GE Writing – Course Approval Description

I. Bylaw

The U.C. Davis Requirements for Higher Degrees, Section 522, sets forth the Baccalaureate Degree Requirements in General Education. Subsection (J) pertains to the writing requirement, stating:

A course in writing experience normally requires a minimum of five pages of writing in a block, which will be evaluated not only for content, but also for organization, style, use of language, and logical coherence. The Committee on Courses of Instruction may, however, approve for General Education credit some other form of satisfying the writing requirement if, in its judgment, the alternative meets the goals of encouraging students to think critically and communicate effectively.

II. Interpretation

The writing requirement must consist of one of two formats: (a) a 5 or more page paper focused on a single theme reflecting some student choice of topic within the context of the course goals, or (b) multiple short written assignments, totaling at least 5 pages, reflecting a variety of themes in the course. The paper(s) should provide an opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate critical thinking about the topic and ability to communicate an understanding of pertinent issue/s related to the course. Critical thinking or analysis consists of comparison, synthesis, and interpretation. Education Abroad Program courses may be used to satisfy the GE writing requirements, if and only if they meet the other requirements for a GE writing course.

The course proposal should include specific evidence of guidance on the development of the paper or papers through regular, systematic feedback to the writer before completion of the final draft or subsequent papers, which must consist of written comments from a TA or instructor. Additional feedback could consist of class discussion of topic selection and narrowing of focus, individual conferences with instructor or TA, peer feedback on drafts, or discussion of effective models. Clear evaluation criteria must be established in advance of the final paper or subsequent papers (rubric, scoring guide, etc.), which include a focus on content, organization, style, use of language, and logical coherence. We strongly recommend that the Student Judicial Affairs handouts on plagiarism be given to the students and discussed in class (http://sja.ucdavis.edu/avoid.htm).

Guiding questions

1. What is the writing requirement for your course?
2. Briefly explain how the paper(s) provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate critical thinking and ability to communicate an understanding of pertinent issue(s) related to the course.
3. Briefly describe the critical feedback that will be given to the student prior to the final paper draft or subsequent papers (e.g., through class discussion of topic selection and narrowing of focus, individual conferences with instructor or TA, peer feedback on drafts, discussion of effective models, staged tasks, or some other means).
4. How will you assess whether these goals have been achieved in the students’ academic performance (i.e., sample test questions, paper topics, etc.?)
III. Sample GE Justifications

(These courses were approved before the new guidelines and may not address all of the guiding questions.)

1) Research Paper 5-8 Pages (30%)

Writing Experience: Although each professor may allocate the writing requirement differently, all of those teaching this course require a minimum of 5 pages (more often, 10-20pp) of English expository prose. Students receive comments on all graded papers and papers are evaluated on the basis of content and form (organization, style, use of language, logical coherence, etc.). In each case, students revise their work in response to these comments. Some instructors in this course require one long (12-15pp) paper at or near the end of the quarter; others assign two or more 5-page papers throughout the term. Working with the TAs in the course, the instructor comments on and returns the papers to the students, who then have an opportunity to respond and/or revise based on those comments.

2) Weekly homework (35%)

Weekly homework: Ten assignments total will be assigned to give students practice in methods and to provide short-term feedback on understanding of central concepts. Homework will include paper-and-pencil exercises assigned in class, computation assigned in the laboratory, and writing. Homework will be started in the lab session but also will require time outside formal class meetings (2-3 hours per hour of lecture time each). Scores for written work will be based on quality of exposition and demonstration of biological insights gained from modeling, as well as on mathematics.

3) Three 4-5 page papers (25%)

Feedback to students before final papers are submitted: Feedback is provided in three ways. First, students receive extensive written feedback on each paper they submit. Second, considerable discussion section time is given to creating successful written assignments. Third, TAs and instructors strongly encourage students to use office hours and/or appointments for individual help.

4) Weekly reaction papers (30%), 5-page Midterm Paper (20%), 5-page Final Paper (20%)

This course has two five-page analytic papers. Students will learn how to formulate a thesis, construct a convincing argument, marshal evidence to support their claims, and analyze the evidence. They will learn how to strive for depth and originality in critical analysis. In addition, they will be taught paragraph organization and sentence structure. They will be taught to use rhetoric, fact, and evaluation for effective communication. They will receive constructive criticism on their papers, and be required to revise each paper in order to learn from the comments.