

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION

MEETING MINUTES

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2020

Attending: Darlene Francis, Chair (UCB), Jeffrey Gagnon, Vice Chair (UCSD), Brandi Catanese (UCB) (Videoconference), Matthew Stratton (UCD), Daniel Gross (UCI), Jesus Sandoval-Hernandez (UCM) (Videoconference), Angelo Kyrilov (UCM Alternate) (Videoconference), Jingsong Zhang (UCR), Betsy Brenner (UCSB), Madeleine Sorapure (UCSB BOARS representative), Phoebe Bronstein (UCSD), Elena Kozlova (Graduate Student Representative, UCR), Han Mi Yoon-Wu (Interim Associate Vice President and Director of Undergraduate Admissions) (Videoconference), Jon Lang (AWPE Committee Chair), Julie Lind (AWPE Coordinator, Undergraduate Admissions), Laura Hardy (Associate Director, Undergraduate Admissions), Brenda Abrams (Principal Policy Analyst)

I. Updates

Chair Francis welcomed members to the meeting. A member of UCOPE is needed to serve on a new UC-California Community College Transfer Task Force and the UCR representative expressed interest in potentially serving in this role.

II. Consent Calendar

Action: The October videoconference minutes were approved with one correction.

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

Note: Meeting notes were not recorded for the UCOPE review and selection of the essay prompts in keeping with past practices specific to the committee's deliberation on this topic.

IV. AWPE Fairness Review

- *Nora Odendahl, Fairness Reviewer*

The Fairness Reviewer, Nora Odendahl, was welcomed to the meeting. Ms. Odendahl has a doctorate in English, and was a test developer with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and now works as a consultant. She shared with UCOPE the 'scope' of her role the Fairness Reviewer for the AWPE. Test Fairness is not a fully defined concept but it begins with validity, in that the claims made about what is being measured can be supported with evidence. Validity is the property of how the test results are interpreted rather than the test itself. Fairness extends to issues of equity and access which means the test is performing the same way across different access the test.

Accessibility is related to accommodations for individuals with disabilities but also for people whose first language is not English. Universal design to make a test accessible to everyone should be the first step and this could mean eliminating difficult language or unfamiliar idioms. Goals include ensuring that one is measuring what is intended, not extraneous factors related to culture, disabilities, or access. A complete view of fairness includes having equal opportunities to learn the material that is being tested.

For the AWPE, Ms. Odendahl focuses upon reviewing the test content for fairness considerations. Test developers try to assume the perspective of the test taker in order to identify everything that could be misinterpreted, problematic or tricky. Using the ETS guidelines for Fairness Reviews, Ms. Odendahl looks at two categories: construct irrelevant variance barriers and construct irrelevant affective barriers. Construct irrelevant variance is a difference in scores that are irrelevant to the construct being measured and this is avoided by trying to eliminate construct irrelevant content barriers. This is content that is not part of what is being measured or what a test taker might not know. Construct irrelevant affective barriers pertain to material that might trigger emotions that hinder a test taker's ability to respond to the stimulus to their best advantage. The review includes ensuring a passage uses appropriate terminology and does not include anything slanderous or that is offensive to or stereotypes any groups. To the extent possible,

there should be diversity in terms of authors' gender and ethnicity and authorities of different genders and ethnicities should be cited in the passage.

More recently, Ms. Odendahl has run readability analyses on each passage to identify the level of difficulty. Passages should not be too difficult and passages of similar levels of difficulty should be utilized. Her feedback on passages also highlights any issues with proofreading or datedness.

Discussion: AWPE Chair Lang pointed out that Ms. Odendahl only recently began working on the AWPE, so she has not seen many of the passages discussed by UCOPE over the past few years. Ms. Odendahl reviews the passages for AWPE alone but indicated that multiple fairness reviewers would be acceptable. A member commented that the passages the committee has seen were not written by authors who reflect the ethnic backgrounds or experiences of students who apply to UC but are academics from homogeneous, privileged backgrounds. The passages presented this morning include underlying assumptions about who the reader is. Ms. Odendahl thinks an explicit goal for UCOPE could be to expand the pool of potential sources so the material describes different types of experiences. It was noted that the test takers' affective responses to passages may result in underperformance on the Exam.

A concern is that an early interaction with UC for students who have been accepted is with AWPE passages that reinforce the institution's powers and normative expectations, placing students in the disadvantageous position of having to push back. Ms. Odendahl suggests having a committee of diverse members select the passages or having two shorter passages with opposing views or disparate experiences. One idea is to have fairness reviewers who are aware of and sensitive to cultural competencies (of various ethnicities). A member commented that the issue of construct validity is related to the type of writing students do for the AWPE compared to the writing they will do for UC courses. A controversial aspect of the Exam is that it is a timed test using unfamiliar material, although certain students will perform well on it. Students in a UC course will be writing about topics they have studied, which raises questions about fairness. Ms. Odendahl indicated that a team of psychometricians would have to conduct a formal study of the AWPE's validity.

There are pros and cons to larger processes for a writing test that involve more material or more time. CalTech has a multiday test conducted online for which students are given a set of documents, similar to how students complete a college assignment. Tests like the SAT, ACT and AWPE are valuable because they provide a sample of students' writing on which no one else has worked. Making the AWPE more like a college assignment would introduce content knowledge into the equation. Ms. Odendahl suggests that the construct being measured by and the purpose of the AWPE should be clearly defined. The information on UCOP's website about the AWPE does not indicate what is measured or whether the Exam aims to predict success in college writing or if it is a diagnostic test to determine readiness for college writing. Clarifying that the Exam is diagnostic could make a positive difference and reduce stigma.

Regardless of how well a student performs on a placement exam, Ms. Odendahl recommends that every freshman should have some degree of contact with and get feedback and assistance from Writing programs. Reliability can be enhanced by adding more tasks to the test or, for test takers with lower scores, by administering the same test twice. The Smarter Balanced Assessment has an online dictionary students can access and UC might consider providing a tailored analog dictionary for the AWPE. UCR hosts the Inland Area Writing Project which introduces the ELWR to high school juniors and allows them to prepare. The AWPE website could provide examples of successful essays that disagreed with the author's position and give advice on preparation and practice. Test takers could be surveyed for their opinions about the topics. Ms. Odendahl found that passages varied from the 7th to 11th grade reading levels which is inequitable. She recommends that passages should be at the 11th and 12th grade levels. The algorithms that offer feedback on readability look at sentence length, syntax and vocabulary which may not measure the complexity of the passages.

V. Consultation with the President's Office

- *Laura Hardy, Director, Undergraduate Admissions*
- *Julie Lind, AWPE Coordinator, Undergraduate Admissions*

Coordinator Lind distributed the Summary Report of the 2019 administration of the AWPE. The number of test takers dropped by about 2k from 2018, to almost 12k in 2019. The number of freshman from California enrolling in UC declined slightly and some students on the waitlist were admitted after the May 1st deadline for the Exam. The next exam will be administered on May 9th. Admissions is currently updating UCOP's ELWR website and will replace outdated writing samples. Assembly Bill 5, the "Gig Economy" bill, went into effect on January 1st and may require test site staff and readers to be classified as employees rather than independent contractors. Admissions is working with UCOP's Office of General Counsel and the vendor's lawyers to identify a solution.

Discussion: Chair Francis noted that more students may have to take the AWPE if the SAT and ACT are no longer used for UC admissions. AWPE Chair Lang believes it should be possible to scale up the administrative operations of the AWPE to meet this increased demand. Issues could include securing additional test sites and readers. Reportedly, a number of campuses pay readers more than readers are paid for the systemwide Exam. Human Resources at these campuses have instructed Writing program directors to pay readers based on some portion of their annual salary. In contrast, systemwide readers are paid a fee per Exam plus a fixed stipend for training. Academic Personnel at UCSB has told the program that readers cannot be paid because reading the Exam is part of their job. The case may need to be made by Writing programs that Unit 18 Lecturers' involvement with the AWPE is a key element of their service and should receive a meaningful stipend. Student fees for the systemwide and campus AWPE cover all costs of the administration of the systemwide Exam. Students with financial need receive a waiver for AWPE fee. UCOP reimburses campuses \$14 per test taker and this is intended to encourage use of the systemwide AWPE. Campuses test about 4k students.

VI. Satisfaction of the Entry Level Writing Requirement

Chair Francis reminded the committee about the charge given to the Standardized Testing Task Force (STTF) early last year and shared the six recommendations from the STTF in advance of the report being released next week. UCOPE members should expect to receive the report through the committee listserv and their divisional Senate. The STTF did not explicitly recommend that UC eliminate using the SAT and ACT for admissions. The report includes extensive data analysis that shows UC is doing a good job of admitting students with low scores on these tests. One recommendation focuses on the need to address the root causes for historical and structural inequities, and the final recommendation is for UC to develop its own tool. The deadline for comments is March 23rd so members are encouraged to discuss the forthcoming report with their divisional committees soon. The turnaround time for Academic Council to make a recommendation to the president to get the matter on the Regents' agenda for May will be fast.

Once the Regents' decision is known and, if there is a commitment for UC to develop its own tool, UCOPE's discussions about the AWPE will change. Chair Francis will discuss the potential ramifications for the ELWR and the AWPE with Senate leadership and the Admissions consultants in the next few weeks. Members should think about practical ways to meet UC's current needs and how to be proactive about what might occur, while also considering the feedback received from various stakeholders about the Exam. Another stakeholder group has recently sent a memo to UCOPE. Chair Francis wants to identify viable ways to move forward and suggested a range of options for UCOPE to consider. She highlighted the range of options UCOPE may consider which include: 1) the status quo (making no changes to the AWPE) 2) considering modest changes to the AWPE 3) considering major changes to the AWPE 4) eliminating the AWPE 5) reaffirmation, revision and/or elimination of the University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement. The committee rejected the suggestion of maintaining/perpetuating the status quo. The committee also did not wish to see the elimination of the ELWR. One discussion the committee discussed, briefly, was the option of providing variances to specific campuses to SR 636 C. It should be noted that

the VPDUEs are the only stakeholders who have suggested eliminating the ELWR. Chair Francis believes UCOPE should remain vigilant about protecting the Requirement however UCOPE should be responsive to campus requests for greater local autonomy in satisfying ELWR. Allowing a few specific campuses to pilot different placement instruments would generate data to inform UCOPE's recommendations with respect to SR636 moving forward. UCOPE has invited UC Davis to share their efforts in this area at our next meeting (April 24th).

Chair Francis believes there is an opportunity for campuses to explore using something other than the AWPE for placement. This must necessarily be sensitive to the need for continued use of the AWPE (until sufficient data is collected that might identify a better option of the UC). The Exam specifications might be revised to address the need for inclusivity and cultural competence. The committee might look closely at Senate Regulation (SR) 636.A and discuss its fundamental meaning and criterion, especially in light of the demographics of students currently at UC. SR 636.C might be modified to give students more time to satisfy the ELWR or the time constraint could be eliminated entirely.

Discussion: The UCI representative shared his thoughts about the latest memo, noting that the signatories are leading UC faculty experts in Rhetoric and Composition and Writing Studies from various campuses. It is a significant document into which much time was invested and cites research to support what is stated. The signatories are primarily from UCD, UCI and UCSB because of the emphasis those campuses have traditionally placed on hiring Writing researchers and they are or have in the past been Writing program directors. From the perspective of the UCI representative, the opinions among his group about the AWPE are not unanimous and a fraction of them believe it is time to do something different.

In October, Chair Francis emphasized that UCOPE members should discuss concerns about the AWPE with interested stakeholders at their campuses. Various administrators and Writing faculty at UCSB met and there seemed to be consensus that the AWPE does not meet the needs of this campus and could be replaced within a year by a better instrument. AWPE Chair Lang pointed out that some Writing theorists focus on pedagogy while others take a political and ideological approach, and this is reflected in differences among campus Writing programs. Reportedly, some Writing faculty are concerned about how placement would be managed if the AWPE is eliminated and the potential elimination of entry level courses.

Members offered feedback on the options Chair Francis outlined related to the AWPE and ELWR. Based on messages members hear about the importance of teaching Writing and having more Writing classes at all levels, faculty appear to support maintaining the ELWR. A member suggested that giving campuses responsibility over placement decisions technically eliminates the Requirement. Members agreed that the pass/fail language used when discussing the AWPE is problematic and urgently needs to be changed to reflect that the AWPE is not punitive but instead enables students to receive more Writing support. A key challenge is to maintain the commitment to resources for entry level courses. AWPE Chair Lang commented that, while eliminating an Exam is easy, changing curriculum requires resources which some campuses lack. The regulations mandate that students take the AWPE but campuses have discretion over how they use the scores from the systemwide AWPE, including disregarding them.

Chair Francis noted that the AWPE works well at certain campuses, such as UCB. Students from under-resourced high schools may initially disagree with being placed into "remedial" Writing at UCB are eventually grateful. Data collected by UCSD's program and anecdotal information suggest the AWPE also meets the needs of that campus. Students at every College at UCSD must take Writing courses and they report satisfaction with their placements. UCSD Writing faculty are anxious that the systemwide umbrella of the ELWR and AWPE could be eliminated but are also concerned about equity. A member commented that there is a need to institutionalize today's discussion and Chair Francis would like to discuss how to operationalize and formalize what has been outlined today. Members are interested in learning about what the alternatives to the AWPE are being considered by some campuses. UCOPE may eventually discuss eliminating the AWPE but that is not currently under consideration.

VII. New Business

There was no New Business.

VIII. Executive Session

Minutes were not taken during Executive Session.

Meeting adjourned at: 4 PM

Minutes prepared by: Brenda Abrams

Attest: Darlene Francis