

**Quality Control and Maintaining Educational Standards:
A Proposal to Increase Undergraduate Residency Requirements and Raise
Standards for Awarding Advanced Placement and International
Baccalaureate Credit**

There is increasing pressure from accrediting bodies to hold institutions of higher education accountable for their effectiveness in student learning. Middle States Commission on Higher Education is revising its accreditation standards to include greater emphasis on institutional assessment and the assessment of student learning. Similarly, the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) has made assessment a major component in accreditation.

A number of procedures (e.g., curricular reforms, program reviews, accreditation) are in place to ensure that GW students receive an excellent educational experience on campus. However, both nationally and at GW, more students are matriculating with substantial advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) credits, more are studying abroad for one or two semesters, and many obtain credit for summer school and community college courses taken elsewhere. Thus, one cannot presume that all the educational components making up a GW baccalaureate degree are of consistently high quality. Moreover, GW's school-specific residency requirements may unintentionally serve to further compromise educational standards.

The AVPAPSP was charged with reviewing current policies and practices regarding the granting of transfer, study abroad, and AP/IB credit. The intent of this review was to ensure that GW's policies and procedures maintain high educational standards. What follows is a summary of where students earn college credit followed by two recommendations: 1) establishing a university-wide residency requirement in addition to the school-specific requirements and 2) limiting the number of AP/IB credits that can be counted as part of a baccalaureate degree.

***The making of a GW baccalaureate:
Where students earn their college credit***

At the present time, about two-thirds of GW students spend their eight semesters in residence¹ (see Table 1). (The percentage of ESIA students who spend eight semesters in residence is much smaller.) Of the remaining third who are in residence for fewer than eight semesters, most (69%) study abroad for at least one semester (Tables 2 through 4). Others use a combination of Advanced

¹ These findings are based on a review of the transcripts of 600 randomly selected GW undergraduates¹ who graduated in 2001 and matriculated as full-time freshmen. This study does not take into account students who enter as transfer students or as part-time students who ultimately earn their degrees from GW.

Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) credit, summer study abroad, and summer classes at GW and other institutions to fulfill requirements for graduation and to earn enough credits to graduate. Only 17% of the latter group used credits earned solely through AP/IB exams or summer school credit to graduate in less than eight semesters. Instead, AP/IB and summer school credit fills in the gaps, when students earn fewer than 15 credits in a given semester.

Table 1. Time spent at GW based on transcripts of 600 randomly selected 2001 graduates

	Total	CCAS	ESIA	SBPM	SEAS
Graduated 2001	600	425	93	58	24
Enrolled full-time 8 or more semesters	387 (65%)	295 (69%)	37 (40%)	37 (64%)	18 (75%)
Enrolled full-time 7 semesters	140 (23%)	88 (21%)	31 (33%)	16 (28%)	5 (21%)
Enrolled full-time 6 semesters	63 (10%)	34 (8%)	23 (25%)	5 (9%)	1 (4%)
Enrolled full-time < 6 semesters	10 (2%)	8 (2%)	2 (2%)	0	0

Table 2. Of those above who were enrolled full-time for 7 semesters at GW

	Total	CCAS	ESIA	SBPM	SEAS
N	140	88	31	16	5
Studied abroad 1 semester	101 (72%)	60 (68%)	26 (84%)	15 (94%)	0
AP/IB/other college credit	18 (3%)	14 (3%)	2 (2%)	0	2 (8%)

Table 3. Of those who were enrolled full-time for 6 semesters

	Total	CCAS	ESIA	SBPM	SEAS
N	63	34	23	5	1
Studied abroad 2 semesters	26 (41%)	12 (35%)	14 (61%)	0	0
Studied abroad 1 semester	18 (29%)	11 (32%)	5 (22%)	2 (40%)	0
AP/IB/other college credit	10 (16%)	8 (24%)	2 (9%)	2 (40%)	0

Table 4. Of those who were enrolled full-time less than 6 semesters

	Total	CCAS	ESIA	SBPM	SEAS
N	10	8	2	0	0
Studied abroad 1 semester	1 (10%)	0	1 (50%)	-	-
AP/IB/other college credit	9 (90%)	8 (100%)	1 (50%)	-	-

Credit by examination

Upon admission to the University, GW may assign up to a maximum of 30 credit hours for any combination of AP, IB², CLEP and other credits by examination when test scores or grades meet the standards established by GW. The number of GW freshmen entering with multiple AP credits has increased substantially over the past four years.

In 2001, 834 freshmen had earned at least three college credits before they enrolled in their first class at GW. More importantly, compared to prior years, there was an increase in the number of AP courses and exams that each student took. In one year, the number and percentage of students who entered GW with 10 or more AP credits tripled (see Table 5). In 2001, 324 students, representing 14% of the freshman class, entered with 10 or more AP credits; in 2000 the number was 112 students or 5% of the class. Given the increased availability of AP courses in high school, one can assume that the number of freshmen entering with any or a significant number of AP credits will increase in the future.

² At this point, the number of students entering with International Baccalaureate credit is very small. It is expected to increase in the next few years as more American public high schools offer IB programs. For the purposes of this report, only AP credit will be discussed.

Table 5. Number of students entering with 10+ AP credits: 1995-2001*.

Matriculation Year	Students with 10+ credits	Percentage of freshmen class with AP credit
1995	40	3%
1996	62	4%
1998	93	5%
1999	119	6%
2000	112	5%
2001	324	14%

* AP scores were not available for students entering in 1997.

Study Abroad

Once matriculated, GW students are encouraged to study abroad. Approximately 40%³ of the undergraduates study abroad sometime during their GW career. Over the past five years, there has been a steady increase in the number of students going abroad (see Table 6). In academic year 2000-01, 569 students studied in 41 countries. This year, it is anticipated that 640 students will study abroad.

Table 6. Number of participants in study abroad programs

School	Participants 1997-1998	Participants 1998-1999	Participants 1999-2000	Participants 2000-2001
CCAS	115	179	201	264
ESIA	113	139	150	179
SBPM	39	70	68	122
SEAS	2	1	4	4
TOTAL	269	389	423	569

Study abroad opportunities include programs that meet GW's standards for academic quality, environmental security, and intercultural experience and have

³ The percentage represents self-reported data taken from student responses on the graduating senior survey.

an established affiliation with GW (i.e., GW study centers, exchange programs, and affiliated program such as Council for International Education). More than half of the participating students were enrolled in a program with no affiliation with GW, making academic and other quality control issues very difficult to manage (see Table 7).

Table 7. Types of programs in which students study abroad

Program Category	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
Madrid Study Center	35	46	57
Exchanges	19	19	18
Affiliated Programs	110	133	125
Unaffiliated Programs	275	238	348
ALL*	439	436	548

*Data reported for 2000-2001 does not include academic year participants as data for 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 did not include them.

In the summer of 2001, a Study Abroad Task Force⁴ reviewed current practices and policies and offered a number of excellent recommendations. Of relevance to this report is the recommendation that the Office of Study Abroad “create a list of approved study abroad programs that emphasizes GW’s study centers, exchange programs, and affiliated programs.” These programs would “exemplify the professional standards and practice of education abroad and establish means for program evaluation and eventual assessment of learning outcomes.”

The careful evaluation of study abroad programs and the creation of such a list would go a long way in exercising a measure of quality control on students’ overseas experiences.

Summer School Courses

During any given summer, less than 10% of GW’s undergraduates enroll in and get credit for summer school courses taken elsewhere. They earn an average of five credit hours during the summer.

In an analysis of summer transfer transcripts of 746 SBPM undergraduates, Carrie Harris, Director of Advising in SBPM, found that a majority of the students took the summer courses in order to reduce their fall or spring semester course load to 12 credits or to make up a failing grade or withdrawn course. The reduction in credit hours enabled them to partake of the many internships, co-ops, ROTC, study abroad, and part-time job opportunities available to our undergraduates. The same reasons apply to students in the other undergraduate schools.

⁴ A copy of the report is available from Lynn Leonard, Director of the Office of Study Abroad.

Many students elect to take courses that fulfill general curriculum requirements. For example, in the summer of 1998, over 40% of the students enrolled in introductory courses in biology, economics, mathematics, and statistics⁵. These courses are taken at community colleges or public institutions near students' home. Only 14% took summer courses at private colleges or universities.

Students' choice of a summer school is largely a financial one. Many work during the summer to earn money to help defray some of their educational expenses. Anticipated summer earnings are included in the formula that the Office of Student Financial Assistance uses to determine need-based aid. Moreover, financial aid does not cover summer courses taken at GW.

Only those students who can afford to pay the entire summer school tuition have the luxury of taking courses at GW. A study of the graduation rates of students who after eight semesters full-time at GW had not graduated showed that most of those who ultimately earned a baccalaureate degree did not receive need-based aid while undergraduates. Most of those who had not earned their degrees two or three years beyond when they should have graduated had great financial need and were not eligible (or had not applied) for additional financial aid.

Allowing students the elasticity to take summer courses elsewhere, at substantial savings, has a positive affect on student satisfaction, retention, and time to graduation. It serves as a safety net for students who have reduced their academic year course load (either through failure, withdrawal, or by choice) and keeps them on track as they make academic progress.

GW's undergraduate residency requirements

Residency requirements serve as one mechanism of quality control for college degrees. By insisting that students take (and maintain established standards of scholarship in) a minimum number of courses, in upper level courses and during their final year(s), colleges can assume that its graduates have met the criteria for a degree and have learned what the college or major department thinks is important for students to learn.

Residency requirements for each of the undergraduate schools at GW vary considerably in terms of length in and timing of residence, with exceptions for those who study abroad. Under the current policy, it is possible to earn a baccalaureate degree in engineering or business by taking only 30 credit hours at GW. SBPM further states that at least 27 credit hours must be taken in business or accountancy courses in SBPM. CCAS stipulates that 45 of the last 60 credits must be completed in residence, and ESIA policy states that 60 of the

⁵ Of the 627 undergraduates who received summer transfer credit, 42 (7%) enrolled in Biology 3, 4, 11 or 12; 69 (11%) enrolled in Economics 11 or 12; 68 (11%) enrolled in Math 9, 10, 20, 21, 31, 32, 33, 51, or 52; and 78 (12%) enrolled in Statistics 51, 53, 105, 111, and 112.

final 90 hours must be completed in residence. Those who study abroad must complete 45 of their final 75 in CCAS or 45 of their final 90 credits in the Elliott School. Moreover, SBPM is the only school stipulating that once a student earns 66 credits, transfer credits from community colleges will not be accepted.

Current residency requirements are such that there is no guarantee that GW graduates have taken courses outside their major field while at GW. All the undergraduate schools require that students take a number of general education courses, affirming the importance of exposure to the humanities, social and natural sciences, and, in some schools, the creative and performing arts. However, students with appropriate AP credit may waive many or all of their general curriculum requirements except in foreign language or culture (which is not required in all schools). One may argue that by waiving these courses, the school allows the overall college intellectual experience to be diminished. Moreover, replacing GW courses with credits from other sources may compromise the quality of GW's baccalaureate degrees.

It is imperative that GW incorporate quality control in its criteria for awarding baccalaureate degrees. By requiring that students spend more than half of their undergraduate career in residence at GW, by limiting the application of AP and IB credits to general curriculum courses, and by carefully selecting sources of exchange and affiliated study abroad programs, GW will maintain its high standard of quality and be assured that its degrees are synonymous with a quality educational experience.

Recommendations

1. ***Institute common residency requirements across GW's undergraduate schools.*** *Proposed policy:* Students who enter GW as freshmen must complete a minimum of 75 credit hours in residence at GW. For those who enter as transfer students, a minimum of 60 credit hours must be completed in residence at GW. Study abroad courses taken at GW study centers or through GW exchange and affiliated programs may be counted toward the GW residency requirement. Students should consult the regulations for their individual schools about school-specific residency requirements.
2. ***Raise the standards for AP and IB credit.*** Currently, undergraduate credit is assigned for Advanced Placement test scores of 4 or 5 and International Baccalaureate scores of 4 or above. *Proposed policy:* Undergraduate credit will be assigned for a score of 5 on AP examinations and 6 or 7 on International Baccalaureate examinations. AP scores of 4 and IB scores of 5 may be used to place students in a higher-level course in the same subject area.
3. ***Limit to 15 the number of AP/IB credits that may be counted towards the baccalaureate degree.*** GW's current policy on advanced standing and

advanced placement states that a maximum of 30 credit hours may be assigned upon admission to the University for any combination of AP/IB, CLEP, and other credits by examination. *Proposed policy:* Only 15 credits earned through advanced placement or international baccalaureate exams may be counted towards a student's baccalaureate degree. AP scores may be used to waive introductory courses in the same subject, making students eligible to enroll in more advanced courses. Students may not use AP or IB English composition or language test scores to fulfill any general writing or literacy requirements or to waive any writing development courses.

4. ***Require students to take an appropriate general curriculum course in subject areas for which they earned AP/IB credit.*** *Proposed policy:* Students may use only 3 of the AP/IB credits to satisfy a particular general curriculum requirement⁶.
5. ***Students who successfully complete 60 hours at GW may not earn credit for summer courses taken at community colleges.***

⁶ At most, Columbian College students would be required to take at least one college course in English composition, quantitative and logical reasoning, natural and physical sciences, social and behavior sciences, and humanities. SBPM students would be required to take two non-business elective courses, one English composition, and one science course at GW. Those in ESIA would have to take at least one course in math or science, humanities, social science, western culture, and English composition. SEAS students would have to take one course each in the humanities and the social sciences.