

PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE UNIVERSITY WRITING REQUIREMENT

March 22, 2007

Although the University Writing Requirement (UWR) has been faithfully administered since its inclusion in the *1989-91 EKU Undergraduate Catalog*, the UWR does not provide the academic units with meaningful information that can be used to enhance the teaching and learning process.

The UWR should be discontinued for the following reasons:

1. The UWR is neither a gatekeeper instrument, an assessment tool, nor a pedagogical method. Specifically,
 - a. EKU has no record that any student has been denied a diploma due to failing the UWR. While students are not excused from taking the UWR, some students have had to return to campus to take the UWR the semester after they have completed all other academic requirements for their degrees. As of February 26, 2007, 371 exceptions have been given this semester, granting students permission to register for 12 hours concurrently with the UWR.
 - b. Because the UWR is not connected directly to the student learning goals for a particular course, degree, nor even General Education, the UWR lacks validity as an assessment tool.
 - c. No academic program uses (nor could use) the UWR results as a means for improving instruction. Very few students who fail the UWR request preparation help from the Writing Center. According to the English Department, ENG 106, which is designed to prepare students for the UWR, is cancelled semester after semester due to a lack of student and faculty interest.
 - d. Writing a culturally unbiased prompt that does not place some groups of students at a disadvantage is very challenging.
2. Monitoring the current UWR requirement in a systematic and equitable manner has been very challenging, even with BANNER and CARES. The result can often be frustrating for advisors, administrators, and particularly our students.

One CB&T chair reported, for instance, that an advisee with a 3.20 was recently blocked from registering for more than 12 credit hours because she had earned 62 hours and had yet to take the UWR. During the prior semester, at 45 hours earned, she was supposed to register for the UWR for the following semester. The CARES report, however, read in bold letters: **'YOU NEED TO SUCCESSFULLY PASS THE UNIVERSITY WRITING REQUIREMENT IN THE SEMESTER AFTER YOU HAVE COMPLETED 60 HOURS,'** which naturally led her to believe she didn't have to register at that time. The Department since then has requested a UWR exception, but she may not be able to get the classes that were her first choice while waiting for the exception to be processed.

Because, as an institution, we continue to make every effort to improve retention, we need to consider whether such roadblocks are worth the harm they inflict. An accumulation of such unnecessary frustrations might be just enough to compel a student either to drop out or transfer to another school.

3. As ECU increases its non-traditional delivery methods and responds to the needs of its stakeholders (adult learners, transfer students, etc.) through innovative and distance-education degree programs and course offerings, the UWR poses an inflexible impediment to students' persistence and graduation.

These distance-education and on-line programs are projected to increase as ECU strives to meet CPE's mandated enrollment goals. While the acknowledgement "*Special arrangements will have to be made for students who rarely or never attend on-campus classes or activities,*" may have been feasible in 1987, the logistics of providing alternate arrangements for the increasing number of distance-education students in 2007 is prohibitive for on-line programs.

4. The financial support for the UWR has not increased since its inception, despite significantly rising costs. A lack of financial support is, it seems, a clear indication of a lack of overall support for the UWR among faculty and upper administration.

The cost for administering the UWR for 2005-2006 was \$19,521.43.

5. The impetus and wording for the original proposal for the UWR was the "apparent decline in communication skills of college graduates." The University felt compelled to "address this problem to ensure that its students are sufficiently prepared for advanced university work and for practical applications, of effective writing after graduation." The University determined that it could meet this challenge, "only by a unified and consistent front which emphasizes writing throughout the curriculum."

Now in 2007, the University has four "unified and consistent fronts" that emphasize writing and assessment, which will be embedded in the curriculum instead of existing apart from the curriculum. Specifically, these efforts include:

- a. ECU's commitment to assessing communication at the program level is being strengthened as a result of the campus-wide focus on ECU's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as presented to SACS. (i.e., Eastern Kentucky University will develop informed, critical, and creative thinkers who communicate effectively.) A number of QEP initiatives are being developed that will focus on students' writing.
- b. As part of the Strategic Plan and Institutional Effectiveness reporting, every unit on campus must report how it is developing students' critical thinking skills and assessing those skills through communication.