SPECIAL REPORT

of the

UNIVERSITY WRITING COMMITTEE

concerning

REVISION TO THE POLICY ON USING NON-UMASS COURSES TO SATISFY THE JUNIOR YEAR WRITING REQUIREMENT

Presented at the 808th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate

On November 18, 2021

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Background
The issue of Junior Year Writing (JYW) course substitutions was brought before the University Writing Committee for discussion by the JYW Associate Directors. Currently, decisions about whether or not courses taken outside of UMass can be counted toward JYW credits are made by the UPD/CUA and the College Academic Dean who submit decisions to the Registrar and the University Writing Committee. This current policy needs to be revised so that the University Writing Committee members and the Associate Directors of JYW are involved in making decisions about which courses may be substituted and which may not be. Additionally, the UWC has suggested changes to the language of the current policy to better articulate who makes decisions about UMass-based JYW course substitutions in the major.
UWC Observations
The current policy governing course substitution decisions states:

The university’s policy is that students must fulfill the junior year writing requirement (JYW) by taking an approved JYW course at UMass. All JYW courses should be upper-level courses in the discipline (i.e., equivalent to major courses offered at the 300-level or above) and meet the university-wide requirements for junior-year writing courses; see www.umass.edu/writingprogram/jy/expectations.html. JYW courses do not only assign writing; more so, as a Gen Ed and major requirement, JYW courses ought to teach writing—more specifically, advanced writing in the major—by engaging students in regular writing and revision based on peer and instructor feedback.

Under exceptional circumstances, a non-UMass course may be approved as fulfilling the JYW requirement at UMass. For example: A student who majors in a modern language may make the case for a writing-intensive, upper-level course offered in a study abroad program, especially if an equivalent course is not offered at UMass. A student who is no longer in residence at Amherst and who must complete his/her degree remotely may need to find a non-UMass course that satisfies the requirements above if returning to UMass is not possible. Or a student pursuing a second bachelor’s degree may request to waive the JYW requirement if his/her first bachelor’s degree included upper-level courses that taught writing relevant to his/her current major at UMass.

Regardless of extenuating circumstances, the following courses would not satisfy the JYW requirement: lower-level (equivalent to our university’s 100-or 200-level) undergraduate courses; upper-level courses that only assign writing but do not teach writing and thus do not meet university-wide requirements; upper-level courses that teach writing but not writing relevant to the student’s major.

To request that a non-UMass course fulfill the JYW requirement at UMass Amherst:

1. A student must submit the following to the Undergraduate Program Director or Chief Undergraduate Advisor in his/her major: (a) rationale for why it is necessary to take a non-UMass course to fulfill the JYW requirement, (b) syllabus for the proposed JYW course substitution and other relevant documents as needed, and (c) an explanation of how the course meets the university-wide JYW requirements.

2. If supporting the request, the UPD/CUA should then indicate his/her approval and forward the student’s request to his/her School or College Academic Dean for final approval.

3. The Academic Dean should notify the Registrar and University Writing Committee (uwritingcommittee@acad.umass.edu) about approved JYW course substitutions. To notify the Registrar, please attach the Dean’s approval letter to either a Registrar Prior Approval Form or the Senior
Year in Absentia Form (whichever is appropriate) and forward to the Registrar’s office.
The expectation is that requests for JYW course substitutions from departments will be rare.

Questions that have arisen include: Who ultimately determines appropriate course substitutions, i.e., Academic Deans, Department Heads/Chairs, or the UWC? Is this policy for UMass classes or non-UMass classes? And, who decides whether UMass JYW courses from one major may count toward another major?

UWC Recommends
The University Writing Committee Recommends the following policy change:

The university’s policy is that students must fulfill the junior year writing requirement (JYW) by taking an approved JYW course at UMass. All JYW courses should be upper-level courses in the discipline (i.e., equivalent to major courses offered at the 300-level or above) and meet the university-wide requirements for junior-year writing courses; see www.umass.edu/writingprogram/jy/expectations.html. JYW courses do not only assign writing; more so, as a Gen Ed and major requirement, JYW courses ought to teach advanced writing in the major by engaging students in regular writing and revision based on peer and instructor feedback. This policy supersedes any past policy on JYW course substitutions.

Under exceptional circumstances, a non-UMass course may be approved as fulfilling the JYW requirement at UMass. For example: A student who majors in a modern language may make the case for a writing-intensive, upper-level course offered in a study abroad program, especially if an equivalent course is not offered at UMass. A student who is no longer in residence on the UMass Amherst campus and who must complete his/her/their degree remotely may need to find a non-UMass course that satisfies the requirements above if returning to UMass is not possible. Or a student pursuing a second bachelor’s degree may request to waive the JYW requirement if his/her/their first bachelor’s degree included upper-level courses that taught writing relevant to his/her/their current major at UMass.

Most students should request approval for a JYW course substitution before taking the course. Prior approval will enable students to make informed decisions when planning their courses. However, transfer students may need to request a JYW course substitution after having taken the proposed upper-level course.

To request that a non-UMass course fulfill the JYW requirement at UMass Amherst:

1. Students must submit the following to the Undergraduate Program Director, Chief Undergraduate Advisor, or Department Chair in his/her/their major:
   1. rationale for why it is necessary to take a non-UMass course to fulfill the JYW requirement,
2. syllabus for the proposed JYW course substitution and other relevant documents as needed, and
3. an explanation of how the course meets the university-wide JYW requirements.

2. The following would not be approved as JYW course substitutions:
   a. lower-level (equivalent to our university’s 100- or 200-level) undergraduate courses;
   b. upper-level courses that only assign writing but do not teach writing and thus do not meet university-wide requirements;
   c. upper-level courses that teach writing but not writing relevant to the student’s major.

3. If supporting the request, the UPD/CUA or Chair should then indicate his/her/their approval to and forward the student’s request to one of the Associate Directors for the Junior Year Writing Program. The request will be quickly reviewed by the Junior Year Writing Variance Committee (a subcommittee of the University Writing Committee).

4. The JYW Variance Committee will notify UPD/CUA or Chair (and cc-the Registrar) with the decision.

5. The UPD/CUA or Chair should then notify the appropriate College Dean who will then notify the Registrar, attaching the JYW Variance Committee’s approval letter as well as a Registrar Prior Approval Form or the Senior Year in Absentia Form (whichever is appropriate) and forward to the Registrar’s office.

Note: This policy addresses requests to use non-UMass courses to satisfy the JYW course requirement. Students interested in taking a JYW course at UMass that’s outside of their major should (1) make sure that the proposed course is designated as a junior-year writing course and (2) request approval from their UPD/CUA.

The UPD/CUA of the student’s primary major may approve proposals to accept JYW courses offered by a different major at UMass; the University Writing Committee does not need to review these types of course substitutions if the course has already been approved as a junior-year writing course. Because junior-year writing courses are often restricted to particular majors, students may need to request instructor permission to enroll in junior-year writing courses outside of their own major.

MOTION: That the Faculty Senate approve Revision of the Policy On Using Non-UMass Courses to Satisfy the Junior Year Writing Requirement, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 22-025.