

# **UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2001-02**

### **TO THE ASSEMBLY OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE:**

The University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) held two meetings during Academic Year 2001-02 to conduct its business with respect to its charges in Senate Bylaw 215. Issues considered by the Committee this year are outlined as follows:

#### **2001 Subject A Examination**

Following its charge of oversight of standards for administering the Subject A Examination, UCOPE reviewed and discussed data and information about its administration the previous spring that was presented by Director George Gadda, Subject A Subcommittee Chair. This included test validity data, annual pass rate data (including differentiation among several years' data), information on the pool of examinees, and other related statistical data.

#### **2002 Subject A Examination Essay/Prompt Selection**

UCOPE accomplished its annual task of selecting the essay/prompt to be administered in the Subject A examination in the spring of 2002 by voting and agreeing on one passage from among a selection of passages presented by the Subject A Examination Committee Chair.

#### **2002 Subject A Examination Passing Standard**

UCOPE members discussed pretest essays provided by the Subject A Examination Committee Chair and agreed on scores for all pretest essays (these matched scores assigned by Subject A Committee readers). UCOPE would like to see groups of faculty, particularly in the sciences, provided with sample essays from final readings in both pass and no pass ranges, as a means of educating more faculty about writing expectations and involving faculty in the Subject A conversation.

#### **Review of Subject A Requirement and Subject A Examination**

As the lead Senate Committee having oversight of the Subject A requirement and examination, UCOPE spent a substantial portion of its meetings this year studying and analyzing both. UCOPE received a request from Academic Council to respond to a series of fundamentals and questions outlined by Provost and Senior Vice President King (at the request of the Academic Planning Council) for response from the Academic Council. These were forwarded to the Divisions and to Senate Committees. UCOPE reviewed SR 636 and its own August 2001 Report on Assessment of the Subject A Examination. Numerous other documents on Subject A and writing instruction were also reviewed and discussed among members and UCOP consultants. On April 15, 2002 UCOPE submitted its response to questions posed by Provost King.

- The current year's Committee endorsed the principal finding of the previous year's Committee; that is, the Subject A examination as it is currently structured examines reading and writing preparation that is more closely aligned with UC faculty expectations for UC freshmen than any other existing examination instrument.
- UCOPE recognized wide variation among local requirements that hold students until the Subject A requirement has been satisfied, and variation among the programs offered to satisfy the requirement. UCOPE noted that changes in SR 761 that redefine what is and

is not remedial with respect to writing have not been interpreted or handled uniformly on all campuses. SR 761 allows full graduation credit for course content taken to satisfy Subject A (this is not remedial), whether as part of a freshman writing program or in a separate community college course. Various means may satisfy the Subject A requirement. Successful passage of the two-hour timed Subject A exam is not required, whether alone, or in conjunction with successful passage of a Subject A or credit course in freshman writing.

- Current regulations do not require that students retake a timed Subject A exam multiple times to satisfy the requirement. This applies to both English speakers and ESL students. Courses used to satisfy Subject A may be fully State-funded.
- UCOPE emphasized the importance of having a single UC standard that clearly communicates the academic reading/writing abilities that are expected of entering freshmen. The current Subject A exam serves an important function in setting a standard.
- UCOPE supports serious campuswide consideration of whether Subject A is treated as passage of a particular test or, as described by the Provost, “completion of a series of University-level writing classes with testing done for proper placement in the sequence.” The Subject A exam, as it is currently administered, could be the placement exam; assigning this function to it would change its image.
- UCOPE recommended eliminating the option for students to take a community college writing course during the summer before a student enrolls at a UC campus (technically satisfying Subject A). The recommendation was based on its concern that a summer course might not be the equivalent of a University-level full term course taught by faculty who are familiar with UC faculty expectations for a student’s writing ability.
- UCOPE supports clarification in legislation that accommodates ESL students.
- UCOPE supports stricter performance expectations in post-Subject A courses and/or additional writing requirements for progressive skill-building in writing.

Following a further charge by Council to prepare a summary analysis of all Divisional and Senate Committee responses, the Committee forwarded “UCOPE Summary of Responses to Academic Council on Subject A” on June 10, 2002.

- UCOPE recognized general consensus and concurred with UCEP that completion of Subject A ought not to be an admissions requirement because it would exclude too many of the top 12.5% of California high school graduates.
- Outreach programs to support and inform secondary schools about University expectations for reading and writing should be encouraged and supported. UCOPE supports UCEP’s proposal for a universitywide conference on Subject A.
- UCOPE agrees with UCEP and BOARS that the Subject A exam is best seen as a vehicle for placement in first-year writing courses; however, UCOPE also affirms that Subject A does accurately reflect the expectations of writing skills that UC faculty have of their first-year students.
- Course content, rather than its relation to Subject A is what determines whether a course will be credit bearing. Campuses need not decline credit to courses because they prepare students to satisfy Subject A. SR 761 clearly defines what is and is not remedial.
- UCOPE believes it is essential that credit-bearing writing courses offered to first year students at UC be under UC control—reviewed and approved by Divisional Committees on Educational Policy and Preparatory Education.

- UCOPE noted that many respondents pointed out problems with Subject A that are related to local campus practices and programs. UCOPE recommended that a set of models for addressing Subject A—best practices and successful programs—be produced.
- UCOPE will continue to assess the possibility of returning Subject A exam results sooner even though current timeline constraints may prevent earlier feedback.
- UCOPE recommends further consideration of issues related to students satisfying both Subject A and their initial first-year composition course with one community college course taken in summer school before entering UC. The same students (in particular, ESL students) who satisfy the requirement with one summer course might require two or three courses in the first-year composition sequence. Savings to a UC campus must be considered against UC faculty's assessment of the students' academic needs.
- Placing ESL students and other students who need work on writing where they will receive additional work on writing needs to be viewed as an appropriate method of directing UC's resources toward the students who most need them.
- UCOPE recommends that UCOP fund a study that would determine whether upper division students' writing ability meets expectations, and whether a graduation requirement in composition should be adopted. UCOPE looks forward to participation in a Task Force that would investigate writing after the first year.
- Responses were split as to whether there should be an outside review of Subject A. UCOPE recommended an alternative approach: that UCOPE's scheduled 2006 review of Subject A be guided by the concerns raised in this review.

UCOPE considered separately various concerns about Subject A testing that were expressed in a document from Undergraduate Deans and Vice Provosts, and articulated many of its own opinions and responses (as outlined above) in discussion with one undergraduate Dean.

**Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates (ICAS) Draft, "Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California's Public Colleges and Universities"**

UCOPE expressed its support for the draft ICAS report, and noted its agreement with statements about the limitations of high school reading programs that focus solely on creative literature. UCOPE would like to see text in that section expanded and strengthened. The document was viewed as superior to the 1982 ICAS statement. UCOPE expected that the list of competencies would be helpful to BOARS and other entities in communicating expectations of skills and abilities to testing agencies. UCOPE encouraged widespread acceptance and use of the document by UC faculty.

**English as a Second Language (ESL) Subcommittee**

UCOPE's ESL Subcommittee met once during the academic year. Subcommittee Chair Jan Frodesen reported that the Subcommittee discussed the following issues: ESL transfer students, ESL students in relation to the Subject A requirement, campus ESL placement examination, international graduate students, UCR Developmental Writing Pre-Subject A Program, and UC Write website (a comprehensive website funded through UCOP that contains best practices in teaching writing and also regulations and procedures for satisfying Subject A). The Subcommittee has requested additional analysis and statistics to follow up on its commitment to identify the significance of ESL problems among the transfer population. ESL Subcommittee and UCOPE requested that the Senate fund one additional

Subcommittee meeting for next academic year, for follow-up and dealing with many cross-campus issues.

**Update on Admissions Testing—Report from Dorothy Perry, BOARS Chair and *ex officio* member of UCOPE**

UCOPE voted on and approved endorsement of both BOARS Motions that were passed by the Academic Council. The sense of these included 1) support for BOARS continuing to work with Testing Agencies to develop improved admissions tests, and 2) endorsement for BOARS to continue to review, assess and improve admissions testing and regularly report on its findings, update and recommend to Council and the Assembly.

**UCOPE representation**

UCOPE was represented on additional Committees, Task Forces and Work Groups this year, including ICAS, and ICAS ESL Subcommittee. The UCOPE Chair consulted also with University Committee on Educational Policy on Subject A issues.

**Other:**

The following reports, items and/or issues were received and discussed:

- SB 1731 Alarcon Bill mandating that “A-G” requirements are made available to all high school students. UCOPE supports the opportunity for students to enroll in a college preparatory curriculum, and also supports vigor in the curriculum. The Committee as a whole did not feel qualified to comment on the Bill without a further charge.
- ICAS December 2001 Intersegmental Major Preparation Articulated Curriculum Project Newsletter.
- Diagnostic Writing Project: Concerns regarding Teacher to Teacher Website. Additional information is needed before any action can be taken.

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