this Executive Order was promulgated, the CSU system commissioned Dr. Edward J. Borowiec, the Faculty Consultant in English, to conduct a survey of campus GEAR practices. Dr. Borowiec’s research culminated in a 1988 report entitled “Pathways to Quality through Diversity: The CSU GEAR in Transition.” The document provides a thorough description of each campus’s implementation of the requirement, identifies several issues that deserve greater attention, and makes a number of recommendations for greater effectiveness in the assessment of student writing skills at the upper-division level.

Two of the most broadly discussed issues in the Borowiec report concerned student matriculation at a campus and GEAR reciprocity among CSU campuses. The report noted that “in certain parts of the state, several CSU campuses are clustered, thereby encouraging students at one institution to take advantage of a more amenable GEAR elsewhere,” and the report recommended that students enrolled in a campus should not be permitted to satisfy the GEAR at another CSU campus. The report also encouraged a “debate on the reciprocity issue with a view to promulgating an executive order or a resolution which would settle the matter conclusively.” The Borowiec report and the ensuing discussions ultimately led, in 1997, to Executive Order 665, which superseded E.O. 514, and stated that “students shall be matriculated at the CSU campus where they satisfy [GEAR]” and that

“certification of graduation writing competence shall be transferable from one CSU campus to another.”

There have been no additional changes to GVAR policy since Executive Order 665 was issued on February 28, 1997. See Appendix E for copies of all memoranda and executive orders pertaining to GVAR.

Stability, Flexibility, and Transformation in the CSU

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of GVAR, especially in comparison to the requirements at other public universities and university systems, is its flexibility and lack of standardization. From its inception in 1978, the assessment has encouraged and accommodated variety, and given the diversity of CSU institutions—in size, locale, student demographics, and mission—the systemwide writing requirement allows for GVAR processes that meet local and individual needs. A reflection of this variety can be found in the different names used by the campuses to designate this requirement, with the usual CSU passion for initialisms. They include, among others, the Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE), Writing Skills Test (WST), Written English Proficiency Test (WEPT), Upper Division Writing Exam (UDWE), and Junior English Proficiency Essay Tests (JEPET).

During the 25 years since the first outlines of GVAR policy were sketched, the writing requirement policy has changed only slightly. Its central tenets, allowing for considerable freedom and flexibility, have remained the same. Other factors in the CSU academic environment have changed considerably, however, and these key shifts have affected the writing requirement, as well as the students subject to it. Over the past three decades, the significant environmental changes include the movement towards the assessment of student learning outcomes, large increases in student enrollments with modest (at best) increases in funding, and dramatic changes in the student body.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

As a buzzword in higher education circles for years, “assessment” has been embraced and maligned in equal measure by university faculties. Whereas almost everyone agrees that improvement of student learning is a worthy goal, there is less consensus on exactly what knowledge, skills, and values college graduates should have and how they should be measured. Clearly, skills that can be performed or demonstrated in a public, visible way are easier to assess than internal values and deep knowledge, and there are long-standing traditions in the academy of juries assessing a student’s musical performance or watercolor painting. This practice of evaluating artistic performances was adapted by evaluators of prose compositions, and test companies like Educational Testing Service (ETS) piloted an assessment method that (1) proved to be congenial to teachers of writing and (2) produced valid and reliable measures of writing competence. In this method, a student’s essay was read by at least two trained evaluators who used a standardized scoring rubric to assess the student’s performance. This assessment process was adopted widely throughout the country and was employed in the standardized English Placement Test (EPT) developed by the CSU to assess entering freshmen. In addition, this form of assessment served as the vehicle for many CSU campuses when they implemented the graduation writing requirement, and it remains the most common GVAR assessment vehicle today. Depending on whom you ask, the “two readers and a scoring rubric” assessment method is either (1) a finely tuned, well-oiled machine that has withstood the test of time in effectively and efficiently evaluating student writing skills, or (2) a 1970s

technology that is far from obsolete but is perhaps less well suited to the academic milieu of the 21st century. The changing perspectives on assessment are indicated in the recent CSU report entitled “Facilitating Student Success in Achieving the Baccalaureate Degree”:

While maintaining rigor and high standards, many faculty members now focus on mastery rather than gatekeeping. The time-honored practice of requiring midterm and final exams has been replaced by multiple assessments of multiple kinds. Instead of emphasizing high-stakes tests, faculty now make multiple interventions into students’ academic progress; they allow students, after thorough review and counseling, to rewrite papers and retake tests; and they permit students to show mastery of a topic or skill in a number of different ways. In other words, faculty provide multiple attempts at and multiple routes to achieving course and program goals.

Enrollment Pressures

The assessment methods developed in the past half century have had to be effective and efficient in order to accommodate the large numbers of students who have flooded American campuses since the GI bill opened wide the doors of higher education. Offering admission to students in the top third of California’s burgeoning high schools, the CSU has had to cope with large increases in student enrollment but only modest increases in funding. Although adding new campuses has eased the burden somewhat, in the 20+ years between the first and the most recent policy documents on GEAR, the CSU system has added over 30,000 FTE students, and the student-faculty ratio has increased from 18.27 to 19.65. Doing more with less has affected campus GEAR practices in several ways. Academic courses that certified students as having met the writing requirement through coursework—or that prepared students to take a GEAR test—generated FTE, which, in turn, generated revenue, making GEAR courses, as opposed to a GEAR exam, an attractive option for institutions. Moreover, a course, in which students built skills and improved their writing practices, as opposed to a high-stakes test, was more congruent with the current interest in providing multiple methods and multiple routes to student success. To contain costs while serving more students, universities hired lecturers rather than tenure-track faculty to staff writing courses and took advantage of a market oversupply of well-qualified English and composition professors, which helped to ensure a generally high-quality program of writing courses. Finally, permanent faculty who taught disciplinary courses (i.e., not composition or writing courses) were stretched thin to cover increased enrollment demand in their fields, and, consequently, some disciplinary faculty were forced to withdraw from active participation in and support for a university-wide writing program.

Changes in the CSU Student Body

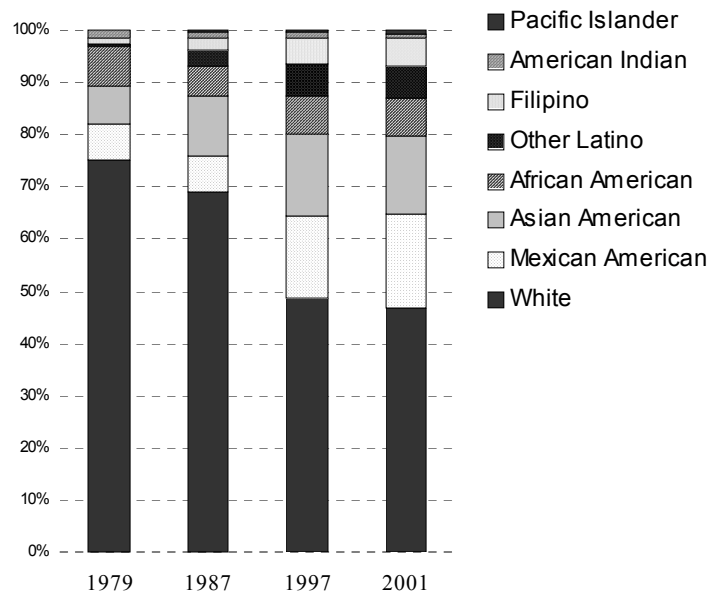
Not only did the CSU have to serve more students, it also had to adapt to a dramatic change in the nature of the student body. Both national and local data indicate that there have been significant shifts in the priorities, attitudes, behaviors, and backgrounds of students over the past several decades. Every fall since 1966, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), now located at UCLA, has conducted a national survey of new college freshmen, and a longitudinal look at student responses illuminates the evolution of student expectations and behaviors. For example, of the students entering four-year colleges as freshmen in 2002, 45.7 percent stated that they had earned an A average in high school. By contrast, in 1968, only 17.6 percent of new freshmen said that they had

achieved an A average. This dramatic increase cannot be explained by the fact that today's students study more and study harder. While high school GPA averages have soared over the years, the time students spend studying has declined. In 2002, only 33.4 percent of the entering freshmen reported studying or doing homework six or more hours per week in their senior year of high school, down from 47.0 percent in 1987, when the question was first asked. In other words, whereas in the past almost half of the students studied an hour or more a day, now only a third of the students exert even that minimal effort.

Commenting on these data, one higher education researcher noted that in high school "students are getting higher grades for less effort. The wider and deeper college-going pool then brings these habits and expectations, not to mention a lack of preparation, with them to college. Students typically don't exceed their own expectations, particularly with regard to academic work" (Kuh, 2003).

It is likely that students are studying less because they are working more. The HERI survey showed that, in 2002, 47.1 percent of the freshmen expected to work during college, whereas in 1989 only 35.3 percent had employment plans. National statistics depicting the rise in the number of college students with jobs are confirmed by CSU data, which show, in fact, that CSU students are much more likely to work while in college than are their national counterparts. The Student Needs and Priorities Survey (SNAPS), administered every five years on all CSU campuses, shows a steady increase in the number of students who work and the number of hours they work. The 1999 edition of SNAPS, the latest data available, reaffirms that between 70 and 80 percent of CSU students work while attending school. Between 30 and 40 percent work full time.

SNAPS also illuminates another dramatic transformation of the CSU student body. In the 1999 administration of SNAPS, more than 40 percent of the students indicated that they usually spoke a language other than English at home when they were growing up. Figure 1 shows that during the quarter-century in which GWAR has been implemented, the CSU student body was transformed into a genuinely multicultural society. In 1979, the first year that CSU campuses implemented the graduation writing requirement, almost three-fourths of the students were white. By 2001, fewer than half of the students were white, and there was no ethnic majority at all in the CSU. The percentage of Asian Americans and Mexican Americans doubled, and the proportions of other Latinos, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos increased at even greater rates. If "Johnny" couldn't write in 1975, the difficulties faced by "Julio," "Juanita," and "Junko" some years later were even greater. The tremendous influx of students whose native language was not English prompted the faculty of the CSU to emerge as one of the country's leaders in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL), but the flood of non-native speakers and writers of English into CSU classrooms only added to the challenge of ensuring that all students could write competently in English before they graduated.



Group	1979	1987	1997	2001
Pacific Islander	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.6
American Indian	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.0
Filipino	1.3	2.4	4.8	5.2
Other Latino	0.2	3.1	5.9	6.4
African American	7.4	5.6	7.5	7.0
Asian American	7.1	11.4	15.6	15.1
Mexican American	6.9	7.2	15.5	18.1
White	73.4	68.8	48.1	46.7

Figure 1. CSU Fall Systemwide Enrollment of Ethnic Groups

Despite the rapid changes that have transformed the institution, many academic practices have remained quite stable: the awarding of letter grades; the number of units required for a bachelor’s degree; the designation of students by class level—freshman, sophomore, and so on—despite the fact that almost 60 percent of the students who enter the CSU as freshmen take six or more years to complete a degree. Likewise, GEAR in the CSU has remained very stable. The developments in the CSU academic environment—changing notions of assessment, the challenge of assessing huge numbers of students, and the nation’s greatest diversity in the student body—have prompted a review of the graduation writing requirement that was defined 25 years ago, and which, unlike many aspects of the CSU, has remained relatively static. In a sense, this report is an assessment of an assessment; it is a study of the processes, products, and policies that CSU campuses have implemented to ensure that their graduates have achieved competence in written communication. (For brief summaries of each campus’s processes, see Appendix B. For more information on each campus’s processes, consult the websites listed in Appendix F.)

GWAR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION @ 2002

This review of the implementation of GWAR on CSU campuses is organized by looking at the key features of the guidelines for the requirement set forth in the memorandum and Executive Orders issued in 1978, 1987, and 1997. These three documents identify the main provisions of GWAR, and a comparison shows how those provisions have changed over time (see Table 1).

Table 1. Key Features of GWAR 1978–1997
(a “✓” in the righthand columns indicates the policy documents that contain the guideline)

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Policy and Procedure</i>	<i>1978 EP&R 78–27</i>	<i>1987 E.O. 514</i>	<i>1997 E.O. 665</i>
Flexibility in choice of assessment method	"Individual campuses may find it desirable, and possible, for this certification to occur at the department level including all disciplines. On the other hand, it may be that campuses would prefer to institute or reaffirm schoolwide and campuswide procedures" (1978). "Measures may be developed that best meet campus needs" (1997).	✓	✓	✓
Procedure for standardized essay exams	"[Common essay exams must be] written and evaluated under controlled conditions and scored by at least two faculty readers."		✓	✓
Variety in writing samples	"Certification may rely on evidence of writing ability as demonstrated in written coursework, essay examinations, or other measures of student writing competence."	✓	✓	✓
Timing of the administration of the assessment	"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."	✓	✓	✓
All-campus responsibility	"Certification of writing proficiency is an all-campus responsibility."	✓	✓	✓
Matriculated at campus	"Students shall be matriculated at the CSU campus where they satisfy the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR)."			✓
Reciprocity	"Certification of graduation writing competence shall be transferable from one CSU campus to another."			✓

Flexibility in Choice of Assessment Method

When CSU campuses were asked about the purpose of GWAR on the campus, most institutions, not surprisingly, said that it was an exit exam, a graduation requirement, or an assessment to validate writing skills. Several campuses also noted, however, that the GWAR serves as a prerequisite, a screening device, or a placement exam for upper-division work. In addition, the few campuses on which students must pass a GWAR course see this not just as an assessment but also as an opportunity for students to learn.

The methods used by CSU campuses to implement GWAR show the variety and flexibility allowed in the systemwide GWAR policy. Table 2 indicates the various routes that students can take on their first attempt to demonstrate their writing competence. See Appendix A for a series of flow charts that indicate how each CSU campus implements GWAR.

Table 2. Methods by Which Students Can Make Their Initial Attempt to Meet the Writing Requirement

<i>Method</i>	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>
Exam only	10	Hayward, Humboldt, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Cal Maritime, Northridge, Pomona, Sacramento, San Francisco, & Sonoma
Course only	2	Chico & San Marcos
Exam and course	3	Fullerton, San José (unless very high score on exam), & Stanislaus
Exam or course	7	Bakersfield, Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Monterey Bay, San Bernardino, San Diego, & San Luis Obispo

As the table shows, a campuswide standardized exam is the most common assessment method used to determine student writing proficiency. When a course is either a requirement or an option, that course is most often an upper-division writing-intensive course in the student's major. In addition, when students are not successful in passing a standardized essay examination, they are sometimes encouraged to take a course.

Specific Procedures for Standardized Essay Exams on Individual Campuses

The standardized examination, the route to writing certification preferred by most campuses, is standardized to the campus alone, not systemwide. In fact, among the 20 campuses that offer an exam as a possible route to writing certification, there are very different approaches in the types of standardized tests offered to students, as is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Content of Campus GVAR Examinations

<i>Type of Examination</i>	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>
Objective and essay	2	Fresno (two 45-minute essays and one 40-minute multiple-choice exam) & San José (one 45-minute multiple-choice exam and one 60-minute essay)
One essay	16	Bakersfield, Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, Hayward, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Cal Maritime, Northridge, Pomona, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Sonoma, & Stanislaus
Two essays	2	Humboldt (two 45-minute essays) & Monterey Bay (one 60-minute topical essay followed by a 30-minute self-reflection essay)

Although Table 3 shows that the single essay is the most common requirement, even that commonality breaks down under closer scrutiny, in terms of the length of time that students have to write, indicated in Table 4, and, more importantly, in the types of writing tasks that students are asked to perform.

Table 4. Amount of Time Students Have to Complete the Single-Essay Exam

<i>Time Length</i>	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>
60 minutes	3	Dominguez Hills, Northridge, & San Diego
75 minutes	2	Long Beach & Pomona
90 minutes	7	Bakersfield, Fullerton, Hayward, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, & Stanislaus
120 minutes	1	Sonoma
150 minutes	1	Sacramento
180 minutes	2	Cal Maritime & San Bernardino

The nature of the timed essays once again varies from campus to campus. On some campuses students are asked to discuss a personal experience; other CSU institutions expect students to write on a social or cultural issue; and still others give students an extended reading passage or set of data and require students to make use of this information in their written response. This wide variance will be discussed more fully in another section of this report.

The GVAR policy guideline about essay examinations also requires that the essays be read “by at least two faculty readers,” and, as shown in Table 5, that is the case for almost all campuses that allow students the option of the timed essay.

Table 5. Customary Number of Readers Who Read an Exam Essay

<i>Usual Number of Readers</i>	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>
One (unless additional readers needed)	1	Monterey Bay
Two	18	Bakersfield, Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Fullerton, Hayward, Humboldt, Los Angeles, Cal Maritime, Northridge, Pomona, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo, Sonoma, & Stanislaus
Three	1	Long Beach

The policy guideline also requires that the essays be “evaluated under controlled conditions.” As indicated earlier, the ETS assessment model generally adopted by the CSU uses a scoring rubric to help readers standardize their evaluations of a student’s writing. The most common rubric uses a six-point scale, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The Scale of the Assessment Instrument

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>
1–4	1	San Francisco (passing score is 3)
1–5	1	Fullerton (score of 6 is passing—two scores of 3)
1–6	17	Bakersfield, Dominguez Hills, Fresno, Hayward, Humboldt, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Cal Maritime, Northridge, Pomona, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San José, San Luis Obispo, Sonoma, & Stanislaus

In most cases, the student’s score is obtained by totaling the scores of the two faculty readers. Table 7 reveals that once again the campuses differ in what they consider a passing score.

Table 7. The Passing Score When There is a Scoring Range of 0–12

<i>Passing Score</i>	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>
Seven	4	Dominguez Hills, Pomona, San Bernardino, & Stanislaus
Eight	9	Bakersfield, Hayward, Los Angeles, Cal Maritime, Northridge, Sacramento, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, & Sonoma

The training of faculty readers to ensure that there are common standards and consistency in evaluating timed essays is quite rigorous on all CSU campuses. The typical process is as follows: At each scoring session, a faculty leader begins by reviewing with the readers the common scoring guide. The faculty members read examples of papers at each level within the scoring rubric. Groups of scorers practice scoring pre-selected papers before the actual session begins. During scoring sessions, scores are reported “blind,” so the second reader does not know the score of the first reader. Table leaders monitor scoring patterns to detect scorers who may have lost their sense of score boundaries. Groups of scorers are “renormed” during breaks in the scoring sessions.

Interestingly, although the GVAR policy is specific and detailed about the evaluation of timed essays (“controlled conditions” and “two faculty readers”), it is entirely silent on the matter of the evaluation of writing in academic courses. This issue will be addressed more substantially in later sections.

Variety in Writing Samples

In addition to offering flexibility in the method of assessment, CSU GVAR policy also explicitly allows a variety of types of written work to be considered for GVAR certification. As part of the survey of GVAR practices, campuses were asked to provide copies of assignments, essay topics, and samples of the actual work that students composed in meeting the GVAR requirement. The review committee examined these documents and looked at essays produced in a timed and controlled environment, as well as those written as part of an academic course.

Timed-Essay Writing Samples

CSU campuses vary according to the number of minutes allowed to students who write essay examinations, and they also vary in the types of essays they ask students to produce. Across the CSU, campuses differ by requiring, before the students actually begin writing, shorter or longer reading passages, more or less complex reading passages, and varying rhetorical situations.

Length of the reading passage. Some campuses simply identify a topic that students should discuss and hence require almost no reading at all. Example A shows two instances of this type of writing prompt.

Example A: Topics

“Be careful what you wish for because you just might get it.” –William Jones

Think of a time when you got what you wanted, only to discover that the reality of the situation was not what you had expected. What accounted for the difference between your expectations and reality? In a fully developed essay, explain what the quotation means using specific details and examples to support your view.



Recently there has been discussion of imposing a requirement of a year of national or community service, with low pay, for all 18-year-olds in the USA.

Write an essay in which you: (1) Agree or disagree with such a requirement. (2) State your reasons for your position. (3) Support your reasons with specific examples.



In other cases, as shown in Example B, students are asked to read a short passage and, based on that brief commentary, write a response. These reading passages are usually about 45–80 words in length.

Example B: Short reading passages

After a decade or two of clean American lungs, smoking has suddenly become fashionable again. In movies and television shows, the actors are striking a match and lighting up. Hanging out on trendy street corners, young adults are puffing on cigarettes. Cigar stores are doing a booming business. In short, once again, America inhales.

Write a unified essay in which you (1) discuss the reasons for this trend, and (2) support your reasons with examples from your reading, observation, or experience.



Technological advances have brought about many changes in the way we as consumers participate in society. The availability of ATMs, on-line banking and brokerage firms, and internet shopping malls have made certain interactions more convenient, but at a cost—a potential loss of privacy, the possibility of identity theft, and so on.

Do you think the convenience of these computerized transactions outweighs the negative effects?



A contemporary writer claims that "nothing feeds the center so much as creative work, even humble kinds like cooking and sewing. Baking bread, weaving cloth, putting up preserves, teaching and singing to children must have been far more nourishing than being the family chauffeur or shopping at supermarkets, or doing housework with mechanical aids. . . . In housework, as in the rest of

life, the curtain of mechanization has come down between the mind and the hand."

In your own words, state the main point of this passage.

Take a position for or against the author's main point in the passage. Then develop a clearly reasoned, coherent essay defending your position on this issue. Support your ideas with details.



A few campuses ask students to read a lengthy extensive passage—roughly 600 to 800 words—and use the reading as a basis for their written commentary (see Example C).

Example C: Long reading passage

From "Students are Dying; Colleges Can Do More" by Rob Waldron

Unfortunately, I am an expert on drinking and driving. As a high-school freshman in Wayland, Mass., I suffered through the death of a classmate on my hockey team who was killed in an alcohol-related crash. Two years later I attended the funeral of another classmate who died while driving under the influence. Twelve months after that a wrestling teammate returning to Wayland from a college break totaled his car in a drunk-driving accident, partially paralyzing himself and causing permanent brain damage. His father, a town firefighter responding to a 911 call, was the one to find him on the roadside near death.

After all that, I thought I knew the worst about drunk driving. I was wrong. Three years ago my brother, Ryan, a Middlebury College senior, drove 70-100 miles an hour on a rainy rural road into a tree, ending his life. His blood-alcohol level was nearly three times the legal limit. Witnesses later recounted that he was swerving and speeding on a nearby road. It was one of the worst accidents that officers at the crash site had ever seen.

Ryan was last seen drinking on campus at a fraternity house that was serving vodka punch. He left the party intending to drive to his off-campus apartment three miles away to pick up a toga for yet another event. He never made it home. After his death, we found out that Ryan had developed a drinking problem while away at college. But even though he drank to excess at nearly every social function, usually three to four times a week, many of his friends never realized he was on his way to becoming an alcoholic.

It turns out that one of the staff members in the student-activities office where Ryan often came to register his fraternity's parties had suspected that he had a drinking problem. And Ryan isn't the only Middlebury student to be involved in a dangerous alcohol-related incident: in the year before his death one of Ryan's fellow students nearly died in a binge-

drinking incident, saved only because the hospital pumped her stomach as she lay unconscious. Her blood-alcohol level was .425 percent.

What should we do about the Ryans in the world? I know that my brother was ultimately responsible for his own death, but in my view, college administrations can work harder to keep kids like Ryan from getting behind the wheel. But many schools have been reluctant to address the problem. Why? Why does the problem of drunk driving persist? It's not easy to solve.

To college presidents, trustees, and all college officials, I ask that you go home tonight and consider your love for your own son or daughter, your own brother or sister. Imagine the knock on your door at 3 a.m. when a uniformed police officer announces your loved one has died. Then go to a mirror and look deep into your own eyes. Ask yourself the question: have I done enough to help solve this problem?

Summarize the position Rob Waldron takes in this essay. What should college administrators do, if anything, about student alcohol abuse? Explain your solution, taking into account the opposing side.



Finally, an even smaller number of CSU institutions present students with an issue, as well as a set of decontextualized facts and statements about the issue or problem, and ask the students to use this information to write a position paper. This unusual approach is shown in Example D.

Example D: Facts and information

ESSAY TEST

Instructions:

- A. During the one-and-a-half hours allotted for this exam, write an essay on the topic given below. NOTE: we recommend that you spend the first 30 minutes of the test planning and organizing your ideas. Use the final 60 minutes for writing and briefly reviewing/revising your work.
- B. Read the topic carefully. Your essay must be on the subject.
- C. Organize your ideas logically and support your generalizations with at least some of the specific evidence provided you. You don't have to use quotation marks unless the information provided is already in quotation marks. Note: You're also welcome to draw on your own knowledge and experiences to support your generalizations. Do not make up facts. Also note: essays that *do nothing more than simply summarize or restate the given information will not receive passing scores.*

- D. Essays which are basically narrative (stories) or are written in excessively simple, short sentences will be considered unacceptable.
- E. Your writing will be evaluated for its organization and content as well as for spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.
- F. Write in ink. You may make corrections if you take care to keep your writing legible.

Topic: Homeless Youth Shelter

The Problem: The Spring Valley Recreation Center has announced plans to open a temporary youth shelter for homeless young adults next winter. But some residents in the middle-class, residential neighborhood where the center is located are trying to halt the project.

Your Task: Decide whether or not the Spring Valley Recreation Center should go ahead with plans for the proposed shelter. Write an essay defending your position, supporting your ideas with specific information and clear explanation. (Essays that do nothing more than restate or summarize the facts will not receive passing grades.)

Some Facts and Information: (Remember, essays that do nothing more than restate or summarize the facts will not receive passing grades.)

- Areas surrounding shelter generally have a lot of litter.
- The shelter will house up to 25 young adults, ages 18-22.
- Some residents fear a homeless shelter will encourage more panhandling, vandalism, and drug dealing.
- The homeless youths would be supervised by staff members.
- Midnight basketball games normally held in the center would have to be cancelled.
- Two janitors will clean and mop the center every morning.
- Street noise may increase.
- Young adults would be inside the building by 10:30 p.m. and out by 7:20 a.m.
- Sixty-eight percent of the city's homeless youths cannot return home because of "emotional, physical or sexual abuse or inability of the family to provide due to substance abuse or poverty."
- Prolonged time living on the streets places youths at extreme risk of survival, sex, exposure to HIV, and substance abuse.
- If the shelter is approved, the city will provide extra police patrols at night.
- A homeless shelter will cause property values in the neighborhood to drop.
- Parents of students attending the preschool and after-school programs feel uncomfortable sending their children to the center with homeless youths hanging around.



Complexity of the passage. Because reading is an integral part of most assignments, it is fairly common for CSU writing prompts to ask students to restate or summarize the main point or points of the reading passage when they compose their essays. Adding a reading passage or expecting students to use an external set of data thus considerably increases the difficulty of the writing task facing the students. Furthermore, the reading passages vary not only in length but also in the complexity of the writing style. For example, the short passages in Example B are roughly the same in length but quite different in their sophistication. In the first passage, the style is simple and straightforward: five sentences, two of them fewer than ten words long, with a simple vocabulary. The second passage is as straightforward, but is still more difficult to read, with longer sentences and a larger number of polysyllabic words. The third passage presents an almost quantum leap in difficulty because of its metaphorical quality and rich use of figurative language to convey an abstract concept.

Rhetorical challenges. The review of CSU writing prompts and the writing samples reveals that campuses offer a range of types of essays as well as different rhetorical approaches to the timed essay. Some require a student to show understanding and sensitivity to the audience, purpose, and effect of a particular piece of writing, whereas others do not. Some writing prompts ask students to discuss an aspect of their personal experience; others allow students to take a position on a matter of general interest and provide reasons for that position. In the most rhetorically complex assignments, students write to a specific person or group of people asking or advising that a specific action be undertaken. Students may, for example, write a letter to the governor, the local newspaper, the university president, or the city council and advocate for a certain course of action.

The timed essay is the most common assessment used in the CSU, but as this discussion shows, the nature of the essay—and perhaps whether or not the written work receives a passing score—depends on many factors, including, on some campuses, the student’s ability to read and respond to complex prose passages and greater rhetorical challenges. On some CSU campuses, satisfying GVAR is as much about reading—and summarizing and synthesizing ideas—as it is about writing.

Writing Samples from Academic Courses

While there is a great deal of variety in the writing samples produced in a timed and controlled environment, there is even greater diversity in the types of writing produced in academic courses, although the short essay appears to be most common. The types of writing products produced in academic courses and reviewed by the committee include the following:

- *Timed essays written in class.* These essays—in content, scope, length, level of difficulty, etc.—look very much like the ones written when GVAR is satisfied through a standardized campuswide essay examination. In this case, however, the reader may be one individual, the course instructor, working alone. A significant variation on the timed essay in a course is that some instructors allow these in-class essays to be composed over the course of more than one class period. Thus, for students who are not able to write satisfactory essays in one hour, the expanded time frame of an academic course allows students more and varied opportunities to demonstrate their abilities.
- *Essays written out of class.* Many of these essays are, again, similar in length and content to the GVAR timed essay. In courses, however, revisions and rewrites are encouraged.

- *Essays responding to works of fiction or nonfiction.* The sample writing products reviewed by the committee included several essays, ranging from 600 to 1000 words, that used a literary or journalistic work to spur reflection and analysis of an enduring or a contemporary issue.
- *Research papers.* The writing samples included research papers of 2000–2500 words that used multiple external sources and were illustrated by charts, diagrams, and photographs.
- *Portfolios.* Some academic courses that provide certification for GVAR require student portfolios, a compilation of a student’s work prefaced by a self-assessment of the student’s development as a writer.

In reviewing these student papers, the committee assumed that the reader and evaluator of the papers was the course instructor, although there was no explicit statement to that effect. In some cases, because an essay was annotated with remarks, notations, and a grade, it was clear that one individual had assessed the work. Answers to the GVAR survey showed that at 11 of the 15 campuses that offer a GVAR course, the certification of a student as having satisfied GVAR is usually made by the individual instructor of a course.

Quality of the Writing Samples

There remains one last issue about writing samples to consider: their quality. To evaluate the quality of student writing performance, the GVAR review committee had two types of evidence to consider: (1) student passrates on timed essay examinations and in academic courses, and (2) the review committee’s own analysis of a sample of essays.

Passrates

In the survey of GVAR processes, practices, and products, CSU campuses were asked to complete a table of information on GVAR 2001–02 undergraduate passrates. This included passrates for “first-time takers” and “repeaters” taking a course or an exam. Some campuses did not have the data collection capabilities to report the information or to distinguish between first-timers and repeaters. The full set of data is included in Appendix C.

One might assume that if a campus’s passrates are high, the campus has a high percentage of competent writers. As the previous discussion has shown, however, there is no standardization across campuses and hence no meaningful comparison of passrates. Moreover, the survey shows that the demands of the writing task vary dramatically across campuses. Some institutions, through the nature of their writing prompt, demand more skill, agility, and resourcefulness of their students than is demanded in other settings. This variability does not call for more standardization and conformity; instead, it reflects the understanding of the CSU Board of Trustees, as expressed in three decades of Executive Orders, that the CSU is not a homogenous body, but is instead a system of campuses with individual and distinctive missions, geographical settings, and student bodies. Hence, the reported passrates are intriguing in many ways, but are not at all useful for cross-campus comparisons.

Passrates for Students Who Take an Essay Examination. Table 8 shows the percentage of students passing a timed essay examination, both those who take the exam for the first time and those who are repeating the exam. Once again, caveats against comparisons are in order: CSU campuses have very different types of timed essay examinations, and they use the timed essays for

different purposes, for example, as a prerequisite for an upper-division course, or as an exit exam. In addition, the raw numbers of exam-taking students vary by campus from a handful to thousands, thus increasing the variability of the percentages shown.

Table 8. Percentage of Students Passing a Timed Essay Examination 2001–02

<i>Percentage of Students Passing</i>	<i>First-Time Test Takers</i>		<i>Repeaters</i>	
	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>
90–100%	0		1	San Bernardino
80–89%	5	Long Beach, Northridge, Pomona, San Diego, & Sonoma	0	
70–79%	5	Los Angeles, Cal Maritime, Sacramento, San José, & Stanislaus	0	
60–69%	5	Dominguez Hills, Fullerton, Hayward Monterey Bay, & San Luis Obispo	2	Bakersfield & San Diego
50–59%	3	Bakersfield, Fresno, & San Francisco	3	Monterey Bay, Northridge, & Sacramento
40–49%	0		4	Fresno, Hayward, Los Angeles, & San José
30–39%	1	San Bernardino	2	Dominguez Hills & San Luis Obispo
20–29%	0		2	Long Beach & Pomona
10–19%	0		0	
0–9%	0		1	Cal Maritime

The table shows that students who retake the exam because they were not successful in the first attempt continue to have difficulty in subsequent attempts. Passrates for repeaters are almost always lower than the rate for first-time takers because the repeater pool consists solely of students who have already demonstrated that timed essay exams pose challenges for them.

Additional data in Appendix C on passrates for students who take an essay exam suggest other significant points. It appears that transfer students and students who enter the CSU as freshmen have roughly the same success rate in passing a GVAR exam. ESL students, however, have

dramatically lower scores than do native speakers of English, and the size of the proportion of ESL students clearly affects campuswide passrates. Campuses with large populations of students with a native language other than English face serious demands in preparing these students to write competent standard written English.

Passrates for Students Who Take an Academic Course. As shown in Table 9 below, the passrates for students who satisfy GVAR by taking an academic course are higher than the passrates for exam takers.

Table 9. Passrates for Students Taking an Academic Course 2001–02

<i>Percentage of Students Passing</i>	<i>Number of Campuses</i>	<i>Campuses</i>
90–100%	5	Bakersfield, Chico, Fresno, San Diego, & San José
80–89 %	3	Monterey Bay, San Bernardino, & San Luis Obispo
70–79%	2	Dominguez Hills & Cal Maritime
Below 70	0	

While the higher passrates in academic courses might suggest that taking a course is an “easier” route to satisfying GVAR than sitting for an essay examination, that assumption is certainly open to question. First of all, whereas the essay exam presents a one-time, all-or-nothing approach to assessment, the academic course provides multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate a consistent pattern of success over time. For example, we can judge a baseball player’s prowess by looking at the batting average in one game only or over the course of an entire season. Such is the difference between a single high-stakes assessment and a more elaborate, lengthier demonstration of ability.

Second, most GVAR courses are based in a subject matter or a discipline, and students, when they are asked to write, have a context and a body of knowledge upon which to draw. In short, they have some familiarity with the topic they are writing about. In timed essays, however, students are presented on the spot with a topic, such as national service, for example, that they may never have thought about. The students therefore have no reservoir of information or opinion to draw upon and thus must manufacture ideas afresh while the clock is ticking. Certainly, a known terrain is easier to navigate than an unfamiliar one, and an academic course, more so than a timed essay, helps students to be situated in familiar territory.

Finally, instead of comparing passrates in GVAR courses to passrates on GVAR exams, we can also compare the passrates in GVAR courses to passrates in other academic courses. Table 10 below shows the relative grade distribution for all undergraduates in all academic courses in 2001–02.

Table 10. Percentage of Full-Time Equivalent Students by Grade Outcomes and Student Level Using Systemwide Parameters 2001–02

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Undergraduate</i>	<i>Graduate</i>	<i>Total</i>
A–C / Credit	83.3	90.3	83.9
D	5.5	0.4	5.1
F / No Credit	4.7	1.1	4.4
Withdraw	4.7	3.6	4.6
Incomplete	1.8	4.6	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The systemwide figures for all CSU students in all academic courses reveal that 83.3 percent of CSU undergraduates earn a grade A, B, or C. The GWAR course passrates, then, are somewhat comparable to CSU course passrates overall. This might suggest again that a GWAR course is not a demonstrably “easier” route to satisfying the systemwide writing requirement.

Review Committee’s Analysis of Selected Writing Samples

In addition to studying the information on passrates, the review committee also examined the student writing samples that were submitted. Instead of reviewing the entire range of scored essays, the committee chose not to look at the very best or the very worst, but to examine only the writing at the critical point of “competence.” Especially because CSU campuses have adopted reciprocity and therefore accept the GWAR certification of a transfer student from another campus, the committee agreed that it was important to investigate the borderline territory of what individual campuses considered to be “barely passing.”

Each campus was asked to provide examples of a “minimal pass” and “marginal failure” in both timed essay exams and academic courses. The committee, by and large, concurred with the judgments of campus evaluators. The writing samples that received passing scores or grades exhibited a minimal writing competence, and those that just missed a passing score could not really be called competent.

However, while generally agreeing with the assessment of the campus readers, the review committee had significant reservations, in some cases, about the essay topics to which students had to respond. In these instances, the writing task asked students to demonstrate only a very limited and narrow scope of competence. In other words, the lack of sophistication in the task presented to the student did not allow the student the opportunity to demonstrate fully the writing skills and proficiencies expected of a college graduate. These types of writing prompts generally called for students to write about their own personal experiences and were viewed by the committee as more appropriate for the assessment of entering freshmen rather than upper-division students.

The committee’s deliberations were influenced by a report published in 2002 called *Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California’s Public Colleges and Universities* (<http://www.academicssenate.cc.ca.us/Publications/Papers/AcademicLiteracy/main.htm>).

This document, prepared by a group of intersegmental faculty and accepted by the academic senates of all three California systems of public higher education, attempts to define the writing and literacy competencies needed for student success in the university. To help define those skills, the authors surveyed not just English or composition faculty but professors in the general education disciplines in all three postsecondary systems. These faculty members reported that the most important competencies for college writing are the following:

- Critically analyze the ideas or arguments of others
- Summarize ideas and/or information contained in a text
- Synthesize ideas from several sources; and
- Report facts or narrate events.

Hence, if these are the expectations of university-level writing, when an upper-division student is asked to describe or analyze personal experience, that student is not being given the opportunity to engage in college-level writing. The review committee, therefore, believes that the writing tasks in GWAR assessments should address the competencies listed above and believes that the kinds of writing prompts shown earlier in Examples C and D would be more likely to reveal that students have the skills and abilities expected of college graduates.

The Executive Orders that define GWAR policy in the CSU encourage and allow considerable latitude in the types of writing that students produce for GWAR certification, and the preceding discussion shows the wide spectrum of writing assignments and products generated through campus GWAR processes. CSU campuses should, however, make sure that the writing prompts used in GWAR challenge students to demonstrate college-level writing skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and summarization.

The next section of the report analyzes the time frame in which writing samples should be produced.

Timing of the Administration of the Writing Assessment

The series of Executive Orders explicitly states that GWAR is an upper-division requirement and that students will have their writing competence certified during the junior year and before the senior year. CSU campuses accommodate this expectation by making assessments available at the beginning of the junior year. A few institutions—those that use GWAR as a prerequisite for upper-division work—make the assessment available even earlier.

Incentives for Early Assessment

Offering the assessment in the junior year and having the students' take the assessment promptly are not always perfectly synchronized, however. More than half the campuses reported that students did indeed try to satisfy the GWAR on the expected timeline. One institution that uses a standardized exam said that 50 percent of the exam takers were juniors; a campus that uses coursework to certify writing competence noted that 52 percent of course enrollees were juniors. To encourage students to meet the requirement in a timely manner, CSU institutions use a variety of incentives and motivators, such as sending students a notifying letter about GWAR or offering the assessment many times during an academic year for the students' convenience. For students who appear to be delaying, the most common strategy is for campuses to put a "hold" on class registration, which prevents students from registering for courses until they have signed up for the writing assessment.

A similar process is effective for campuses that use the GVAR as a prerequisite for upper-division work: Students cannot continue progress to their degrees until they have satisfied the requirement. The mechanisms described here have the benefit of helping students get early attention and of precluding the problem of students finishing all graduation requirements except the GVAR.

Resources for Student Success

Although many campuses noted that students generally do take the GVAR course or exam when they are supposed to, passrates are not 100 percent, and thus many students are forced to repeat the assessment. Almost all campuses intervene proactively when a student attempts an assessment and does not succeed. In our survey of the campuses, at least 15 indicated that they either advise or require students who do not pass to make an appointment with a counselor or advisor. These individuals can provide the students with a review of the performance on the exam, counseling about possible next steps, or tips on improving writing. Students who need extra help can visit the campus writing center, get one-on-one tutoring, or attend GVAR preparatory sessions. For both first-time test takers and repeaters, campuses offer a host of services: GVAR workshops, brochures, test-prep sessions, and an array of online materials, including sample essay topics, sample essays anchored to the scoring guide, and writing tips.

GVAR Courses

When campuses use a timed essay examination as the assessment instrument, as most of them do, they often recommend to students who are unsuccessful on the standardized essay that they should enroll in a course. The survey of campus GVAR practices shows that there are two very different types of courses offered to students. The first is a “GVAR preparatory course”; that is, the writing assignments and instruction in the class are geared to helping the student achieve a passing score the next time the student takes the timed essay examination. The other type of course provides an alternative GVAR assessment. This course is not geared towards passing a timed writing test, but instead focuses on subject matter content and provides a variety of writing experiences and opportunities to let a student demonstrate writing competence in forms other than a standardized essay exam.

The number of enrollments in these courses can affect the progress students make. According to the survey, for campuses that offer “GVAR preparatory courses,” somewhat more than half set a class limit of 20 students, and the remainder enroll 20 to 30 students per course. For campuses that offer writing-intensive subject-matter courses, a large majority enroll 20 to 30 students per section, and one campus allows enrollments to exceed 30.

Inability to Satisfy the Requirement

Unfortunately, some students find that they have completed most academic requirements at the university but are still unable to satisfy the writing requirement. The survey conducted in Fall 2002 asked the CSU universities to estimate the number of students in the 2001–02 academic year who did not graduate solely because of their failure to satisfy GVAR. Deriving such an estimate is no easy task because this is not a data element that institutions routinely collect. Therefore, most campuses used various methods to provide such a calculation. Some relied on self-reports from alumni or

graduating senior surveys; others identified students who had not graduated but had satisfied all requirements except GVAR; campuses that use GVAR as a prerequisite to upper-division coursework, by definition, graduate only students who have satisfied GVAR; other campuses just guessed. “Guesstimates” of the percentages of students who were unable to receive degrees in 2001–02 because they could not demonstrate writing competence include the following: 0%, five campuses; 1% or less, five campuses; 1–3%, four campuses; 3–5%, three campuses; over 5%, one campus; no estimates, four campuses.

All-Campus Responsibility

In requiring a certification of writing competence for CSU graduates, the CSU placed the responsibility in the hands of all faculty in the university, not just the professors of English, composition, or rhetoric. From its inception, GVAR has involved faculty from disciplines across the curriculum in the development and assessment of good writing skills. As was noted earlier in the report, large enrollment growth coupled with a greater percentage of lecturers rather than tenure-track faculty has left tenured faculty struggling to cover the responsibilities of academic service to the university. Given these heavy service responsibilities, to what degree do discipline faculty participate in campus GVAR processes? The survey sheds light on this question by indicating the extent to which subject-matter faculty are involved as readers of students’ GVAR essays and members of GVAR oversight committees.

Readers of Timed Essays

Campus practice varies, once again, based on whether the assessment is a timed essay or part of a course. When the writing requirement is satisfied by an essay examination, the Executive Order mandates that the essay be read by two trained readers. The survey indicates that most campuses use readers who come from many different disciplines, but five institutions say that their readers are primarily or entirely individuals from the English or composition program. A few campuses also use readers from their local high schools and community colleges.

Readers of Writing Samples in Courses

The situation is more complicated when the assessment is part of an academic course. First of all, some courses are “GVAR preparatory courses” geared to help the student pass the standardized exam. In these cases, the instructors—and thus the readers of the essays—are mostly writing instructors. In general, at some point in the preparatory course, the timed essays are read by at least two readers, both of them likely to be trained composition instructors. Second, some courses are subject-matter, writing-intensive courses taught by a faculty member in the discipline. In one of these courses, a student’s writing is read and evaluated by one person only, the discipline faculty member, who also then certifies that a student who passes the course has necessarily produced competent writing and has therefore met the writing requirement.

In brief, then, with the exception of a few campuses, discipline faculty are indeed involved in the GVAR process as readers. It is striking, however, that the Executive Order mandating GVAR is detailed and precise in requiring two readers for a timed essay exam while it is utterly silent on any

procedures for readers in courses. To put it another way, there is a kind of enforced consistency for timed essays but no such assurances for coursework. The judgment about writing competence is solely in the hands of one individual, the instructor of record. Because GVAR certification is a serious, university-wide obligation, delegating the responsibility to one person only (perhaps a part-time lecturer with minimal connection to the university) is problematic.

Some campuses, however, have tried to insert processes to ensure consistency and common standards in the GVAR certification by coursework. At CSU Fresno, for example, the GVAR courses must follow guidelines established and monitored by a subcommittee of the Academic Senate. Professors in these GVAR courses must guarantee that they will follow the guidelines and observe accepted standards. At CSU Hayward, if a student's performance in a course is marginal, a portfolio of that student's work is reviewed by a panel of faculty members. In three of the five colleges at CSU San Bernardino, there is a common reading of a central assignment or midterm examination by the faculty teaching the course within a college. These practices are helpful in ensuring some consistency and common standards when faculty evaluate essays produced in GVAR courses.

Reader Recruitment

Although English and composition professors dominate at a handful of campuses, at most CSUs discipline faculty are involved as readers of standardized GVAR exams and instructors of record in GVAR courses. To some extent recruitment practices can determine who becomes readers and evaluators for the writing assessment. Most campuses report that they have a strong, well-established and experienced cadre of readers, and it is these readers who recruit and recommend others. Another promising pool of potential readers lies in the discipline faculty who have been active in the Writing Across the Curriculum movement. In rare cases, GVAR readers have been recruited from local community colleges.

GVAR Oversight Committee

A final factor in determining whether GVAR is an all-campus responsibility is the composition of the GVAR oversight committee. In almost all cases, it is composed of faculty, staff, administrators, and sometimes a student, who are variously elected or appointed to the committee assignment. A few campuses invite community college faculty to participate. The affiliations of committee members seem to follow those of GVAR readers: most campus committees draw upon a wide range of discipline faculty to serve (many have a representative from each college or school), but a small group of institutions rely heavily on faculty from departments of English, composition/rhetoric, and communications to oversee campus GVAR policy and process.

The survey shows that the demands on these committee members in service of GVAR vary considerably. Some campus committees meet "as needed," some once or twice a year, and, at the other extreme, some groups meet monthly.

Matriculation

Almost all of the GVAR provisions just discussed—campus flexibility, timing of the assessment, all-campus responsibility, and others—have been part of GVAR policy since its inception. The two most recent provisions—concerning matriculation and reciprocity—were the result of changes in the academic environment and new developments reported in the Borowiec study of 1988. These guidelines were added to Executive Order 665 in 1997.

In his report, Borowiec wrote, “A student who matriculates at one campus, with intent to graduate at that campus, should not be permitted to satisfy the GVAR requirement at another CSU campus.” This requirement arose from incidents of “GVAR shopping” in urban areas where several CSU campuses are easily accessible, and students presumably shopped for the assessment most likely to lead to success. Hence new GVAR policy bound the writing requirement to the campus of matriculation only.

Oddly enough, and indicative of the rapid pace of change, just six years after the matriculation policy was adopted, new developments are once again presenting challenges to students who must satisfy GVAR at the college where they are enrolled. As distance-learning programs in specialized fields have begun to flourish in the CSU, more and more students are enrolling in degree programs at CSU campuses hundreds of miles away from the students’ base. If the campus requires a distance-learning student to satisfy GVAR through a timed essay “under controlled conditions,” the student must go to the time and expense of traveling to the distant campus. Already many distance-learning students have requested exemptions and asked to travel to a nearby CSU campus, rather than the campus of matriculation, to satisfy GVAR.

As distance-learning programs proliferate, the issue of matriculation may someday need to be revisited.

Reciprocity

For many years, just as a university has had the right to accept or reject coursework and academic credits accumulated by a transfer student from another university, so too the CSU allowed individual campuses to accept or reject a GVAR assessment transferred from a sister CSU institution. However, this practice proved burdensome to transfer students who assumed that a “GVAR pass” meant the same thing on all CSU campuses, just as a course in “Renaissance art” generally meant the same thing on all CSU campuses. Borowiec said in 1988, “The current situation is inconsistent, idiosyncratic, often arbitrary, always chaotic. A few campuses accept everything, a few something, a few nothing.”

Hence, acting in the best interest of students and with a view towards the maintenance of collegiality and harmony in the CSU system, the Academic Senate CSU in 1993 passed a resolution endorsing amendments to the Executive Order that would guarantee “transferability of GVAR certification among California State University campuses.”

This guarantee of transferability argues strongly for some modicum of consistency and common standards in what CSU campuses define as writing competence.

EMERGING ISSUES IN GVAR @ 2002

Although GVAR policies have not changed much in the past quarter-century, and although most (but not all) CSU campuses have generally complied with the GVAR guidelines, the past two decades have forced the CSU to confront some major challenges in its writing programs. Its commitment to graduate only students who can demonstrate competent writing skills has been put to the test by a huge influx of students who have academic ability but who have not used standard written English as a primary language. In addition, the assessment movement's emphasis on attaining competencies as opposed to racking up test scores has called into question the primacy of high-stakes exams. These and other contemporary issues will continue the pressure on CSU campuses to use creativity and fresh thinking in considering GVAR processes.

GVAR and Non-Native Speakers of English

The mandate of GVAR is clear: All CSU graduates must demonstrate writing competence. It is likely that in the late 1970s almost three-fourths of the students grew up in a culture using standard English in both writing and speaking. In the new millennium, CSU students come from far more varied linguistic backgrounds. Although generically called "ESL students," they come from at least three different backgrounds. First, the CSU has always attracted a group of "international" students, residents of a country other than the United States who come to the CSU to study. In 1976, the first year of GVAR policy, 1,824 enrolled CSU students held residence in another country when they applied to the CSU; in 2000, that number was 7,670. These students are often proficient in the native language, but less so in English. Second, ESL (English as a second language) students are defined as students who reside in the United States but are not native speakers of English. Sometimes English is not even a second language, but a third or fourth language. A third and somewhat overlapping group, only identified fairly recently, is called Generation 1.5. These students were born in the United States, but because of the use of other languages at home, they often have difficulties in composing standard written English, and they are sensitive when labeled ESL, since they see English as their primary or first language. Generation 1.5 also includes students who immigrated at an early age and who were mainstreamed through the American public school system without achieving written English proficiency at the secondary-school level. Waves of immigration to California from Mexico, Central America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Mideast have populated CSU classrooms with a linguistic diversity unimaginable in other parts of the United States. That heterogeneity clearly places extraordinary demands on CSU faculty and heavy burdens on students who succeed in their coursework but have not attained a proficiency in standard written English.

The GVAR passrates discussed earlier show that ESL students have much less success in demonstrating writing competence than do native speakers of English, and they often need to avail themselves of extra resources for help. CSU campuses indicated that ESL students are often referred to writing centers, one-on-one tutoring, and special ESL courses to help them prepare for the writing requirement.

In some cases, to level the playing field, there are special provisions for ESL students in a campus's GVAR test administration. Five campuses allow ESL students to have extra time in completing their essay examination. Other institutions suggest specific practices for the readers: on four campuses, the evaluators are given instructions on the particular features of writing by non-native speakers; and on four other campuses, all ESL essays are read by specially trained readers. At one institution, international students—and international students only—may pass the GVAR with a reduced score.

GWAR and Assessment of General Education

The assessment movement of the past two decades, generally, and the new requirements of WASC standards, specifically, have created an environment in which GWAR processes have served as a model for many CSU campuses as they have sought to develop a “culture of evidence.” The concept of holistic scoring and the development of scoring rubrics, piloted by EPT and GWAR, have been adapted for assessment of other academic skills. This is particularly true in areas of general education, where students are expected to attain outcomes such as “an appreciation for learning” or “an understanding of diversity.”

In fact, some enterprising CSU campuses have attempted to make GWAR do double duty as both an assessment of writing skills (i.e., “the medium”) and an assessment of student attitudes and values (i.e., “the content”). One campus, for example, designed a GWAR writing prompt that asked students to explore their perceptions of and experiences with diversity over the course of their academic career. The students’ essays were then scored using two entirely different rubrics and two different sets of graders (one for writing skills and one for student values), and the assessments were conducted at two different times. If carefully and attentively done, this marriage of GWAR and other areas of general education can be meaningful and useful, as well as cost effective. The challenge will be ensuring that GWAR’s base as a vehicle for determining writing competence is not obscured or distorted by the demands of another aspect of general education.

GWAR for Graduate Students

The Executive Order requiring a regular review of GWAR identifies the undergraduate program only as the object of a review and does not address GWAR issues at the graduate level. However, since the undergraduate and graduate programs are often intertwined, the review committee asked campuses to comment briefly on their processes for GWAR in the graduate program.

As is the case with the writing requirement in general, there are a wide variety of GWAR processes in CSU graduate programs. Four campuses said that they had no requirement at the graduate level at all. Two other institutions indicated that graduate students are required in multiple ways to demonstrate their writing competence—through theses, courses, comprehensive exams, and culminating projects—and therefore no additional assessment is needed. At the other extreme, eight campuses, all of which employ a timed essay as a possible assessment method, stated that the requirement for graduate students is exactly the same as the one for undergraduates. Two institutions use the same assessment method for both graduate students and undergraduates, but raise the score or grade that graduate students must attain in order to pass. Other standardized tests are also considered acceptable for graduate GWAR certification by some institutions: two CSU campuses allow scores on the GMAT or GRE to count for GWAR certification.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the undergraduate and graduate GWAR processes is that more graduate programs delegate the assessment method to the department level. Instead of a campuswide certification, each individual department decides what kind of method it will use. Some departments simply ask graduate students to register for the timed-essay examination taken by undergraduates. Others require grad students to pass a course; still others find an acceptable score on the GMAT to serve as certification for GWAR; and yet others will accept a student’s publication in print as a testament that the graduate student has demonstrated writing competence.

Although this laissez-faire departmental approach prevails at many institutions, at least one CSU campus has tried to devise some consistency and coherence among graduate departments. At this institution, each program develops its own GWAR policy, but that policy must be consistent with certain goals and objectives developed by the University Graduate Committee and approved by the Academic Senate.

When campuses were asked to identify crucial issues associated with GWAR at the graduate level, one moderate and one major concern emerged. The first is the perception by some students and faculty that GWAR at the graduate level is unnecessary: according to these individuals, simply having a baccalaureate degree should be sufficient proof that the student can write. The second issue engendered much more concern on many more campuses: international students who have earned undergraduate degrees in their home country, come to the CSU for advanced training, have limited English skills, and are expected to return to their home country within a year or two, which does not allow enough time for the students to develop competence in standard written English and pass GWAR. However, with early intervention, more international students might develop these valuable skills.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A look at the history of GWAR in the CSU and a review of campus GWAR practices in 2001–02 illustrate the creativity and resourcefulness of CSU faculty in developing effective and meaningful responses to a requirement that mandates student competence in written English. With the flexibility and independence encouraged by the Board of Trustees, CSU campuses have developed assessment procedures that are, with a few exceptions, rigorous and sound. The campuses have identified assessment methods that are appropriate to their individual missions and student populations, and they have adapted to an evolving academic milieu. CSU campuses have experimented with a range of assessment procedures and testing instruments, have accommodated a student body with a broad range of exposures to standard written English, and have approached GWAR as both a vehicle through which to improve student skills as well as an imprimatur of quality assurance to the citizens of California.

The following conclusions attempt to summarize the prominent issues and themes perceived by the committee in its yearlong review of GWAR in the California State University. The attendant recommendations propose several actions that may help to strengthen and improve a process that culminates in students more skillful and assured in their written communication in English.

- ***Flexibility in Choice of Assessment Method***

CSU campuses have taken full advantage of the freedom and flexibility offered in E.O. 665 to design writing assessments appropriate to the individual campus.

- No recommendations in this area.

- ***Specific Procedures for Standardized Essay Exams***

The 1987 CSU policy statement on GVAR identified a particular process for evaluating timed essays: “[Common essay exams must be] written and evaluated under controlled conditions and scored by at least two faculty readers.” This process has been adopted by almost all CSU campuses that offer a timed essay as an option for GVAR, and the review committee found campus processes to be quite rigorous and thorough. However, the precision and specificity of processes for essay examinations seemed to emphasize, by contrast, the lack of guidance for ensuring consistency and common standards in writing samples produced during an academic course. Whereas standardized essay exams have to be read by two professors, essays produced in courses, in most cases, are read by a single individual, the instructor of record. Requiring a specific process—such as two readers of course-related work—in and of itself cannot guarantee consistent standards; a more productive route is to stimulate serious campus conversation about setting and maintaining standards in these courses.

- *Recommendation #1:* Each campus should implement measures to ensure consistency and common standards in faculty evaluations of written documents produced in courses through which students can achieve GVAR certification.

- ***Variety in Writing Samples***

From one-hour timed essays to 2500-word research papers, a wide variety of written documents are used to demonstrate writing proficiency—a diversity allowed and encouraged by current GVAR policy. Since GVAR is explicitly identified as an upper-division requirement—not a requirement for entry-level students—the task must enable students to demonstrate the advanced writing skills of analysis, synthesis, and summarization.

- *Recommendation #2:* Each campus should review GVAR writing prompts to ensure that they will elicit the skills expected of graduating students rather than the proficiencies of entering students.

The recommendation above urges campuses to consider more demanding writing prompts. However, the development of topics and assignments that allow students to be successful at sophisticated levels is a difficult and demanding task. Sharing these resources across all CSU campuses would minimize effort on individual campuses and provide a wealth of material for all to use.

- *Recommendation #3:* The CSU system should develop and maintain a systemwide repository of writing topics, prompts, and assignments for GVAR.

Passrates on GVAR assessments vary widely, largely because the writing tasks required of students vary widely, so there is no comparability across campuses. The data show that, in general, students are more likely to pass a GVAR course than they are a timed essay examination; this is not surprising, however, given that students in a course have more than one opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency. Nevertheless, the lack of common standards and consistency in some campuses’ GVAR courses adds reinforcement to Recommendation #1.

- ***Timing of the Administration of the Writing Assessment***

GWAR policy is explicit about when students should sit for the GWAR assessment: sometime during the junior year. Data show, however, that many students choose to delay their encounter with GWAR.

- *Recommendation #4:* Each campus should develop a process that ensures students attempt the assessment in their junior year.

Many campuses have provided incentives and motivators to encourage students to meet the writing requirement in the junior year. Nevertheless, because passrates are not 100 percent, many students must repeat the assessment, and some students complete all academic requirements except GWAR and find that they cannot graduate.

- *Recommendation #5:* Campuses should discuss and implement advising and assistance to enable GWAR “repeaters” to be successful.

Often GWAR “repeaters” are encouraged to take a GWAR course rather than the standardized essay exam because courses allow students many different venues to demonstrate success and because courses combine writing instruction with the assessment. The CSU offers many such GWAR courses, most with enrollments between 20–30 students.

- *Recommendation #6:* So that students can have effective individualized instruction in GWAR courses, course section enrollments should be capped at 20.

Data from the 2001–02 academic year indicate that anywhere from 0 to 5 percent of the graduating class does not earn a degree solely because of failure to satisfy GWAR. However, it is impossible to specify this figure more precisely because the CSU has no well-defined systemwide data element to represent the students who have completed all requirements for graduation except GWAR. For campus self-assessments and for internal review, there should be a well-defined data element.

- *Recommendation #7:* Each campus should collect and disseminate data that reports the percentage of students who have completed all requirements for graduation except GWAR.

- ***All-Campus Responsibility***

The Executive Orders identify GWAR as an all-campus responsibility, and most CSU campuses report that faculty from many disciplines are active in various GWAR processes, from serving as readers of standardized essay exams, to teaching GWAR courses, to serving on GWAR oversight committees. It appears, however, that at a handful of campuses, most of the responsibility for GWAR falls in the hands of faculty from English, composition/rhetoric, or communications.

- *Recommendation #8:* Each campus should involve CSU faculty from all disciplines in GWAR processes such as reading essays, teaching GWAR courses, providing opportunities for students to improve their writing, and serving on GWAR committees.

- *Recommendation #9:* To ensure all-campus responsibility for GWAR, every CSU institution should conduct a five- to seven-year review of GWAR on the campus. GWAR should be added to every campus's program review calendar as one of the regular academic programs to be reviewed periodically.

- ***Matriculation***

The 1997 GWAR provision that a student who matriculates at one CSU campus should satisfy the GWAR requirement at that same campus has effectively prevented “GWAR shopping” in urban areas. However, as more distance-learning degree programs are being developed, the CSU may have to reconsider the matriculation policy at a future date.

- No recommendations in this area.

- ***Reciprocity***

Making GWAR certification automatically transferable to all CSU campuses has benefited transfer students and promoted collegiality in the system. Regular five- to seven-year reviews of GWAR at the campus and system level should ensure at least a minimum level of consistency in writing standards throughout the system.

- No recommendations in this area.

- ***GWAR and Non-Native Speakers of English***

Data on GWAR passrates indicate that non-native speakers have considerably more difficulty than native speakers in showing proficiency in standard written English. Many campuses have been creative in finding ways to help ESL students succeed.

- *Recommendation #10:* Each campus should discuss and implement practices that help ESL students to be successful in passing GWAR.

- ***GWAR and the Assessment of General Education***

GWAR was one of the first large-scale assessment efforts in the CSU. Models and practices pioneered by GWAR are now being adapted to areas of general education. In some cases, the writing assessment is serving as a vehicle for an additional assessment of GE learning outcomes.

- No recommendations in this area.

- ***GWAR for Graduate Students***

It appears that some campuses are not aware that CSU policy requires a writing assessment for graduate students as well as for undergraduates. On many campuses, GWAR processes are

decentralized, allowing individual departments to identify how they will ensure student writing proficiency.

- *Recommendation #11:* Each CSU campus should develop a campuswide GVAR policy for graduate as well as undergraduate programs.
- *Recommendation #12:* Graduate programs should be included in the annual five- to seven-year GVAR reviews on campus.

REFERENCES

- Academic Senate CSU. "Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR): Certification of Transferability." Resolution 2180. November 1993.
- Borowiec, Edward J. "Pathways to Quality through Diversity: The CSU GWAR in Transition." Long Beach: California State University, Office of the Chancellor, October 1988.
- California State University, Committee on Educational Policy. "Student Needs and Priorities Survey (SNAPS) 1999." *Board of Trustees' Agenda*. Long Beach: California State University, Office of the Chancellor, 9–10 May 2000.
- California State University. "Facilitating Student Success in Achieving the Baccalaureate Degree: Report of the California State University Task Force on Facilitating Graduation." Long Beach: California State University, Office of the Chancellor, December 2002.
- California State University. *Statistical Abstract*. Volumes from 1976–2001. Long Beach: California State University, Office of the Chancellor, 1976–2001.
- Garcia, Philip. Memo to Marsha Hirano-Nakanishi. "Withdrawals and Repeats: Estimates from Historical Records." 14 February 2003.
- Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates (ICAS) of the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California. *Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California's Public Colleges and Universities*. Sacramento, CA: ICAS, 2002. <<http://www.academicssenate.cc.ca.us/Publications/Papers/AcademicLiteracy/main.htm>>
- Kuh, George D. "What We're Learning about Student Engagement from NSSE: Benchmarks for Effective Educational Practices." *Change* 35.2 (2003): 24–32.
- National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. "The Neglected 'R': The Need for a Writing Revolution." New York, NY: The College Board, 2003.
- Sax, Linda J., et al. "Findings from the 2002 Administration of Your First College Year (YFCY): National Aggregates." Los Angeles: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, December 2002.
- "This Year's Freshmen at 4-Year Colleges: Their Opinions, Activities, and Goals." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 31 Jan. 2003. <<http://chronicle.com/premium/stats/freshmen/2003/opinions.htm>>
- Young, Jeffrey, R. "A New Take on What Today's Students Want from College." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 31 Jan. 2003. <<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v49/i21/a03701.htm>>

MEMBERS OF THE GVAR REVIEW COMMITTEE

Chair

Bethany Shifflett
Professor of Measurement and Evaluation, San José State University

Review Committee Members

J. Theodore Anagnoson
Professor of Political Science
Chair of the Academic Senate, CSU Los Angeles

Ruth Christensen
Student, CSU Bakersfield

J. Milton Clark
Dean of Undergraduate Studies, CSU San Bernardino

Jeri Echeverria
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Ad Interim, CSU Fresno

John R. Edlund
Director, University Writing Center, Cal Poly Pomona

Mary Kay Harrington
Director of the Writing Skills Program, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Cristy Jensen
Professor of Public Policy and Administration, CSU Sacramento

Marvin Klein
Interim Associate Dean, College of Education and Integrative Studies, Cal Poly Pomona

Elaine Sundberg
Associate Vice Provost for Academic Programs, Sonoma State University

Staff

Lorie Roth
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs, CSU Office of the Chancellor