



30.018: University Policy on Examination of Writing Competency

Responsible Executive: Vice President for Academic Affairs
Responsible Office: Office of Academic Affairs
Related Policy:
Approved-On Date: Spring 2001
Effective Date:
Revision Date:

Policy Statement

In keeping with the mission of Norfolk State University to produce productive citizens the Examination of Writing Competency (EWC) has been developed. The EWC is a graduation requirement for all undergraduate students. It is a 3-hour proctored exam; students write an academic essay of about 500-600 words that responds to a question or prompt from a broad range of general topics. The Exam is given on the campus of Norfolk State University one Saturday morning each semester at a scheduled time and place.

Purpose

The Exam meets the State Council of Higher Education's requirement for Virginia colleges and universities to demonstrate student competencies in specific subject categories. In addition faculty members are asking for a method to ensure that students write competently when entering upper-level courses in the major. Benefits of an Exam of this sort are numerous: it protects the reputation of the University for producing graduates who can write competently in their professions and who will succeed as responsible employees, citizens, and alumni, it benefits the University faculty by providing data/information for curriculum improvement and faculty/professional development, and it benefits the University students by providing continued opportunities for them to improve their writing and critical thinking skills.

Procedures

I. General Information

- A. All incoming freshmen and transfer students are required to sit for and pass the Examination of Writing Competency in order to receive undergraduate degrees at the end of their program of study.
- B. Students seeking a second undergraduate degree from Norfolk State University must sit for and pass the Examination of Writing Competency if their first undergraduate degree did not come from Norfolk State University.
- C. This information is contained in the 2001 Norfolk State University catalog, and it is the students' responsibility to be aware of this graduation requirement.
- D. The Examination of Writing Competency is administered from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (IEA) through its Writing Competencies Programs. It is part of the University's overall assessment efforts (See policy 30.017).
- E. The Exam is designed for students in the first semester of their sophomore year or their first semester of study as transfer students.
- F. Students are encouraged to take the Exam as soon as they are qualified to do so.
- G. The prerequisites for sitting for the Exam are that the student has completed two semesters of Freshman Composition or its transfer equivalent and at least 30 hours of credit but no more than 60 (unless they are transfer students); this includes transfer credits.
- H. The Exam is offered on scheduled dates and at scheduled times each semester.
 - a. These dates and times are well publicized at the beginning of each semester.

- b. They are published in *The Schedule of Classes* booklet for each semester and posted all over campus at the beginning of each semester.
 - c. In addition, advisors, other faculty members, the Registrar's Office, and other administrative offices are supplied with the dates and times of the Exams.
 - d. Information is always available from the IEA office and the Writing Competency Coordinator's office.
- I. Students must take the Exam when it is scheduled to be given.
 - J. Work, family, school or athletic conflicts must be settled by the student so that he or she is free to take the Exam at its scheduled time.
 - K. Religious practices which prohibit activity at the time of the scheduled Exam and obligations to the U. S. military at the time of the scheduled Exam are the only exception to the above policy.
 - a. Students must inform the Writing Competency Coordinator's office if they have religious or military conflicts with the scheduled Exam date and/or time and present written proof of such conflict before the Exam by bringing or sending such proof to the Coordinator's office.
 - b. Telephone or e-mail explanations of conflicts are not acceptable.
 - c. For students with the above legitimate conflicts, one alternate date and time will be offered; the Coordinator's office will make every effort to arrange the alternate Exam at a time that does not interfere with students' scheduled religious or military obligation and give those students advance notice of that alternate date and time; it is up to the students to arrange their schedules so they are free at the time of the alternate Exam.
 - d. The alternate Exam will be scheduled as close to the regularly scheduled Exam as possible, depending on the Coordinators available resources to administer the alternate Exam (proctors, space, materials).
 - e. The alternate Exam will never be given after the regularly scheduled Exam for obvious security reasons.

II. **Registration/Information Sessions**

- A. Students must register to take the Exam
- B. They must attend one of the scheduled Exam Registration/Information sessions each time they take the Exam.
- C. Dates, times and places for the Registration/Information sessions will be published in the *Schedule of Classes* booklet for each semester and posted all over campus on bulletin boards, in dorms, and in classrooms whenever possible.
- D. In addition, advisors, other faculty members, the Registrar's Office and other administrative offices are given the dates and times of the registration sessions.
- E. Exam information is always available at the IEA office and the Writing Competency Coordinator's office.
- F. The Writing Competency Coordinator and his or her staff conduct these sessions.
- G. During the registration portion of the session, students complete and return the registration form.
- H. The coordinator reviews this form thoroughly during the session, and students must correctly complete the entire form in order to be eligible to take that session's scheduled Exam.
- I. Exam registration forms are distributed to students only at Registration/Information sessions; completed registration forms are not accepted at any other time or by any other means.
- J. If the student comes to take the Exam and no registration form can be found by the Coordinator and/or staff and proctors, it is up to the Coordinator's discretion whether the student will be allowed to sit for the Exam.
- K. If the student does sit for the Exam but no evidence of registration can be found after a thorough search of records, the essay will not be graded and will not count in any way toward completing the Exam graduation requirement for that student.

- L. The information portion of the session is designed to give students all of the information necessary for them to pass the Exam the first time they take it.
- M. Handouts which explain the grading criteria and process, define the format of the Exam itself, and supply some basic essay writing and grammar are distributed to each student for his or her study before the Exam.

III. **The Exam**

- A. The Exam is usually given on a Saturday morning. It is proctored following as closely as possible the ETS testing guidelines, allowing for resources available to the Exit Exam.
- B. Proctors are hired and trained by the Coordinator and follow specific instructions during the administration of the Exam.
- C. Students are advised to arrive at the test site about fifteen minutes before the Exam is scheduled to begin so that they will have time to check-in and get seated and settled.
- D. Check-in requires students to show picture identification; the proctors have each student's registration form and a master list of those students who registered to take the Exam at one of its Registration/Information sessions.
- E. Each student signs the master list and receives his or her testing materials.
- F. Students are given the test questions, a packet of number-lined paper on which to write their essays, and an unlimited amount of scratch paper for prewriting activities.
- G. Although students are advised during registration to bring their own pencils, pens, and dictionaries, proctors have these supplies on hand for those students who need them.
- H. When the timers indicate that the three hour testing session is over, students must stop writing and turn in to the proctors all the testing materials.
- I. Students may take breaks during the Exam period; they must turn all testing materials and their picture identification in to a proctor to be returned to them when they return to the test room.
- J. All testing materials, including students' scratch paper and/or trash, are turned in to the Writing Competency Coordinator immediately after the Exam or as soon thereafter as possible.
- K. Proctors sign all of the necessary paperwork either before or during the Exam so that they can be paid as soon after the Exam as possible.

IV. **Grading the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency**

- A. Graders are recruited from NSU faculty members representing all of the programs of study and trained by the Writing Competency Coordinator and/or staff on an on-going basis.
- B. The only requirement for eligibility as a grader is that the faculty member has a Master's graduate degree in his or her field.
- C. The intent of recruiting graders is to begin to develop a staff of graders to choose from for each Exam. By doing this, no one grader has an immense amount of grading to do, and the Coordinator can assure that the graders come from varied programs, that no one program or major is over-represented by graders; we especially want to be careful about how many graders come from the English Department.
- D. The Exam is not connected in any way to the English Department although many assume it is administered through the English Department; we want to avoid any appearance of using or relying on the English Department or being under its influence.
- E. The Examination of Writing Competency is administered through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment.
- F. Groups of graders are trained in two-hour training sessions and given some practice grading to do; individual graders return to the Writing Competency Coordinator for feedback about their grading. Most graders are then eligible to grade Exit Exams for two academic years.
- G. Each essay is evaluated by two graders. If the two graders disagree about the Pass/Not Pass evaluation, a third grader evaluates the essay.
- H. This means that at least two graders agree on the final assignment of Pass/Not Pass.

- I. A 4-point rubric was designed by the Exam Committee and is used to give graders a way to evaluate the essays in the same way each time they are graded.
- J. Graders use a standardized evaluation sheet based on the rubric to mark where and what the weaknesses in the essay are by what line the weakness and errors appear in; graders do not mark on the essay itself.
- K. In this way, each grader receives a clean copy of the essay, and the student who comes in to review his or her essay sees no marks on it.
- L. Students must pass in all areas of evaluation to earn a final mark of Pass.
- M. The aim is to have all the grading done in the three weeks following the Exam.

V. **Designing the Examination Questions**

- A. A request for questions and/or question ideas is distributed to the faculty at the beginning of Fall Semester of each academic year.
- B. In addition, requests are distributed throughout the year to specific individuals or departments.
- C. The Writing Competency Coordinator is responsible for designing any necessary questions because of a lack of questions from faculty or to cover areas not covered by faculty-submitted questions.
- D. He or she is also responsible for revising and editing questions offered by faculty.
- E. The Coordinator has certain guidelines which must be followed before a question can be used on the Exam.
- F. The Coordinator also keeps statistics on the pass rates for each question so that he or she can make decisions about future questions; we will not want to repeat questions or types of questions if students don't do well on them when they are first used on an Exam.
- G. Each Exam consists of three questions; the student chooses **one** question to respond to in his or her essay. We want to give students a choice about what they write but not so many choices that choosing which one to write about becomes the focus of the Exam and the specific writing task.

VI. **Resources for Students**

- A. During registration/information sessions, students are advised to contact the Writing Competency Coordinator if they do not pass the Exam.
- B. Those students who do contact the Coordinator are given an appointment time and come in to review their exams.
- C. The Coordinator has prepared in advance for this conference and goes over the weakness in the Exam essay with the student; the aim is to get students to see why and how they didn't pass so that they can pass the Exam the next time they take it.
- D. During an effective conference, the Coordinator can determine if the mistakes can be fixed in conference or if the student will need additional work to bring his or her writing up to a level that will meet the Pass requirements.
- E. If the student needs additional work, the Coordinator refers the student to the ACCESS program or other effective resources.
- F. The ACCESS program receives a list of the students who do not pass after every Exam.
- G. They contact those students to come in and work with one of their tutors who has been trained by the Writing Competency Coordinator to work with students who don't pass the Exam.
- H. In addition, the University has an on-line writing tutorial program, *Criterion*, which has been designed to help students with all aspects of their writing but especially with writing problems relating to the Exam.