



On Moving to a Universal First-Year Writing Requirement at UVA

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UVA currently exempts one-third of the first-year class based on their score on a 25-minute SAT writing exam. Not only is the exam a poor measure of writing ability, but our exemption policy has led both students and faculty to conceive of first-year writing courses as remedial rather than recognizing their role in helping all students develop into more thoughtful and capable writers.

Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Duke, Michigan, and UNC-Chapel Hill (among others) don't allow any of their students to exempt first-year writing, regardless of SAT or AP scores. These universities offer writing courses meant to challenge all students, regardless of their high school record. Inspired by this approach, the UVA Writing Program has hired eleven new faculty members over the past three years to create rigorous first-year writing courses that engage our students in critical inquiry, rhetorical awareness, research writing, and a final project that combines oral presentation with digital production.

Recent University-wide writing assessments in 2009 and 2015 have shown that only a small percentage of our fourth-year students are strong writers, and faculty across the curriculum regularly express their frustration with student writing. A universal first-year writing requirement won't solve these problems on its own, but it can serve as a major first step in the right direction. Additional resources for the second writing requirement, where students learn to compose in specific disciplinary discourses, will be forthcoming from the President's Office in 2017.

With these factors in mind, the Curriculum Planning Committee proposes that UVA move to a universal first-year requirement. Students will be able to meet this requirement in a variety of ways:

- An array of advanced, honors-level writing courses for those who arrive with considerable skills in hand
- A challenging introductory writing course intended for the majority of our first-year students
- A year-long writing course that includes tutoring in the Writing Center for students who arrive in need of additional preparation

These choices will allow students to meet the first writing requirement in more ways than they can at present, and it will ensure that those who currently exempt the requirement have the option to take advanced courses intended to help them truly excel as writers.