

Dear Department Chair Colleagues,

I am writing to you because I thought you would be interested in a proposed change to the Writing Intensive Requirement that was made at the faculty senate last week. My hope is to generate some conversation among us and perhaps offer a collective response to this proposal. At last week's faculty senate meeting, there was a first reading of a proposal regarding the Comprehensive Writing program across campus generally, and specifically, the Writing Intensive requirement. The overall proposal had to do with strengthening various aspects of writing requirements across campus and, in my opinion, had much to recommend. However, I did find one component problematic. Instead of allowing students the option of taking the Writing Intensive requirement across campus in another department and another college, this proposal moves that requirement to a student's major department and/or the college in which the department is located. I have included the explicit recommendation below. (The entire document can be found on the faculty senate website [http://www.csus.edu/acse/archive/0506/fsa06\\_mar\\_30.htm](http://www.csus.edu/acse/archive/0506/fsa06_mar_30.htm) (go to the section that says Attachment A-1))

I found the proposed recommendation problematic from both a substantive and process perspective.

In terms of substance:

1. This proposal assumes facts not in evidence. Specifically, it assumes that a systematic analysis of all departments has been conducted and that it has been determined that students are not writing in their majors. Is this really the case? Don't students in business, science and engineering have to write memos, technical reports and/or lab reports? How will a Writing Intensive course in the major assist with this type of writing, since one would assume that this type of writing is currently infused into each department's discipline and/or curriculum? As a chair, I'm a bit taken aback by the assumption that students do not write in the major. (Our students do a tremendous amount of writing – technical reports, memos, essays, budget narratives, Master Plans, grantwriting, etc.) Similarly, isn't a "discipline" defined in terms of "writing" and "thinking" within that discipline, and aren't opportunities to write incorporated into all courses in a discipline?
2. What evidence exists to support the claim that the current system is "broken" – have we done alumni surveys to determine the extent to which students perceive that they are ill-prepared to write in their profession? In addition, Dan Melzer, one of the main authors and proponents of the proposal, argued that another reason for this change is that students need to write more in the major because they need to think, for example, like scientists or engineers, etc. This is an interesting point, but developmentally speaking, once you graduate from college and begin pursuing a career in your chosen profession (assuming that one pursues a job that directly relates to one's major) you do not immediately internalize your identity in that particular profession. How many of us entered academia and felt totally comfortable and secure with our identity as a "professor"? It takes time to develop this aspect of one's identity and the process of working in the field, along with

thinking and writing in the profession, will facilitate the internalization of this identity – not the fact that one took a writing intensive course in one’s major.

3. Will this requirement continue to be included in the GE sequence? How will the university justify this as a GE requirement if it is now discipline specific? In the most recent catalogue, our university offers this point about the role of GE: “One of the principles on which a modern university rests is the assumption that there is an important difference between learning to make a living and building a foundation for a life” (California State University Sacramento 2004-2006 Catalogue, p. 88). We believe that the current system helps the university accomplish this goal.

4. Recent research indicates that students will have a number of careers and 9 or 10 job changes over a lifetime (see note below and the full text is available at: <http://www.bls.gov/nls/nlsfaqs.htm#anch5>) and if students are required to take the writing intensive requirement only in their major, how will they be able to negotiate the transition into a new career if they do not have experience with writing across a variety of disciplines? Yes, they take other GE courses across disciplines, but only the writing intensive courses require that students focus equally on the substance of the course and the process of writing in the course.

5. The subcommittee argued that the research shows that students need to write more in the major. Where is the relevant and timely research to support this claim? In the recommendation noted below, there is no evidence to support a claim that there is a problem with the current system. Moreover, what research has this subcommittee done to determine the extent to which all departments are ready and prepared to offer a writing intensive course? We argue that since students may have a number of careers and 9 or 10 job changes over a lifetime, and given the fact that being a good writer may be more about “attitude” and “motivation” than about focusing only on specific skills, we argue that the types of courses we offer provide students with opportunities to internalize an appreciation and love of writing because it is linked to a broader discipline, something outside of what they focus on day in and day out. One of our goals in the writing intensive course is to get students to become life-long learners. One of the key components to becoming a better writer is to read more. If we are able to instill a curiosity about the larger world in the courses that we offer, then students will continue to read and learn about life across disciplines and, in turn, they will perhaps read more and, ultimately, become better writers.

**In terms of process:**

1. A committee met in the fall of 2005 to discuss various issues related to comprehensive writing across campus. Yet, last week was the first time that a public recommendation had been made, a recommendation that was made as a “first reading” at the Senate. What exactly is the “hurry” to bring this proposal forward, especially since there has been no widespread discussion during the six or so intervening months between the time the retreat was held and the report was prepared. Shouldn’t there have been a campus-wide discussion about these issues, especially with those departments who currently teach

Writing Intensive courses and with those who do not teach such courses but will now have to designate an existing course and/or create a new course to meet this requirement? Currently, the writing intensive courses are capped at low numbers to ensure students get ample feedback from instructors on their writing. Are large departments prepared to create 10-12 sections of writing courses that are capped at 35? Or will the small class size standard established within the current configuration of writing intensive courses be compromised to accommodate large departments (i.e., 50-65 students in a writing-intensive course)? As noted above, one of the reasons cited for this change is that students need to write more in their major so that they can then learn to think and write “like an engineer or a scientist, for example.” Yet, if one way of fulfilling the writing intensive requirement will be to have the English Department offer discipline-specific writing courses, how exactly will students come to think and write like engineers, scientists or managers? Wouldn’t we want students to be trained in the discipline by experts in the discipline? Moreover, doesn’t having exceptions (e.g., allowing another department in a college or the English Department) undermine one of the key argument for “why” such a course is needed, namely that students need discipline-specific training in writing?

2. Given that the Faculty Senate is a body that is strongly committed to issues of process, I am very troubled by the way in which this proposal has been developed and then put forward for a reading in the Senate. Indeed, there seems to be a foregone conclusion that this change will take place and yet, there has been no strong argument as to “why” such a change is needed, nor has there been widespread input from faculty across campus on this proposal. Ironically, members of the Senate have been critical of the administration for not being process oriented; and yet, we find ourselves in a similar position in terms of being excluded from this process until a proposal has been forwarded for comment, review and ultimately a vote.

3. Invariably, there will be budgetary implications and when this proposal was released last week, there was a comment that the committee was concerned about budgetary implications, but no specific impacts were identified. How could a subcommittee make a proposal that will have financial implications on departments that may lose FTE, as well as on departments that may have to add faculty members to teach this particular class, and not provide specific budgetary information?

4. We should also have a discussion about the broad goals of a liberal education and where reading and writing fit into this education. Are we only concerned with writing within the major or are we concerned about developing writing skills that will carry over into the whole of a student’s future life? If we are concerned with the latter, we need to investigate how this can best be achieved. By moving the focus of the intensive writing course from a liberal education perspective to a discipline perspective, we may merely be robbing one area to supplement another.

I’ve only been on this campus for 2 years, but in conversation with other faculty, it seems as if this issue has been raised many times but with different justifications. Ultimately, if there is no major problem or concern with regard to this requirement, my question is this:

**“Why propose a major change that has large-scale ramifications across ALL departments?”**

**Philosophically and pedagogically, I am very much in support of measures that improve student writing. In this particular instance, there is no evidence, however, to suggest that our configuration of writing intensive courses does not do this, nor is there any evidence to support the assertion that students in every department are not getting enough opportunities to write in their respective majors. If there is some evidence, I would like the committee to share it with us.**

### **Specific recommendations:**

**If faculty are concerned that students do not write well in their respective majors, then perhaps we need to identify some key questions about issues related to student writing in the major and conduct some research.**

**First, we should conduct a thorough literature review on both sides of the issue – the pros and cons of intensive writing in one’s major.**

**Second, we should develop and conduct surveys of current and former students to determine the extent to which they feel prepared to “write” in their professions.**

**Third, we should develop and conduct surveys across campus to determine the extent to which departments feel that they are not preparing their students well enough to write in their majors.**

**Fourth, perhaps this Writing subcommittee could convene some campus-wide conversations within colleges about issues related to writing in the major.**

**If the research and the campus-wide conversations show that our current plan is valid, then perhaps no action should be taken. The current system will remain. If, on the other hand, we find that changes are needed, campus-wide we could develop a 3-5 year plan to implement the recommendations based on the research we have done and the campus-wide conversations that have been convened.**

**The issue of what constitutes a “good writer” is comparable to other global conversations about what constitutes an educated person. Indeed, we as individuals who chair departments should not necessarily be in the position we find ourselves in now of responding to such a recommendation; rather, we should have been invited to the table a long time ago to openly discuss what constitutes a “good writer.”**

**I hope that this e-mail will begin that process. I would appreciate it if you could please respond directly to me or to this list-serve with your thoughts and comments on this issue. Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of this letter.**

**This recommendation will be voted on at the April 27<sup>th</sup> Faculty Senate meeting.**

Dr. Beth D. Kivel, Chair

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

California State University, Sacramento

6000 J Street

Sacramento, CA 95819-6110

Office Phone: (916) 278-6429

Office Fax: (916) 278-5053

#### **Number of Jobs Held in a Lifetime**

To determine the number of jobs in a lifetime, one would need data from a "longitudinal" survey that tracks the same respondents over their entire working lives, and so far, no longitudinal survey has ever tracked respondents for that long. The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79), however, has tracked younger baby boomers over a considerable segment of their lives.

A BLS news release published in August 2004 examined the number of jobs that people born in the years 1957 to 1964 held from age 18 to age 38. The title of the report is "Number of Jobs Held, Labor Market Activity, and Earnings Growth among Younger Baby Boomers: Results from More Than Two Decades of a Longitudinal Survey." The report is available on the BLS web site at: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/nlsoy.pdf>

These younger baby boomers held an average of 10.2 jobs from ages 18 to 38. (In this report, a job is defined as an uninterrupted period of work with a particular employer.) On average, men held 10.4 jobs and women held 9.9 jobs. Both men and women held more jobs on average in their late teens and early twenties than they held in their mid thirties.

From ages 18 to 38, some of these younger baby boomers held more jobs than average and others held fewer jobs. Twenty percent held 15 jobs or more, while 16 percent held zero to four jobs. For additional statistics on the number of jobs held, see the tables at: [Http://www.bls.gov/nls/y79r20jobsbyedu.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/nls/y79r20jobsbyedu.pdf)

**Recommendation #4: To help initiate students to the specialized discourse of their chosen discipline, the Subcommittee recommends adoption of the 2002 "Transmission of GWAR" proposal, which was endorsed by the Subcommittee and the General Education/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee. This proposal recommended that the WI requirement be revised to a Writing-in-the-Discipline requirement, so that students take a WI course in their discipline in their junior year.**

Even the most accomplished student writers struggle when they are first learning the specialized discourse of their discipline: each discipline has its own genres, its own discourse conventions, and its own ways of generating knowledge through reading and writing. This recommendation would create a more coherent and logical sequence of student writing experiences in the Comprehensive Writing Program: students would receive an introduction to college writing and the writing process in their freshman year in ENGL1A, begin to explore writing, reading, and research across disciplines in their sophomore year in ENGL20, and then receive an initiation to the specialized discourse of their discipline in their junior year.

Under this plan, each student would satisfy the GVAR through an upper-division writing-intensive course in their major or a course within the college designated by their major. This course should be content-rich in the discipline and also integrate instruction in disciplinary writing. The writing-in-the-discipline course could be developed by the department in three ways:

1. Departments could identify a course or courses that already meet the WI guidelines and designate it (or them) to fulfill the requirement for its majors.
2. Departments could select a content course within the major to fulfill the WI requirement and alter its design to meet the guidelines.
3. Departments could work in conjunction with other departments to develop a college-wide course that meets the writing intensive course requirement for its majors. This could be accomplished a) when more than one department has majors which do similar writing or b) departments could plan a WI course with disciplinary writing texts to be offered through the English department, supported financially by the major department but conducted through the English department.

The Writing-in-the-Discipline requirement would replace the current Writing Intensive requirement, so it would not add units to the major. Support for developing the courses would be provided by the University Reading and Writing Coordinator. Adjunct tutoring support for students and instructors could be provided by 3X and Writing Across the Curriculum's "Tutoring in the Disciplines" program, which trains and sponsors writing tutors for a department or college if the department or college provides matching funds.

The Subcommittee would not want a single writing-in-the-discipline course to be seen as a replacement for integrating writing throughout the major. However, the Subcommittee feels that the current WI requirement does not fall within a coherent sequence, especially with the proposed changes to ENGL20 and the request by the Senate to infuse writing more broadly in each discipline. The assumption behind this recommended change, and behind all the changes the Subcommittee recommends in this report, is that student literacy is a goal and a responsibility we all share.