

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION (UCOPE) ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13

TO THE ASSEMBLY OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE:

During the 2012-13 academic year, the University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) met twice and the UCOPE-EMS (English for Multilingual Students) Advisory Group met once. Both groups considered matters in accordance with their duties as set forth in Senate Bylaw 192, which states that UCOPE shall advise the President on matters relating to preparatory and remedial education (including the language needs of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds); monitor and conduct periodic reviews and evaluations of preparatory and remedial education; supervise the University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement; monitor the development and use of placement examinations in mathematics; and work with BOARS to communicate these standards to all high schools and colleges in California.

A summary of the committee's activities and accomplishments follows below:

Review and Selection of Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE) Essay Prompts

Under the leadership of consultant George Gadda, UCOPE members selected the essay to be used in the 2012 UC-AWPE administration, in accord with Senate Regulation 636B.1. This annual event involved UCOPE members reviewing sample essays to ensure that norming procedures used in evaluation of the exam would be consistent with SR 636A and SR 636B.1. It was noted that the number of students satisfying UC's undergraduate writing requirement through the AWPE has held steady at approximately 15,600 for the past few years.

Director of Undergraduate Admissions Michael Treviño reviewed the financial records of the AWPE and reported that the exam was solidly in the black in 2012, thanks to operational changes over the past four years. This last year, AWPE increased campus reimbursement for testing, and introduced a tiered fee structure for the exam based on financial need.

Consultation Regarding International Students

Chair Jonathan Alexander noted that the EMS, ESL, and ELL programs at many campuses had been put under tremendous pressure by the recent deluge of international students. Those students need assistance with acculturation as well as with language; they are often isolated by their lack of English communication skills and do not adjust well to campus life.

UCOPE discussed possible ways to remediate the problem of students with extremely limited English proficiency. Some campuses already hold special orientations for international students that include testing of English writing and speaking skills. Chair Alexander reminded members of the 2011 white paper that called for the University to fully fund English, ESL, ELL, and related programs. <file:///X:/Committees/UCOPE/2010-11/UCOPE%20White%20Paper.pdf> The committee agreed that the EMS Advisory Group should revise the white paper and should include specifications regarding ideal range of courses and support for international students.

Standardization of the Awarding of Advanced Placement (AP) Credit Across the UC System

AP scores are used divergently systemwide in relation to course credit and requirements. Particularly problematic is the occasional practice of excluding students from preparatory classes based upon their high AP scores. The committee considered whether a systemwide policy should be put in place to dictate how AP scores in English and math should be applied. It was suggested that a joint task force between UCEP and UCOPE should look at the issue more broadly.

Systemwide Math Diagnostic Test

UCOPE discussed the possibility of giving incoming students a diagnostic test to determine if they should take classes over the summer to improve their fall math placement grades. Members suggested that the Math Diagnostic Placement Test (MDPT), which was developed with UCSD, could be used as a strong generic test. The current lack of assessment in math has resulted in students taking (and then dropping) classes that are not well-suited to their skill level. It was suggested that UCOPE establish a representative committee to produce a diagnostic test (or to vet an existing test).

Discussion of Online Writing Courses

UCD and UCI have partnered together to offer summer writing courses that will be 100 percent online. Chair Alexander explained that UCI has had online courses in first-year composition for some time and has evaluated its online versus “on-ground” programs. In short, the department learned that online courses are very labor-intensive and are not more cost-effective than traditional classes. Chair Alexander suggested that UCOPE might want to schedule a session next year with UCI’s online instructors to learn from their experience. He urged UCOPE to collect information on online math courses as well.

EMS Advisory Group

The EMS Advisory Group addressed issues related to the increase of international students, many of whom are not proficient in written or spoken English and are subsequently having difficulty at UC. The lack of preparation and accurate placement of these students places a considerable burden on faculty. In addition, ill-prepared international students are a significant financial drain on the EMS/ESL/ELL departments, which were – in most cases – already quite lean. The group proposed that each campus develop a comprehensive plan to address the needs of international students including academic language support, classes, and tutorials. It also advocated support for faculty development and TA training to help serve the international student population.

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