A Brief History of the Gordon Rule at Miami Dade College

The Original Gordon Rule

After Jack Gordon’s death in 2005, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), the State Board of Education, and the Florida Board of Governors adopted revisions to Administrative Rule 6A-10.030, commonly referred to as the “Gordon Rule". Originally introduced in the state legislature by Senator Jack Gordon in 1987, this rule was envisioned as a means of preparing first and second-year college students to succeed in their education, career, and life through the development of critical, analytical, and communication skills. With this purpose in mind, this law required every public post-secondary student to enroll in and complete, with a grade of “C” or higher, twelve hours of coursework in English and/or the humanities, provided that each of the four three-hour courses required written work of six thousand words, and to take six hours of college-level mathematics. Later this rule was modified so as to permit an institution to provide an alternative plan that would accomplish the same educational goals.

The Newly-revised Gordon Rule

The new revisions passed in November 2005 were “intended to provide institutions with greater flexibility in determining their Gordon Rule curriculum rather than relying on a prescriptive word count.” As a consequence of this modification, the original prescribed 24,000 word count requirement for communications was replaced with a requirement for “multiple assignments” (to be defined by each institution)” and requires the following:

1. Six semester hours of English coursework and six semester hours of additional

coursework in which the student is required to demonstrate college-level writing skills

through multiple assignments. Each institution shall designate the courses that fulfill the writing requirements of this section. These course designations shall be submitted to the Statewide Course Numbering System (SCNS). An institution to which a student transfers shall accept courses so designated by the sending institution as meeting the writing requirements outlined in this section.

1. A grade of “C” or higher shall be considered successful completion for each of these courses.

The rationale behind these modifications was greater flexibility in the creation, implementation, and assessment of College-level writing by the individual institutions. In contrast to the original Gordon Rule, the modified version emphasizes quality rather than quantity and decentralizes academic decision-making. Rather than defining student success on a quantitative basis, students will now have to demonstrate college-level writing skills in multiple college-level writing assignments. Furthermore, the modified rule encourages individual institutions to take ownership of the new requirements, especially in terms of creating assignments that are discipline specific and that adhere to institution-wide proficiency standards.

Miami Dade College’s Response: Process and Recommendations

In the late summer of 2006, a Task Force, appointed by the Provost for Academic and Student Affairs and composed of faculty, staff, and administrators, convened for the purposes of establishing Miami Dade College’s Gordon Rule writing and course requirements. The Gordon Rule Task Force’s (GRTF) goal was to define the criteria for “multiple college-level writing assignments” and to draft a writing rubric, guidelines, and an assessment process. What followed were several months of intense faculty-centered dialogue and deliberation. Ultimately, the GRTF’s recommendations were approved by the Miami Dade College (MDC) College Academic and Student Support Council (CASSC) in December 2006.

On the one hand, these recommendations define what constitutes “college-level writing” as well as prescribe the number of assignments and the appropriate formats to be used:

1. At least 3 (three) “college-level writing assignments” per course
2. “College-level writing assignments” be defined as having the following descriptors:
   1. A clearly defined central idea or thesis
   2. An adequate support for that idea
   3. Clear, logical organization
   4. Usage of the conventions of standard edited American English
   5. A format appropriate to the assignment
3. “Assignments” that provide evidence of college-level writing may include, but are not limited to the following:
4. Essays
5. Project plans
6. Written examinations
7. Interviews
8. Case studies
9. Evaluated drafts
10. Process papers
11. Lab reports
12. Research papers
13. Reviews
14. Feasibility studies
15. Discussion question responses
16. Reports
17. Business plans
18. Portfolios
19. Journals
20. Manuals
    1. “Assignments” that do not provide evidence of college-level writing include the following:
       1. Resumes
       2. Creative Writing
       3. E-mails (short/informal)
       4. Annotations
       5. Free writing exercises
       6. PowerPoint presentations
       7. Brainstorming
       8. One-minute (very short) papers

The GRTF also recommended assessment procedures for the implementation of the aforementioned criteria. These recommendations were revisited after the GRTF completed its mandate in December 2006, and the Provost established the Gordon Rule Writing Committee (GRWC), composed of key academic and student affairs administrators and faculty from Gordon Rule Writing disciplines. This committee’s purpose is an ongoing one: to work with cross-college discipline committees to strengthen and assess the Gordon Rule Writing courses and to refine and, as necessary to adapt the criteria to reflect the forms of college-level writing appropriate to the disciplines offering Gordon Rule Writing courses. Similarly, the discipline committees, in conjunction with the Gordon Rule Writing Committee, may refine for the respective disciplines the types of assignments as well as the rubrics to be used in assessing them.

After further discussion and consensus building, the GRWC has modified the original assessment recommendations to include the following:

* + - 1. The Gordon Rule Writing Committee will work with the discipline committees to assure that the State-mandated Gordon Rule Writing requirements are met and that the MDC guidelines are followed.
      2. Faculty teaching Gordon Rule writing courses will include in their syllabi appropriate writing assignments that fully demonstrate students’ college-level writing skills.
      3. Faculty teaching Gordon Rule writing courses will use the Miami Dade College writing rubric or a discipline-specific rubric developed in conjunction with the Gordon Rule Writing Committee to evaluate students’ writing skills.
         1. Discipline-specific rubrics will be prepared by the discipline committee, will be reviewed by the Gordon Rule Writing Committee, and will be uniformly applied as an assessment instrument in all Gordon Rule courses in that discipline.
  1. Faculty will share the MDC or discipline-specific rubric with students.

1. The Gordon Rule Writing Committee, in concert with Institutional Research and the discipline conveners, will develop an assessment process and will prepare a Gordon Rule Writing *Institutional Effectiveness* report.
2. Based upon the assessment process and definition provided by the discipline committee, faculty teaching Gordon Rule Writing courses in that discipline will award a course grade that takes into account student proficiency in college-level writing. During the implementation period, a course grade of “C” or higher will be awarded only if students have demonstrated college-level writing skills as measured by the MDC or discipline-specific writing rubric in addition to the course grade requirements established for the course. The course syllabus will clearly state that a course grade of “C” or higher will be awarded only if students have demonstrated college-level writing skills.
   * 1. .