UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

–SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND APPLIED SCIENCES–

Definition of Writing Competency:

Competent Writers

1. Produce prose that is correct with regard to grammar, diction, spelling, and sentence structure.
2. Design documents that exhibit an understanding of audience, occasion, purpose and structure.
3. Frame introductions that quickly and reliably establish context and signal a document's purpose to its readers.
4. Delineate methods, present results, and reach conclusions that are logical and clear.
5. Produce coherent and cohesive document subsections and paragraphs.
6. Integrate appropriate graphics into the text and document sources in a correct and consistent style.

Standards for Competency:

Writing samples were evaluated on the basis of a four-point scale (4 =consistently, 1 = seldom or never) for frequency of demonstrated competence on ten criteria including overall design, style, introduction, methods, results, interpretation, organization, graphics, documentation, and mechanics. Overall, a score of 1, 2, 3, or 4 was assigned to each thesis (4 = strong competence, 1 = incompetence or occasional competence). Each thesis was evaluated twice and the final score is the average of the two. (See the following web site for the detailed scoring rubric: http://www.web.virginia.edu/iaas2/public/reports/subject/competencies/2002/writingrubric.pdf)

Description of Methodology Used to Gather Evidence of Writing Competency:

A panel of independent, trained faculty evaluators assessed a random sample of senior theses equal to 7% of the seniors who complete a thesis in the reporting year. Results of the thesis evaluations are reported every three years.

Results for spring 2002 assessment:		
N, % strong competence:	11	42%
N, % reasonably consistent competence:	14	54%
N, % developing competence:	1	04%
N, % incompetent or occasional competence:	0	0%

(See the following web site for a discussion of examples of each performance level: http://www.web.virginia.edu/iaas2/public/reports/subject/competencies/2002/writingexample.pdf)

Summary:

In their overall assessment, the evaluators described the theses as complex, lengthy documents that were generally well written and effectively communicated to non-expert audiences and that represented a real accomplishment for the students who completed them. Although the assessment guide placed little explicit emphasis on writing for non-expert audiences, the ability to communicate technical material to a non-expert audience played a significant role in the evaluation of many theses. The thesis is a very demanding communications task for the students.

We expect that the evaluations may well have been higher overall if the same students had been writing about non-technical subject matter.