

PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

March 18, 2004

The Gordon Rule and Essay Testing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 9, 2004, Dr. R. E. LeMon sent a request to all university provosts for their responses to two questions asked by Mr. Steve Uhlfelder for the Performance and Accountability Committee of the Board of Governors. The questions focused on determining how much writing is required by students at the universities. Because the university responses were needed in less than a week, Mr. Uhlfelder requested estimates or general descriptions of the amount of student writing required as opposed to time-consuming analyses of the situation. The following questions were posed for all SUS universities:

1. How do universities ensure adherence to the Gordon Rule, and are courses tracked, transcripts checked, and courses identified in catalogs as meeting the Gordon Rule requirements?
2. What is the estimated percentage of the undergraduate, lower-level student population that is exposed to essay-response testing within the first two years at each institution?

To summarize university responses to the Gordon Rule question, all SUS institutions adhere strictly to the Gordon Rule requirements. Courses meeting the requirements are clearly identified, and compliance is built into the Student Academic Support System (SASS), as well as through other audits and course tracking. Although there may be university differences in their processes for compliance, it is clear from the university responses that this requirement is a priority at each institution.

University responses indicate that between 80 and 100 percent of the students at each institution are exposed to essay-response testing in lower-division coursework, with most institutions reporting that all of their students have this experience during their first two years in college. University responses show that most lower-division students are repeatedly exposed to tests that have at least some essay component.

UNIVERSITY RESPONSES

Florida A&M University

Gordon Rule: The University ensures students' adherence to the Gordon Rule through its General Education Sequence. Students complete the writing portion of Gordon Rule Requirement in the following courses that are required of all students:

ENC 1101: Freshman Composition I	9,000 words
ENC 1102: Freshman Composition II	9,000 words
AMH 2091: Introduction to African American History	2,000 words

OR

AMH 3104: African American Experience	2,000 words
Humanities Requirement 1	3,000 words
Humanities Requirement 2	3,000 words

In addition, students may take other Gordon Rule courses. For instance, many take the following course:

SPC 2600; Public Speaking	3,000 words
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The mathematics requirement under Gordon Rule may be completed through college algebra or any higher-level mathematics course.

Gordon Rule courses are tracked on the students' transcripts. Upon completion of the Gordon Rule requirements, "Gordon Rule Completed" is placed on the students' transcripts. Gordon Rule courses are listed in the University catalog and are identified in the Student Academic Support System (SASS). It is the academic advisor's responsibility to advise students to complete the General Education Sequence, which includes the Gordon Rule courses for both English/humanities and mathematics; however, the Registrar's Office ensures that students complete Gordon Rule before they are admitted to the upper division. Further, using the SASS degree audit, chairpersons of each department and deans and directors of the different schools, colleges, and institutes check for students' completion of all state mandates and major requirements before certifying students for graduation.

Essay Testing: All students at the University are exposed to essay-response questions during their first two years at the institution, both in the required English composition courses and in an array of courses in other disciplines that are completed as part of general education. Some of the other disciplines that require students to answer essay-response questions are the humanities and the social sciences. Courses in mathematics, computer and information sciences, and science also require constructed responses that require students to express answers in grammatically correct narrative form.

Florida Atlantic University

Gordon Rule: The University publishes Gordon Rule requirements along with a list of those courses that satisfy both Gordon Rule writing and mathematic requirements in the Undergraduate Catalog (see pp. 106-7 of the current catalog). Students' satisfaction of these requirements is checked as part of routine Student Academic Support System (SASS) audits as part of the advising process, and through degree audits by associate deans within the respective colleges prior to graduation. Each student's compliance with this and all requirements is verified through the degree certification process. Satisfaction of Gordon Rule requirements is noted on transcripts, as well as within the SASS and FACTS systems as noted above.

Essay Testing: This information is not available in any readily obtainable form. It would require a survey, which is not possible within the time frame specified. Nonetheless, it is possible to report that the importance of writing throughout the curriculum is widely recognized and supported at FAU. This is evidenced through such activities as the creation of the University Center for Excellence in Writing; see <http://www.fau.edu.divdept/schmidt/UCEW/about.htm> for

a description of this important effort. It is also supported by the desire of many faculty members to incorporate writing assignments and essay questions into classes. The Board of Governors should be made aware, however, of the direct relationship between the availability of adequate funding for universities and the ability of universities to provide classes with enrollment levels that allow increased writing assignments. It should be clear to all concerned that writing assignments and essay examinations require significant amounts of time for grading and this level of time commitment is restricted as class sizes increase when budgets are reduced or inadequately supported.

Florida Gulf Coast University

Gordon Rule: At Florida Gulf Coast University, we strictly adhere to Gordon Rule principles. All courses with Gordon rule requirements are designated as such. They are continually evaluated for efficacy.

Essay Testing: All of our students take essay-response tests within the first two years at FGCU.

Florida International University

Gordon Rule: Through the university curriculum process, faculty members have developed and approved specific writing courses within the University's Core Curriculum as Gordon Rule courses. *"Students must successfully complete twelve hours of writing courses with a grade of "C" or better. Each of these approved courses requires a least 6,000 words of written work."*

Students are required to take two three-credit courses in English Composition and two three-credit courses in Humanities with writing within the University Core Curriculum.

Gordon Rule compliance is built into the Student Academic Support System (SASS), the electronic degree audit system. When students complete the University Core Curriculum, they will have completed the Gordon Rule requirements. All units use SASS at the time of application for graduation to ensure completion. Department Chairpersons also periodically review course syllabi to ensure compliance at the departmental level. Academic Affairs (VP) ensures that Gordon Rule courses are included in the University Catalog, Advising Manuals, and program of study guides.

Essay Testing: The Departments of English, Philosophy, Religious Studies, and History house the majority of the lower-division undergraduate writing-intensive courses that include the courses used to satisfy the Gordon Rule and University Core Curriculum requirements. In consultation with the chairpersons for these departments, we affirm that all lower-division students are repeatedly exposed to tests that have at least some essay component. Students are also asked to write responsive essays and research papers in the courses offered by these departments.

In the English department, the composition and Approaches to Literature courses require the use of writing skills in a variety of ways including journal writing and formal research essays. There are limited tests in these course because of the nature of the course content; however, students are required to write both short essays (usually three to five typewritten pages) to long essays (usually seven to ten typewritten pages) throughout the course of the semester.

In the Philosophy department, a review of the syllabi shows that approximately 69% of the Philosophical Analysis sections have essay exams. Of the remainder, another 13% use exams composed of short answer questions. The Religious Studies Department uses essay response on

100% of their tests according to the syllabi on file with the Department. A survey of the faculty members in the History department and the syllabi on file shows that 90% of the sections use essay questions on their exams.

Florida State University

Gordon Rule: FSU, along with every other 4-year institution in the state, participates in the Student Academic Support System (SASS), a computerized analysis of each student's earned credit in light of all university, college, and departmental requirements for graduation. The SASS report automatically checks each student's transcript for credit that fulfills Gordon Rule requirements and indicates whether those requirements are met, are in progress, or are not met.

Students find out which courses meet Gordon Rule requirements in several ways: They attend one presentation, "It's All Academic," and one advising session during Orientation that focus on Gordon Rule and other Liberal Studies issues; they are referred to an online "First Contact" book that contains full descriptions of all Liberal Studies courses; their lower-division advisors key in on meeting Gordon Rule requirements as soon as possible; and they use an on-line tool that identifies courses by which Gordon Rule, Liberal Studies, or University requirement are met. Courses that meet Gordon Rule are also identified in the *General Bulletin* in the regular course listings and are listed together in a separate section.

There are several benchmarks built into the system that prevent students from graduating without completing the Gordon Rule requirements. In the first year, Undergraduate Studies monitors the completion of the English and Math Gordon Rule requirements and does not permit students to register unless they are registered for the appropriate courses. In addition, many upper-division degree programs require that students either have earned an A.A. or have completed their Liberal Studies coursework. Students must also have a graduation check with the registrar's office and with their academic department at 90 credit hours. If they delay obtaining these graduation checks, a hold is placed on their record. Finally, when a student files for graduation, the college dean's office checks to ensure that all University requirements have been fulfilled. No student graduates from Florida State University without completing Gordon Rule requirements.

Essay Testing: We reviewed the curriculum master file and did a cursory review of Web syllabi. This revealed a moderate selection of courses that required essay exams. Those with essay exams included AMH 1000, WOH 1023, WOH 1030, ARH 2090, AML 3630, and GEA 1000 (copies available).

We also contacted various departments for information regarding their curricula. Darryl Dickson-Carr in the English indicated that a very high percentage of English and American Literature courses (probably 90% or higher) use the short essay response as a typical format for quizzes and examinations. The reason for the high percentage is the emphasis on the analysis of what is read; tests are therefore rarely strictly objective in nature.

Jeff Tatum (Classics) also indicated that, of the 11 courses in the Classics Department that qualify for Liberal Studies credit, at least 95% would use a short essay format for quizzes and examinations. The courses emphasize the synthesis and analysis of required reading material; therefore, essay responses are typical.

Approximately 90% of the Humanities courses would require an essay exam.

Because students must take a course from either Classics, English, or Humanities to fulfill the Liberal Studies Literature requirement, it would be safe to assume that at least 90% of our native students have, on at least one occasion, been assessed utilizing an essay-response format.

The Undergraduate Policy Committee (UPC) closely monitors the Gordon Rule requirement and course designation (W) by periodically reviewing the writing provisions and assessment protocols. The UPC establishes student learning outcomes and other criteria for individual courses that the committee approves for inclusion in the listings of Gordon rule, multicultural, and skills-competency courses, as well as various subject areas of the Liberal Studies program. The UPC is also responsible for reviewing syllabi for courses proposed as additions to these categories and conducts regular reviews of syllabi of the existing courses for each category. Any course whose syllabus does not clearly include the elements required by the criteria for approval is returned to the department, college, or school with an indication of what needs to be corrected; revised syllabi are subjected to the same review process. Writing proficiency is also tested on the CLAST and will be assessed on the revised SAT starting spring 2005.

New College of Florida

Gordon Rule: Almost all New College courses demand extensive written work that is closely critiqued by faculty. Each student's performance in each course is carefully reviewed by the faculty instructor, who prepares a formal written narrative evaluation in lieu of assigning a grade. Our students are much more likely to be asked to complete research papers and essay exams than students at most institutions. In fact, multiple response examinations are rare at New College, even in the Natural Sciences.

Furthermore, the Independent Study Projects, completed by students during the January Interterm Period, usually require students to submit lengthy written summaries of their work, and in many cases this involves an extensive (often in excess of 25 pages) review of appropriate literature. These projects also are carefully reviewed and evaluated by faculty in narrative format. In order to fulfill graduation requirements, New College students must complete three satisfactory Independent Study Projects.

The student's senior thesis becomes the showcase for writing skills, and the satisfactory completion of a thesis project – also a requirement for graduation – presumes a high quality of writing. Small classes, seminars, tutorials, and thesis collaboration all contribute to the expectation that students will acquire the skills to communicate effectively.

A student's completion of the New College "Liberal Arts Curriculum" requirements assures that he or she has (1) fulfilled SACS mandated General Education requirements, (2) demonstrated competency in mathematics, (3) attained computer literacy, and (4) acquired written and oral skills. The completion of these requirements is tracked and documented by the Registrar's Office. In this way, the Gordon Rule requirements are monitored.

Essay Testing: New College's Writing Resource Center (WRC) annually assesses students' writing competencies. A random sample of admissions essays and thesis excerpts are evaluated using an assessment instrument, the Cognitive Level of Quality of Writing Assessment (CLAQWA). The CLAQWA was developed by researchers to allow for the systematic assessment of writing skills. The instrument assesses four main writing skills categories: how well writers fulfill the assignment objective; writers' organization and development skills; the appropriateness of language use; and grammar and mechanics. The WRC's evaluation process is designed to document changes in the quality of student writing from admission to graduation.

University of Central Florida

Gordon Rule: The College of Arts and Sciences, the "home" of most general education courses, believes in and supports the Gordon Rule since it ensures that writing occurs throughout the curriculum. Courses are identified in the catalog regarding how many words of Gordon Rule they fulfill. The General Education Program (GEP) is structured so that students completing our GEP will fulfill the Gordon Rule. A GEP Committee monitors that program. Individual courses are checked by monitoring syllabi to ensure that the writing in these courses adds up to this amount.

Gordon Rule courses are identified in the catalog as such and are tracked by our Student Academic Support System (SASS) auditing system, which provides a continual evaluation of a student's progress toward completion of all graduation requirements. The GEP is structured in such a way that students completing it will also fulfill the Gordon Rule requirement. Graduation certification depends upon completion of the Gordon Rule, using the SASS audits to verify completion of the Gordon Rule as well as all other graduation requirements.

Essay Testing: All students who begin as freshmen at UCF will do many essay-response tests in the first two years. They will do so in the following classes: Freshmen Comp I and II, the two semester History/Humanities sequence, American National Government, Art History, World Literature, and the other courses designated in the GEP as Gordon Rule classes. In addition, several classes in the major which some students take in the second year are Gordon Rule classes including all upper division classes in History, Philosophy, Humanities, and English.

University of Florida

Gordon Rule: Supervision of the Gordon rule falls under the purview of the General Education Committee, a permanent university committee. This committee decides which courses satisfy 2000-, 4000-, and 6000-word Gordon rule requirements. The committee has a statement of principles and criteria and is fairly strict in their application. The Schedule of Classes indicates each semester which courses are certified for Gordon Rule. Completion of these requirements is tracked and verified for students automatically via the UF computerized tracking system.

Essay Testing: Approximately 80 percent of University students take a writing class in their freshmen year, where they write extensively. In their first two years, literally all our students would take a class that requires essay exams in at least one course. Many will have multiple classes in which they take essay exams.

University of North Florida

Gordon Rule: The Gordon Rule is reviewed in admissions during the evaluation of transfer courses as a part of the admission process and for concurrently enrolled students. To evaluate transferred work from public Florida community colleges and state universities, the Statewide Course Numbering System list of courses by institution that meet or partially fulfill Gordon communication or computation is used. The state articulation agreement for credits by exam is used to award Gordon credit or words on many accelerated mechanisms. We also honor articulation agreements for Associate in Arts degrees from public Florida community colleges and state universities as satisfying these requirements. Admissions also honors statements printed on and electronically traded on public Florida community colleges and state universities' transcripts that indicate the student has satisfied the Gordon requirement. Transfer evaluator discretion and research using an online catalog service is used for out-of-state transfer work. General education coursework common across the US post-secondary educational system is equated to courses identified at UNF. For example ENG 101 English composition for 3 semester hours with a grade of C or better from an out of state institution would be awarded 6000 words of communication like UNF's ENC 1101. The transfer evaluation provides a needs assessment for both the Gordon math and communication requirements. There is an appeals process for students to produce additional documentation attesting to the writing component or Gordon math course equivalency for transfer coursework. These appeals are reviewed by admissions office personnel and, in many cases, the general education committee or a respective department such as Mathematics & Statistics.

The advising areas and registrar's office are also involved. For native students and students who complete the Gordon requirements at UNF after transfer, the course descriptions at UNF contain indications of satisfying portions of the Gordon requirements. For ENC 1101 G(6) English Composition the G(6) means that the course satisfies 6000 words of the 24,000 words of evaluated writing communication portion of Gordon rule if completed with a C or better. G (M) means a course contributes to the computation portion if completed with a C or better. Students are advised as to how to fulfill Gordon deficiencies via the program of study as well as in their advising sessions. Pre-certifications for graduation and graduation certifications also review students' completion of these requirements and ensure Gordon is completed prior to graduation with an Associate in Arts or Bachelor's degree from UNF.

We ensure adherence to the Gordon Rule in our lower-division writing program:

Each of the three courses in our lower-division writing sequence--the sequence required of virtually every FTIC--is designed to offer students the opportunity to earn 6,000 words of Gordon Rule credit. No student may earn Gordon Rule credit in any of these courses without writing a minimum of 6,000 words and earning a grade of C or better. Every syllabus in the writing program specifies the Gordon Rule requirement and makes clear to students both the grade and the word count necessary to qualify for Gordon Rule credit.

Essay Testing: We now administer a timed essay exam to all entering freshmen. We employ the results both for placement and program assessment. We also have begun the administration of a second essay exam for students as they come to the end of our three-course sequence. The results of this exam will help us assess the effectiveness of our efforts. In short, every native

student at UNF is now given two essay exams, one before he (or she) begins to study writing here, and one at the completion of our writing sequence.

An essay "exam" is something different but I would expect this to be an evaluation component of most social science and humanities (philosophy and history) courses so, again, I would think that most (to be conservative -- 80%) would have some kind of essay-short written answer test, or component of a test.

University of South Florida

Gordon Rule: At the University of South Florida, responsibility for ensuring adherence to the Gordon Rule (State Rule 6A-10:30) is assigned primarily to the Dean for Undergraduate Studies. That office has responsibility for coordinating the development and approval of the undergraduate curriculum and individual course approvals, as well as the development of the undergraduate catalog. In those roles, the Dean provides oversight for the Gordon Rule course development and offerings and verifies that Gordon Rule courses are appropriately identified in the Catalog.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the Student Academic Support System (SASS) report for each student includes clear checkpoints for the Gordon Rule courses so students know when they have met the requirement. Moreover, at the University of South Florida, the graduation certification process also includes a specific check to ensure that Gordon Rule requirements are met.

For example, the following note is extracted from the SASS for Biology majors:

NO 25 GORDON RULE (6A-10.30) COMMUNICATION (USF COURSES ONLY)
(GRADES MUST BE C OR BETTER - NO S/U)
-----> NEEDS: 1 SUB-REQ
___ 1) SELECT FROM APPROVED LIST OF GORDON COURSES
NEEDS: 12.00 HOURS 4 COURSES

NO 26 GORDON RULE (6A-10.30) COMPUTATION (FL PUBLIC ONLY)
(GRADES MUST BE C OR BETTER - NO S/U)
-----> NEEDS: 6.00 HOURS 2 SUB-REQS
___ 1) AT LEAST 3 SEM HRS MUST BE MATHEMATICS
___ 2) 3 ADDITIONAL HRS OF MATHEMATICS
___ OR) 3 HRS OF APPROVED LOGIC, STATISTICS, OR COMPUTERS

Essay Testing: Although there may be a small number of first- and second-year students whose class schedules provide for more limited access to classes requiring essay-response testing, we estimate that, at the University of South Florida, 90% or more of freshman and sophomore students are enrolled in multiple courses with such testing in place. A few examples of course offerings that are used by students to fulfill their general education requirements and require essay-response testing are given below:

English: In our First-Year *Composition* courses, we require common syllabi and course requirements that result in assurance that ALL students are evaluated in extensive writing

experiences. The courses fulfill the obligations of Gordon Rule courses, but most, if not all, exceed the 6,000 word requirement. Many instructors do not give exams as such but use multiple major papers for the evaluation process. All of our FTIC students enroll in these courses unless they have credit for both courses from former work in one or more of the acceleration opportunities (AP, IB, CLEP and Dual Credit).

History: The Department of History estimates that 90-95% of students enrolled in *American History I* and *II* (AMH 2010 and 2020) are exposed to essay-response exams. In almost all classes taught by the Department of History (and these include the 2000-level “surveys” in *European, Medieval, and Ancient History*), students are evaluated with “essay-response” tests or with some other form of intensive writing exercise. In “real” terms our enrollments are as follows:

Fall 2003	2000 level: 2,012 students
	3000 level: 491 students
Spring 2004	2000 level: 1,812 students
	3000 level: 550 students

Total enrollment for AY 2003-04 = 4,865 students, more than 90% of whom experience an essay-response test or other form of written evaluation when they take one of our 2000- or 3000-level courses (and these are the ones typically taken during the students’ first two years). However, some of our students do not take their 3000-level (major) coursework until their 3rd and 4th years. At USF, the history department offers 15 or more different courses at this level, many in multiple sections, during each of the fall and spring semesters.

Philosophy: Philosophy courses that are largely populated by FTIC students and include writing and essay-response tests are:

PHH 2000 - *Introduction to Philosophy* (Gordon Rule) – Depending on the instructor, writing requirements may include two short papers plus one term paper or may include a combination of writing opportunities such as essay examinations, a term paper, short answer quizzes, or essay examinations (in class or take home).

PHI 1103 - *Critical Thinking* – Both the lecture and the discussion components of this course involve writing assignments that may include an 8-10 page (2,000-2,500 word) critical paper, essay format mid-term & final exams, short-answer quizzes, and homework assignments.

PHI 1401 - *Critical Reason in Science & Society* – Writing assignments may include 1,500-word essays, quizzes with a variety of question types, homework assignments, and exams.

PHI 1600 - *Introduction to Ethics* – Writing assignments may include essays, short-answer or essay examinations, and term papers.

PHI 2631 - *Business & Ethics* – Writing assignments may include written case analyses (5-7 pages each) and cumulative short answer quizzes plus a written case study.

Anthropology: The Department of Anthropology estimates that 95% of the lower-level students in Anthropology must complete some kind of writing-intensive assignment in their classes. Anthropology classes that are taken primarily by first- and second-year students, and that always include some written essay response in tests and usually require some essay work outside the tests, are:

ANT 2000 - *Introduction to Anthropology*; ANT 2410 - *Cultural Anthropology*; ANT 2511 - *Biological Anthropology*; ANT 3101 – *Archaeology*; and ANT 3610 – *Linguistics*.

During this current spring semester, 1,215 students, mostly first or second year students, are enrolled in sections of these courses.

In conclusion, I have the utmost confidence in the University of South Florida's adherence to the Gordon Rule. Our multilevel system of verification ensures that all USF graduates meet the statewide requirement. Moreover, the percentage of lower-level students exposed to essay-response testing in any one semester at the University of South Florida is estimated at between 90-100%.

University of West Florida

Gordon Rule: Gordon Rule courses are approved through the CCR process, including Faculty Senate approval. Student's progress in meeting the Gordon Rule is tracked through the student record system and is listed on the student's degree audit. Transcripts of transfer students are evaluated for Gordon Rule courses when the students enter UWF. Courses that meet Gordon Rule at UWF are listed in our Catalog.

Essay Testing: Our estimate of the percentage of our lower-level student population that is exposed to an essay-response is at least 85%. The percentage was determined after consulting with the English, social science, and humanities areas on campus.