

Writing Competency Assessment Proposal

(Due March 15, 2001)

**Institution: University of Virginia—College of Arts and Sciences,
School of Architecture, and School of Nursing**

Standards/Definition of Writing Competency: The University of Virginia's College of Arts and Sciences, School of Architecture, and School of Nursing expect their graduates to be able to produce effective expository and persuasive writing. More specifically, graduating students should be able to:

1. Produce prose that is correct with regard to grammar, diction, spelling, and sentence structure.
2. Compose balanced arguments and support their claims--not only by articulating reasons and marshalling evidence, but also by anticipating the need to acknowledge and respond to significant counter-claims.
3. Frame introductions in their writing that quickly and reliably signal a document's purpose to its readers.
4. Produce coherent and cohesive document subsections and paragraphs.
5. Manage and vary their syntax to produce effects ranging from extreme clarity to elegant complexity.

Description of Measure to be used (instrument attached): All first-year students, including first-year transfer students, in the College of Arts and Sciences, School of Architecture, and School of Nursing are required to complete a first writing requirement (*FWR*).

The *FWR* may be met in one of several ways:

- I. All first-year students not exempted (see II below) must complete ENWR 105/106 (Academic Argument) or ENWR 110 (Accelerated Academic Argument) with a grade of C- or better. Students earning grades below C- in ENWR 105/106 or ENWR 110 must retake the course and earn a C- or better in order to satisfy the first writing requirement.
- II. Students may be exempted from the *FWR* in one of the following three ways:
 1. A *single measure exemption* is earned by students who have earned Echols scholar status, or scored 740 or above on the SAT II writing exam, or scored a 5 on the AP English language subject test.

2. A *composite exemption* is earned by any student who: a) scored 680 or above on the SAT II writing exam **AND** scored a 5 or above on the IB (higher A1) exam; or b) scored 680 or above on the SAT II writing exam **AND** scored a 4 (or above) on the AP English language subject test; or c) scored 700 or above on the SAT II writing exam **AND** scored a 4 (or above) on the AP English literature subject test.
3. A *portfolio exemption* is earned by students who submit a placement portfolio of three argumentative essays demonstrating strong competence with regard to the features listed on the ENWR 110 outcomes statement. (See **score of 4** below for a description of *strong competence*.)

Each year, those first-year students not exempted, approximately 1400-1600, earn *FWR* course credit by completing ENWR 105/106 or ENWR 110. Since according to multiple placement criteria, these students enter UVa as our least advanced writers, it is these students we intend to track for purposes of competency assessment.

A panel of independent evaluators will assess writing portfolios of not fewer than 5% of students who earn *FWR* course credit by successfully completing ENWR 105/106 or ENWR 110 during a reporting year. The evaluators will assess the portfolios on the 4-point scale described in detail below. A score of 4, 3, 2, or 1 will be assigned to each portfolio. The evaluators' interpretations of terms such as "well developed," "cohesive paragraphs," and "grammatically correct" will be guided by a detailed portfolio assessment guide (see attached), which will draw their attention to relevant textual features. A final score will be assigned independently to each portfolio and will not necessarily result from a calculation of the scores from the assessment guide. Each portfolio will receive two evaluations with the final score being the average of the two.

A SCORE OF 4: Portfolios in this category demonstrate **strong competence**. Papers in these portfolios consistently offer focused and developed claims, clear introductions that frame readers' expectations, coherent and cohesive sections and paragraphs, mature sentence syntax, and mechanically correct prose. Although portfolios in this category may contain some lapses and surface errors, any such lapses will be rare and minor.

A SCORE OF 3: Portfolios in this category demonstrate **reasonably consistent competence**. They may include occasional errors in execution, but they will be free from patterns of error that indicate the writer is ignorant of important rhetorical, linguistic, or grammatical principles. Of the four essays in the portfolio, at least three will offer focused and developed claims, as well as clear introductions that frame readers' expectations. Although demonstrating occasional lapses, the collected essays will be comprised of coherent and cohesive sections and paragraphs; the syntax will be varied and appropriate; and the prose will be correct with regard to grammar, diction, spelling, and sentence structure.

A SCORE OF 2: Portfolios in this category demonstrate **developing competence**. Most of the work in the portfolio will be consistently competent, although the portfolio may contain occasional major weaknesses, such as inadequately focused or poorly framed arguments, insufficient development, inflexible or inappropriate syntax, or an accumulation of errors in grammar, diction, spelling, or sentence structure.

A SCORE OF 1: Portfolios in this category demonstrate **incompetence** or **occasional competence**. The majority of essays in these portfolios are seriously flawed by one or more of the following: very poor organization, weak logic, indifferent development, and severe syntactical and usage errors.

Description of the Administration Process: The Department of English keeps portfolios of the written work of all students enrolled in the first-year writing course(s), each portfolio containing a minimum of four written works produced in the course. From the list of students who have successfully completed a first-year writing course, the Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies will choose a random sample equal to at least 5% of the entire entering first-year class (approximately 150 students in the 2000-01 academic year), with half of the sample drawn in the fall semester and half in the spring semester.

The Department of English will collect the portfolios of the students in the sample at the end of the fall and spring semesters and provide them to the Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies. That office will make copies of the portfolios, remove student names (and any other material that would identify the student) and replace the names with a randomly assigned ID code not related to the social security number. Neither the portfolios, nor the writing samples, nor the results of the writing competency assessments will ever be associated with student names. The Office of Institutional Assessment and Studies will return the original portfolios to the Department of English.

The writing competency committee will choose and coordinate the training of portfolio evaluators. The evaluators most likely will be faculty members of the University who are not involved in teaching the writing courses. Outside-the-University examiners and/or graduate students also may be included.

In the first year, the evaluation of the writing samples will take place in late spring or early summer of 2002 to enable the University to submit a report on results to SCHEV by July 1, 2002. Thereafter, every three years, the evaluation of the portfolios will take place in either summer or fall with the results available by late fall or winter in time for a report on results to be submitted to SCHEV by the following July 1.

Results of the writing competency assessment will be provided to the Department of English and to the deans of the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Architecture, and the School of Nursing so that they may take steps to improve the teaching of writing if assessment results indicate that improvement is needed.

Preliminary proposal about how results of the competency assessments will be described in a way that will be meaningful to the various publics with a stake in the quality of Virginia higher education.

The University will describe the writing assessment results as follows:

1. A description of the University's expectations for student writing competence.
2. A description of the various ways students may satisfy the writing competency requirement.
3. A description of the writing assessment process including the characteristics of papers to be scored 4, 3, 2, 1.
4. The percentage of portfolios that were determined by the evaluators to fall within each of the categories of the 4-point scale described above.

Submitted by: _____
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