Motion to Add A University-Level Critical Thinking through Writing Requirement to the Graduation Requirements

Approved by the Committee on Academic Programs and Admissions & Standards, March 20, 2007 and by the University Senate, April 19, 2007

Motion:

Effective for students entering Fall 09 and thereafter, all students who seek a baccalaureate degree are required to pass two critical thinking through writing (CTW) courses in their major. Implementation of this motion is contingent upon allocation of necessary resources by FACP.

CTW courses will be proposed by Departments and approved by the General Education (Gen Ed) Subcommittee of the Committee on Academic Programs (CAP). If they wish, colleges/schools may require that proposals be approved at the college level before going forward to the Gen Ed Subcommittee. In their proposal to the Gen Ed Subcommittee, Departments must include a written justification that outlines how each CTW course will use writing to help students achieve Georgia State’s learning outcome of improving the discipline-appropriate critical thinking skills of their students.

A CTW course meets the following requirements:
1. It has at least three credit hours.
2. It contains assignments that focus on critical thinking as demonstrated through writing. These assignments together should constitute a substantial percentage of the course grade.
3. It has a maximum of a 25/1 student/instructor ratio. Should a CTW class have more than 25 students, the instructor will receive assistance. If a CTW class enrolls 51-75 students, the assistance of two people would be needed, and so forth.
4. It is taught by a CTW-trained instructor.

1 For purposes of this motion, “courses in the major” refers to those courses that students use to fulfill the requirements of Areas G, H, and K of a particular major. All majors must have at least two CTW courses in Areas G, H, or K approved for the 2009-2010 Catalog.

2 For purposes of this motion, “assignments that focus on critical thinking as demonstrated through writing” are assignments that use writing to help students develop the “wide range of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions needed to effectively identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments and truth claims; to discover and overcome personal prejudices; to formulate and present convincing reasons in support of conclusions; and to make reasonable, intelligent decisions about what to believe and what to do.” (Bassham, Irwin, Nardone & Wallace, Critical Thinking: A Student's Introduction (McGraw-Hill, 2005) page 1.) Typically, students will have the opportunity to revise at least one assignment during the semester.

3 This ratio may be accomplished by various means. Variations include but are not limited to: capping CTW sections at 25 (the ideal), assigning trained CTW graduate student(s) to sections with more than 25 students, and having department or college CTW staff consultant(s) work with sections over 25 students. In some cases, it may be appropriate for the instructors of
CTW courses capped at 25 to have assistance. In these cases, Departments and colleges may petition the Gen Ed Subcommittee and the Provost for additional funding.

CTW training will be available to faculty, graduate students, and staff who are working in CTW courses. Departments must use university-wide CTW training or alternative training approved by the Gen Ed Subcommittee.

Rationale:

The goal of this graduation requirement is to increase GSU students’ performance on two of the University’s most important general education learning outcomes—critical thinking and written communication. The strategy for achieving this goal is to implement a university-wide two-course CTW graduation requirement. While the specific design of these courses is a departmental matter, each CTW course would present students with engaging assignments and activities based on issues, problems, and applications within the discipline and approach these through multiple writing activities that focus on critical thinking. Each department’s implementation of the program will require instituting a two course CTW requirement for graduation, adopting and gaining approval for the necessary curricular revisions, allowing for the training of the faculty members involved, and providing the additional personnel necessary to offer frequent instructional feedback to students.

As evidence of the high priority of this initiative, the University has decided to make CTW its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as required for accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Georgia State has a fair amount of flexibility when it comes to choosing the focus of our QEP. This motion represents a decision that the focus of our QEP will be on improving the critical thinking skills of our students as exhibited through their writing. Both critical thinking and writing are among Georgia State’s general education learning outcomes.

Implementing this new graduation requirement will require resources. In addition to adopting this motion and making the necessary curricular revisions, implementation will require a faculty training program and the additional personnel necessary to offer CTW courses on the 25/1 model. Passing this motion commits Georgia State to provide the necessary resources. Funding for implementation of the QEP will be provided by the Provost Office.

The CTW program will be assessed through the existing assessment process.