GWAR Task Force Report

GWAR Task Force Membership
Diana Chu – Associate Professor, Biology Department
John Kim – Associate Vice President, Academic Resources (Task Force Chair)
Gary Selnow – Professor, Business Communication
Kendra Van Cleave – Librarian; Chair, Committee on Written English Proficiency (CWEP)
Deborah van Dommelen – Lecturer; Director, Learning Assistance Center (LAC)

Charge from UPAC Report
“Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) – The Council is concerned that the cost of implementing the upper-division GWAR requirement be understood in the context of other curricular decision-making. The Council recommends that the Committee on Written English Proficiency (CWEP) review the GWAR requirement, assess the resource commitment that it requires, and review the possibility of delivering the expected learning outcomes with pedagogical strategies that might be less resource intensive.”

On April 7, 2011, Provost Rosser charged the GWAR Task Force with studying the GWAR Program in light of this recommendation from the UPAC report. The GWAR Task Force met on a weekly basis through mid-June, after which time its members continued to work via e-mail. To complement the backgrounds and perspectives of the task force members, the Task Force invited the following guests to discuss their work or experience with the GWAR Program at various meetings: Paul Sherwin (Dean of the College of Humanities), Nancy Hayes (Dean of the College of Business), Gail Evans (Dean of Undergraduate Studies), Helen Goldsmith (Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies), Mary Soliday (Director of the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum/Writing-in-the-Disciplines (WAC/WID) Program), Al Harahap (LAC tutor and English graduate student), and a number of faculty members who have taught GWAR courses.

In this report, the Task Force outlines the resources required to support the GWAR Program and makes a number of recommendations for moving forward with the GWAR Program in the current budgetary and curricular environment.

Resources required to support the GWAR Program
The following are the ongoing resources required to support the GWAR Program in its current form:

1. The Director of the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum/Writing-In-the-Discipline (WAC/WID) Program, and tenure-track composition faculty in the English Department. These positions are filled by permanent tenure-track faculty at the University. So their ongoing cost in support of the GWAR Program is best measured in terms of the part of their full 1.0 timebase that would otherwise be spent teaching if their official assignments were not working on the GWAR Program (or the WAC/WID Program more generally). This amount is .40 per semester for the Director of the WAC/WID program, who currently teaches one course per semester in a three course teaching load College.
2. **Expanded support for tutoring centers (LAC, CARP) to support GWAR courses.** Students in GWAR courses are encouraged to seek tutoring support, which can be in an individual or group format; instructors can arrange for scheduled tutoring sessions for students or for in-class workshops between students and tutors. In general, the tutoring centers are open to meeting with faculty who are teaching GWAR courses to develop ways the tutoring centers can best support students and instructors of GWAR courses. The task force believes that tutoring support is central to the success of the GWAR Program, and that by building that tutoring support on effective, already-established, and efficient tutoring programs, the cost of the tutoring services required to continue a successful GWAR Program is marginal. Approximately $70,000 of IRA and lottery funds has been allocated to tutoring centers each year to support GWAR.

3. **The cost of maintaining an enrollment limit of 25 for GWAR courses.**

Prior support for the GWAR Program also included funding for assessment activities and funding for assigned time for faculty liaisons to work with faculty and staff within the Colleges to develop and maintain the GWAR Program. These types of support remain important for the long-term success of the GWAR Program, but have either been eliminated due to budget cuts or supported on an as-needed basis.

**Comparison of the JEPET/ENG 414 Program and the GWAR Program**

Prior to the implementation of the GWAR Program, SF State students satisfied the upper division writing requirement by taking a fee-based junior level English proficiency test (JEPET); students who did not pass this test were required to successfully complete an upper division composition course (ENG 414). The overall salary cost of ENG 414 sections prior to the implementation of GWAR was approximately $555,000 for 111 sections in 2006-07. (The estimated costs of ENG 414 sections from 2006 through 2011 may be found in the Appendix, along with the estimated costs of GWAR sections from 2009 through 2011 and other related data.)

Starting in 2008-09, official GWAR courses with the “GW” course suffix were first offered. The overall number of GWAR courses approved by CWEP increased quickly from 2008-09 to 2011. (A full list of currently approved GWAR courses may be found at [http://wac.sfsu.edu/content/approved-gwar-courses](http://wac.sfsu.edu/content/approved-gwar-courses) ) Using the Fall 2011 class schedule as an estimate for ENG 414 and GWAR offerings in Spring 2012, the estimated cost for ENG 414 sections in 2011-12 is $170,000 for 34 sections, and the estimated cost for GWAR

---

1 The Writing Task Force found that one-time testing that attempts to measure students' writing proficiency is no substitute for a properly designed and sequenced program of writing instruction. See the Writing Task Force report at [http://www.sfsu.edu/~senate/documents/attachments/wtfreport.pdf](http://www.sfsu.edu/~senate/documents/attachments/wtfreport.pdf) for further discussion of the problems with JEPET/ENG 414, and recommendations that led to the implementation of the GWAR Program with Senate policy F10-14 and its predecessors.

2 For purposes of comparison over time, a rate of $5,000/3 WTU course section will be used throughout this report. This amount approximates the full salary level at which Colleges are now funded for offering GWAR sections and ENG 414 sections.
sections in 2011-12 is $1,185,000 for 224 sections, for a total estimated cost for upper division writing courses of $1,355,000 in 2011-12.

The total cost of upper division writing courses (GWAR and ENG 414) for 2011-12 is approximately twice the cost of ENG 414 in 2006-07. This is to be expected given that the failure rate on the JEPET has historically been in the 40-60% range, resulting in the need for 40-60% fewer seats in ENG 414 than there are students who take JEPET (whereas all upper division students are required to take a GWAR course in the GWAR Program). Among other possible factors, the fact that the cost estimate of upper division writing courses in 2011-12 is slightly more than twice that of ENG 414 in 2006-07 may reflect some combination of the following:

a. the University has engaged in recent efforts to ensure that students have access to classes required for them to graduate, which may have led to additional sections of these courses in recent years compared with 2006-07;
b. there may be more students at the upper division level in 2011-12 than in 2006-07, and so there may be more students who need to satisfy the upper division writing requirement in 2011-12 than in 2006-07;
c. if the pass rate of JEPET was higher than 50% in 2006, then fewer than half of the those taking JEPET in 2006 would have had to have taken ENG 414; and
d. average class size for ENG 414 (24.1 in 2010-11) is higher than that for GWAR courses (21.9 in 2010-11), despite the fact that the enrollment limit is 25 for ENG 414 and for GWAR courses.

The factors in (a) - (c) would have resulted in an overall cost for ENG 414 that is higher now than it was in 2006-07 if the GWAR Program were never implemented. A conservative estimate of the cost of ENG 414 for 2011-12 then might be $600,000 if there were no GWAR Program, $430,000 more than the actual estimate of $170,000 for 2011-12.

The difference between $1,355,000 and $600,000 is not a good estimate of the cost of additional sections needed in order to implement the GWAR Program. The vast majority of courses that are now GWAR courses existed prior to the GWAR Program, and would have been offered (typically, though not always) with an enrollment limit higher than 25. An estimate of the number of these sections that would have been offered if there had been no GWAR Program is one-quarter to one-third of the number of GWAR sections currently offered. Using the 2011-12 estimate of 224 sections as a basis, 56 to 75 of these sections might have been offered in 2011-12 even without a GWAR Program. The cost of 56 sections would be $280,000, and the cost of 75 sections would be $375,000. So an estimated range of the cost of additional sections needed to implement the GWAR Program is $380,000 (= $1,355,000 - $600,000 - $375,000) to $475,000 (= $1,355,000 - $600,000 - $280,000).

It should be noted that GWAR has not been implemented for two very large units, namely, the majors within the College of Business (with the exception of Economics and Labor Studies) and the Department of Biology. At present, students in these majors must take

---

3 This to be expected because, for instance, a single GWAR course may be needed for fewer than 25 majors, whereas ENG 414 sections are not added to the schedule except to meet student demand.
JEPEET and complete ENG 414 if they fail JEPET in order to satisfy the upper division writing requirement. But if the cost of this implementation can be kept to the current cost of ENG 414, this should not require resources above and beyond what is now being used to mount ENG 414 sections and GWAR sections because the vast majority of seats in ENG 414 sections are now being filled by Biology and Business majors.

**Recommendations for various constituencies across the University**
The Task Force was charged with studying the GWAR Program, and making recommendations about how the program might be implemented in a way that might be less resource intensive. The original recommendation from the UPAC report places this responsibility with the Committee for Written English Proficiency. But the Task Force believes that this responsibility should be shared among a number of different constituencies across the University, as finding ways to make the program less resource intensive is only one way to mount the program with reduced resources available from the State of California; others include making more efficient use of existing resources and finding additional sources of revenue to support the program, much of which go beyond the purview of CWEP.

Before moving to specific recommendations for specific campus constituencies, if it is decided that the GWAR Program is to continue, then the Task Force recommends that the University complete the conversion from the JEPET/ENG 414 program for satisfaction of the upper division writing requirement to the GWAR Program. Retaining a hybrid of the programs will not save much money because what resources are currently being used to fund ENG 414 can be used instead to fund the cost of extra sections needed to fully implement the GWAR Program. Given that the GWAR model is a high impact practice with respect to student success, whereas the JEPET/ENG 414 model is not, there is little or no advantage to waiting to fully implement the GWAR Program now if it is to be implemented at some point. Moving away from an interim hybrid model will also reduce the amount of confusion on the part of students about what their requirements are for graduation, and will help to maximize the benefits of other curricular innovations occurring on campus, such as changes being made to ENG 214 (Second Year Written Composition) to better prepare students for GWAR courses.

The Task Force recommends:

a. That the University make seeking external support for the GWAR Program a priority. One possibility is to seek such support from individuals with an interest in supporting writing and/or composition. The University’s strengths for attracting such support include its commitment to writing, as evidenced by writing being one of the University’s seven strategic priorities in CUSP II, by having hired a nationally recognized WAC/WID expert as the Director of its WAC/WID Program, by having developed a nationally recognized Intensive Reading and Writing (IRW) program to replace its remedial composition program, and by the support from the faculty, tutoring centers, and administration that resulted in the implementation of the GWAR Program in a relatively short period of time.

b. That the University consider using the miscellaneous course fee mechanism to support the GWAR Program in the ways allowed by Executive Order 1034 on student fees. Such a fee may be able to be used to support the cost incurred by the campus
tutoring centers in support of GWAR sections, as well as other activities designed to support GWAR sections.4

c. That the University support the continual evaluation of the GWAR Program, with a focus on whether key University-wide initiatives are being served by the program (e.g., facilitating graduation/student success; improvement in writing) and on whether the investment in the GWAR Program might lessen the cost of instruction in various ways (e.g., by reducing failure rates of students taking subsequent major courses; by helping to streamline major curricula).

d. That the University, CWEP, and the WAC/WID Coordinator develop a comprehensive plan for disseminating information to Colleges and Departments (and ultimately to instructors of GWAR courses) about the support that the campus tutoring centers can provide for faculty teaching GWAR courses and about effective pedagogies for teaching GWAR courses. Many faculty concerns regarding teaching GWAR courses focus on how time-intensive teaching GWAR courses will be, and the fact that faculty within disciplines may not be prepared to teach writing courses. A better understanding of best practices and successful strategies may help GWAR instructors. The Task Force learned of various pedagogical methods and resources available to instructors that may help address this issue somewhat, e.g., peer review of student writing in the class; use of iLearn for submitting required writing assignments to be reviewed by other students in a chat format; what students do and do not need help with; etc.

e. That CWEP and the WAC/WID Coordinator continue to build on current faculty development efforts to develop instructor-centered support groups for instructors of GWAR courses. In our meetings with faculty teaching GWAR courses, an open discussion uncovered an interest in informal interest or support groups among instructors of GWAR courses. At least one of the faculty we met with found talking with the Task Force and the other GWAR instructors to be very interesting and potentially very helpful.

f. That the CWEP and WAC/WID Coordinator encourage and consider approaches developed by units, particularly large ones like Biology and Business, that may integrate GWAR methodology and requirements across courses required by majors to both develop writing as students progress through their majors, as well as find cost-saving measures.

g. That Colleges, Departments, the WAC/WID Coordinator, and CWEP work together to share the range of ways in which GWAR has been successfully implemented across campus, including course sequences, floating GWAR signifiers, and courses offered in the senior year. Especially for Departments that implemented GWAR early on and for Departments that have not yet implemented GWAR, the wealth of information about the different ways GWAR has been implemented across campus since 2008 may help them develop (better) GWAR courses that are pedagogically sound and cost-effective.

h. That Colleges and Departments consider changes to how they implemented GWAR as College reorganization discussions progress. For instance, it can reasonably be

4 Though these are difficult times to ask students to pay such a fee, under the JEPET/ENG 414 model, all junior level students were required to pay a fee to take the JEPET to fund the evaluation of their writing.
expected that Departments with more students (majors) will be better able to approach an average class size of 25 for GWAR sections compared with Departments with fewer students (majors), e.g., if smaller Departments have significantly fewer than 25 majors. If reorganization discussions include potential mergers, changes to GWAR courses that make more efficient use of resources should be considered.

i. That Colleges and Departments consider offering more GWAR courses during the Summer if doing so results in lower overall cost to the University. Insofar as there is demand enough to justify Summer sections of a GWAR course and especially insofar as Summer remains on self-support, offering GWAR sections during the Summer should reduce the University’s cost of instruction of GWAR sections during the academic year without significantly impacting student progress to degree.5

j. That any discussions of increasing the enrollment limit for GWAR courses be balanced with a discussion of the appropriate enrollment limit for other courses that satisfy baccalaureate requirements. This is particularly relevant given the implementation of the University’s new baccalaureate degree requirement policy that is now in process. There are many reasons that lower enrollment limits benefit students, but they do so differentially for different types of courses. There are good pedagogical reasons to maintain an enrollment limit of 25 for GWAR courses. On the other hand, an increase in enrollment limit for other University-wide baccalaureate requirements may not be desirable, but it also may not be as problematic for maintaining the integrity of the course, the quality of student learning, and a reasonable faculty workload.

Conclusions
After careful review of material and discussion with campus constituencies, the Task Force believes that the successful implementation of the GWAR program will play a central role in improving student writing at the baccalaureate level, in better preparing students for subsequent upper division work in their majors, and in contributing to the overall success of our students. But the cost of implementing the GWAR Program is not insignificant, and the additional sections required to implement it may cost up to $380,000 to $475,000 more than the JEPET/ENG 414 model, which may be the most cost effective way to have students satisfy the upper division writing requirement.

In this report, the Task Force recommends a number of actions that various constituencies across campus may undertake to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the GWAR program with the goal of reducing the cost of the program, or to garner additional financial support for it. In general, the Task Force believes that the success of these efforts and of the GWAR Program depends on coordinated and collegial work among these various constituencies, and hopes that they continue to work together for the common goal of providing SF State students with the much improved educational experience that the GWAR Program promises.

---
5 Review of the ENG 414/GWAR comparison spreadsheet in the Appendix reveals that only 2 sections of GWAR courses have ever been offered during the Summer, and that none have been offered after Summer 2009.