

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION

VIDEOCONFERENCE MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2018

Attending: Darlene Francis, Chair (UCB), Debra Lewis, Vice Chair (UCSC), Deborah Willis (UCR), Jeffrey Gagnon (UCSD), Jesus Sandoval-Hernandez (UCM), Eric Prieto (UCSB), Bruce Cooperstein (UCSC), Madeleine Sorapure (UCSB BOARS representative), Matthew Stratton (UCD), Brandi Catanese (UCB), Han Mi Yoon-Wu (Director, Undergraduate Admissions), Tongshan Chang (Director, IRAP), Matt Reed (Analyst, IRAP), Jon Lang (AWPE Committee Chair/Chief Reader), Julie Lind (AWPE Coordinator, Undergraduate Admissions), Laura Hardy (Associate Director, Undergraduate Admissions), Brenda Abrams (Principal Policy Analyst)

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Francis welcomed everyone to the videoconference and members introduced themselves. The analyst noted that at least one videoconference will be added to UCOPE's regular meeting schedule in the future.

II. Analysis of the International Students' 2017 AWPE Data

- *Tongshan Chang, Director, Institutional Research and Academic Planning (IRAP)*
- *Matt Reed, Analyst, IRAP*

Following the most recent changes to the SAT, UCOPE agreed that the 2017-2018 admissions cycle would be a pilot period for analyzing data from the new Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) section of the exam. AWPE Chair Lang has been contacted by UC faculty who work with English Language Learners and reported that international students whose SAT scores exempted them from the Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR) did not perform well in classes. There is a concern that international students take advantage of testing mills which teach them how to 'game' the SAT. Once at UC, these students struggle in courses that require reading and writing. It is unlikely that there is coaching available for the AWPE. The committee asked Institutional Research to analyze the 2017 AWPE data for the incoming international students. As UC did not allow the new SAT to satisfy the ELWR for the 2017-2018 academic year, this population also took the AWPE, providing a unique opportunity to compare the SAT and AWPE scores and consider if the SAT is serving as an accurate placement mechanism.

The analysis looked at scores from the SAT EBRW, the SAT essay, the ACT English Language Arts (ELA), and the AWPE. Approximately 1,100 international students took the AWPE at one of four campuses in fall 2017. The analysis suggests that in years when the SAT threshold is in place, a large share of international students will meet the ELWR via the SAT even though they likely would not have passed the AWPE. The analysis found that, except for the very top of the scale, international students taking the campus AWPE had much lower AWPE pass rates for a given SAT Essay score compared to the general population of incoming freshmen. About 350 of the 1,100 students in this analysis had scores for both the AWPE and the ACT ELA and the data indicates that a large share of international students meeting the ELWR via the ACT would not have passed the AWPE. Just over 800 of the students in this analysis were Chinese, which was the largest group from any one country. Chinese students generally had lower AWPE pass rates overall and for any given SAT or ACT threshold scores compared to all international students in this analysis.

Overall, the analysis found that international students taking the campus AWPE, and Chinese students in particular, have lower AWPE pass rates than the general population, even after controlling for SAT EBRW, SAT Essay, or ACT ELA scores. Large shares of international students are likely to meet the

ELWR via the SAT EBRW or ACT ELA even though they would not have passed the AWPE, leading to possible misplacement in first year writing courses. This reinforces one reason for keeping the SAT and ACT thresholds for the ELWR high relative to the AWPE: to limit the number of students (international or domestic) who meet these thresholds but would not have passed the AWPE.

Discussion: Members wondered if the differences between the test scores are the result of problems with the tests as opposed to the use of test mills. There should be an analysis to determine which exam is doing a better job of predicting success in classes. It would be useful to look at the course outcomes for this student population and IRAP will add this question to a future report. The AWPE is a placement exam and is not intended to be predictive, and the goal is to place students in courses where they will receive appropriate instruction. One question is whether traditional entry level writing courses are prepared to support international students. It is not clear that comparing the scores on exams to grades in UC courses will provide useful information, in part because of grade inflation. UCOPE should evaluate which tool provides the most accurate information. The committee should also determine what should be included in future analyses of the AWPE.

There is interest in getting more information about the students who finish the AWPE before the two hour mark, including their demographics. High school students may have more experience with timed tests that are only 30 minutes long and some schools may teach-to-the-test which does not help them develop the writing skills needed for college. Coordinator Lind indicated that tracking when students leave early would be difficult to do during the systemwide administration given the number of test takers, but it could be feasible during a campus administration. However, some campuses have 300 or more students taking the Exam, meaning that tracking would still be a challenge for proctors. Asking students to note when they finish the Exam may add to test anxiety and Coordinator Lind suggests that the proctors could be asked to provide an estimate of how many students are still testing at two hours. Another idea is to add a time stamp to the electronic system.

The criteria used to admit students to UC is the same systemwide, but campuses differ in how decisions about placement are made. In addition to the right placement instrument, strategies are needed to better support the international students who flounder after being admitted. UCOPE may also want to look into persistence in writing intensive courses. Chair Francis would like the committee to discuss issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, and whether 1st gen, low SES students, students from under-resourced environments are being overly/disproportionately burdened.

When UCOPE decides upon the permanent thresholds for the SAT and ACT, the committee should discuss the threshold for international students. UC could raise the SAT threshold for international students although this might send the wrong message, although it was noted that Dartmouth has different thresholds for international and U.S. students. UC would have to make the case that international students are fundamentally different and need to be evaluated in different ways. UCM did raise the threshold for scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language for graduate students and using multiple indicators would be a good practice in general. A high score on the SAT may not be the most useful indicator for international students. When international students became a sought after source of revenue for UC campuses, faculty were reassured that these students would be well-prepared but, since this has not necessarily been true, campuses had to develop courses to meet the needs of this population.

A question is how quickly the testing preparation mills adjust to changes in the SAT but it is not clear how this could be determined. It would be interesting to see if the gaps between the scores are larger or smaller in the years following a change in the test. The redesigned SAT is not giving UC the information that is desired. If the SAT and ACT were eliminated, it would be extremely difficult to handle the increased number of students needing to take the AWPE. UCOPE's various concerns should be shared with the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS). Decisions are being made by other

institutions about the SAT and ACT whereas the AWPE is under UC's control. The Exam reflects the needs and values of UC in a way that other instruments do not. The committee's discussions about the use of the AWPE are nuanced and have to be informed by qualitative and quantitative data. UCOPE should discuss improvements that might be made to the AWPE to address concerns of UC faculty.

III. Standardized Testing and UC Admissions

Chair Francis explained that President Napolitano has asked the Senate to evaluate the use of standardized testing for UC admissions. BOARS and the Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) will work with UCOPE on this effort. Questions include whether UC will continue to use standardized tests and if how they are used should be changed. In the past, BOARS has been the lead committee on similar studies.

Discussion: The Provost asked IRAP to analyze the SAT and ACT scores in relationship to student success at UC and this report is being finalized. The analysis looked at how well scores predict students' first year grade point average at UC, first year retention rates, and four-year graduation rates. This study will be shared with BOARS in November and eventually with UCOPE. Director Yoon-Wu described that changes made to the SAT in 2016 have resulted in a different type of test based on Common Core standards. When this change was made, BOARS decided to require the essay for UC applicants. Now, UC's nine campuses are among seventeen institutions still requiring the SAT essay and most recently the University of Chicago went "test optional" for admission purposes. In light of the current environment, it is timely for UC to look at the value and predictive power of standardized testing, including the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

The scope of UCOPE's engagement will need to be defined. The focus might strictly be on the writing component and whether the SAT and ACT provide the information that is needed by UC. UC must make its own decision about the importance of writing assessments. Chair Francis stated that, in light of the broader question about standardized testing, eliminating the AWPE is not an immediate consideration. Chair Francis proposed that the committee focus on framing the value and utility of the AWPE, how it is being used, and why UC has its own writing exam. The changes to the SAT and ACT writing requirements may or may not represent what UC faculty want to see. UCOPE should continually have discussions about the contents of the AWPE but this year, the broader questions about standardized tests should be addressed first. Individuals at the campuses have concerns about the AWPE, however UCOPE members should understand the bigger picture as it relates to the President's request.

AWPE Chair Lang provided a brief overview of changes to the SAT in 1995 which were driven by UC and resulted in the SAT being used for admissions and placement. Any major decisions UC makes as a result of the upcoming study are likely to impact how students are placed. The University does not have the resources to test a large number of students if there is a radical change to the use of the SAT and ACT. It is important to understand that the AWPE is a placement exam, not an admissions requirement, so the questions about the SAT and ACT are different. The AWPE allows campuses to effectively place students for the ELWR and this is a central point to framing UCOPE's discussions this year. Chair Francis commented that satisfaction of the ELWR is different at each campus and it is problematic when the placement becomes punitive. Based on the data analysis UCOPE considered last year, the question was why the AWPE should be used if the SAT has better predictive value but the context has now changed. Making changes to the AWPE should also be on the table and one question may be whether a systemwide or campus specific placement exam should be used. Faculty may also want to consider and clarify the expectations for writing at UC.

IV. Satisfaction of the ELWR at the Campuses

Last year, UCOPE discussed differences in how the campuses handle satisfaction of the ELWR for students who do not pass the AWPE. The analysts for the campus committees on Preparatory Education will be asked to gather detailed information about the process at each campus in time for UCOPE's January meeting. It is critical to understand that what happens at the campuses is distinct from the systemwide Exam.

V. Updating Components of the AWPE

UCOPE has the opportunity to discuss any revisions or updates that might be made to the AWPE. The changes may not necessarily be made immediately but a concrete plan with a timeline would be useful.

Discussion: UCOPE members could gather opinions about the AWPE from the writing faculty at their campuses and input from students would also be valuable. A 2002 report from UCEP, BOARS and UCOPE included some feedback from writing faculty. The committee created the exam specifications so it is within UCOPE's purview to review them to determine if changes are needed. A fundamental question is whether UC faculty value writing. AWPE Chair Lang briefly explained that because of the AWPE Committee's current test development cycle and structure, it would take several years to roll out changes. UCOPE might identify specific components of the Exam for the AWPE Committee to updates.

This year, Chair Francis would like UCOPE to discuss whether the AWPE is a burden to students and issues related to equity and diversity. It is important to not conflate the value of the AWPE with how students who do not pass the Exam meet the ELWR at a campus. The ELWR sends an important message about the baseline standard for reading and writing at UC. A member emphasized that the AWPE is a narrow part of the ELWR and what happens after the requirement is met, and it is frustrating and problematic that the committee's current discussions are filtered through individual campus perspectives. At UCD there are courses that only have workload units, whereas UCR's writing courses now offer academic units which helps students move toward graduation at a steady pace and eliminated tension related to having workload only remedial courses. It was noted that the California Community Colleges (CCC) and California State University systems have been instructed to eliminate remedial courses. As a result, sending UC students to CCCs for courses to satisfy the ELWR will no longer be an option, so UC writing programs may wish to develop more stretch courses to fill this gap.

VI. Viable Alternatives to the AWPE

UCOPE has discussed directed self-placement (DSP) in the past and several years ago the committee heard from individuals about this model.

Discussion: AWPE Chair Lang is concerned that too many simultaneous changes to the SAT, ACT and the AWPE would be destabilizing. Changing the parameters of the AWPE should be discussed. DSP would automatically mean there is no entry level writing requirement. It is unclear how many faculty members are in favor of the DSP approach. A subcommittee of interested UCOPE members could take the lead with identifying placement models. The point was made that UC could consider campus specific placement exams rather than a systemwide exam. Campuses might also be given more flexibility since DSP might work well in some places. AWPE Chair Lang recommended inviting the UCSD Writing Program Director to describe her experience with DSP at Dartmouth and offer insight into how this model would translate at UC.

Videoconference adjourned at: 11 AM
Minutes prepared by: Brenda Abrams
Attest: Darlene Francis