

**UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION  
ANNUAL REPORT 1999-2000**

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

The University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) met twice in full committee in 1999-2000. In addition to its regular task of selecting the prompt essay and setting the scoring standard for the UC-wide Subject A Examination, the Committee focussed its particular attention this year on an assessment of the examination itself, as recommended by last year's committee (see the 1998-1999 report of Yat-Sun Poon). We have also continued to work with the Office of the President on the development of the Diagnostic Writing Service; and we have taken preliminary steps toward an investigation of the needs and resources available to students for whom English is not the primary language (ESL programs).

**I. Assessment of the Subject A Examination (Subcommittee consisting of Calvin Moore, UCB; Peter Berck, UCB, representative of UCEP; and Jane Stevens, UCSD, chairman)**

The assessment of the Subject A Examination has included two primary tasks, a determination of the questions that need to be asked about the Exam, and the carrying out of studies necessary to answer those questions. We have laid out a set of questions, with the procedures we believe will help to answer them, and have begun to develop these answers. The three fundamental questions and the steps we are taking to address them are as follows:

1. Since the Subject A requirement can be met through other tests available to UC entering students, are there ways we can reduce the number of students who must take the Subject A Exam?
  - a. Reassess the appropriateness of the SAT IIW exam, the AP English Language and Literature exams, and the Golden State writing exam, as measures comparable to the Subject A Exam
  - b. Reassess the scores on those exams judged to satisfy the Subject A requirement, by re-examining the correlation of scores on the Subject A Exam with scores on those other exams
2. Does the Subject A Exam function as a reliable test of reading and writing ability?
  - a. Examine the 10-year history of the Exam to determine the level of consistency in percentage of students who fail the Exam
  - b. Investigate the reliability of scoring within a given Exam year by a blind re-reading, by a group of expert readers, of a sample of the exams scored either 4 (barely passing) or 3 (barely failing)
  - c. Construct a set of permanent guidelines for the characteristics of the essay used as a prompt for the Exam

- d. Construct a set of permanent guidelines for the composition of the question that follows the prompt essay
3. Is the Subject A Exam a valid measure of the level of reading and writing competence expected by UC faculty of incoming freshmen?
    - a. Recruit from each of three campuses a small number of faculty instructors of lower-division humanities and social-science (non-writing-program) courses that require substantial writing of papers, to be asked to read a sample of Subject A exams scored between 2 and 5 and to assess the level of writing adequacy for their own courses

The Committee plans to complete its work on this assessment early in the coming year and will present its findings in a report to the Academic Senate.

## II. Diagnostic Writing Service (DWS)

The DWS, an online service for high school students and teachers sponsored jointly by the UC Office of the President and by CSU, intends to enable university applicants better to prepare for both the Subject A Examination and the CSU English composition test. Both the CSU and the UC parts of the Service went into operation (at [www.essayeval.org](http://www.essayeval.org)) in September of 1999, following intensive work by a DWS task force monitored and directed by a subcommittee of UCOPE, and two UC prototype trials during the preceding year. The UC part of the Service aims most importantly to help teachers enrich literacy instruction in high schools so that all students may improve their reading and writing skills. As a part of that effort, it provides reading and scoring of practice Subject A Exam essays for high school students, principally those working within regular English classes; in 1999-2000 it offered two submission periods, in the fall and in the spring, during which essays were read and evaluated by Subject A Exam readers. An equally important part of the web service is the Teacher to Teacher site, which will contain a wide variety of curriculum materials for teachers. Although still in a rather primitive state, this website is under active development by a DWS Workgroup made up of UC writing faculty and high school teachers, working under the aegis of the Office of the President with the advice and oversight of the UCOPE Subcommittee on the DWS (Parama Roy, UCR; Richard Levin, UCD; Wendell Potter, UCD, chairman). UCOPE will continue to oversee the operations of the DWS through the DWS Subcommittee, which will report regularly to the full Committee about the progress of this significant educational outreach program. (See Attachment: Memo from Carla Ferri and Jane Stevens to DWS Task Force and Subcommittee members)

## III. English as a Second Language (ESL)

As the next area demanding of its attention, the Committee has identified the problems associated with "second language" students, those for whom English was not the first

language. Although anecdotal evidence abounds attesting to the difficulties of these students, and the apparent inadequacy with which (for whatever reason) their needs are being met, there are only incomplete data available on the actual number of them or on the effectiveness of the ESL programs based on individual campuses. Since many campus ESL programs function outside of regular departmental faculty structures, these programs typically have achieved neither the level of visibility nor the critical scrutiny accorded most instructional programs. A UCOPE Subcommittee on ESL, made up of representatives from each of these programs, has been meeting for several years; but although it has produced a number of comprehensive reports on the programs and remaining challenges of ESL instruction on both the undergraduate and the graduate level, it has not been fully successful in increasing a general awareness within the University of what many on the Subcommittee view as the continuing urgency of this situation. (California Pathways, the 1996 report sponsored by ICAS surveying ESL students and instruction in California high schools, community colleges, and universities, confirms the unavailability of even basic information about this population at UC; see the 2000 update, pp. 55-56.) Believing that the issue of these "ESL students" is both a significant and a growing one in California, the Committee plans next year, with the help of the ESL Subcommittee, to investigate (1) the number of entering UC students with inadequate skills in the English language (as differentiated from simple writing skills), and (2) the present operations of the various campus ESL programs. This information will be basic to any future investigations or recommendations by the Committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane R. Stevens, Chairman 1999-2000 (UCSD)

Calvin C. Moore (UCB)

Richard Levin (UCD)

Lyle Bachman (UCLA)

Parama Roy (UCR)

Nancy Byl (UCSF)

Bruce Cooperstein (UCSC)

BOARS Chair Dorothy Perry, Ex Officio (UCSF)