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Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate
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University of California
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September 29, 2020

**YVETTE GULLATT, VICE PRESIDENT AND VICE PROVOST
GRADUATE, UNDERGRADUATE, AND EQUITY AFFAIRS**

Re: Administration of the Systemwide Analytical Writing Placement Exam in 2021

Dear Yvette,

At its September 23, 2020 meeting, the Academic Council endorsed the attached recommendation from the University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) related to the administration of the systemwide Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE).

As background, in March 2020, UCOPE announced the cancellation of the May in-person administration of the AWPE due to COVID-19, and asked campuses to develop a local plan to address student placement into writing classes. While an online administration of the AWPE was subsequently offered in June, four campuses developed alternative testing and placement options. These campuses want to continue their local practices in 2020-21. Council agrees with UCOPE's recommendation that incoming first-year and current students may fulfill the Entry-Level Writing Requirement during the 2020-21 academic year with these local campus alternatives, or with the online AWPE.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Gauvain".

Mary Gauvain, Chair
Academic Council

Cc: Director of Undergraduate Admissions Yoon-Wu
UCOPE Chair Gagnon
Senate Directors
Hilary Baxter, Executive Director, Academic Senate

Encl.



*Jeffrey Gagnon, Chair
University Committee on Preparatory Education
jgagnon@ucsd.edu*

*University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, California 94607-5200*

September 10, 2020

**MARY GAUVAIN, CHAIR
ACADEMIC SENATE**

RE: 2021 ADMINISTRATION OF THE ANALYTICAL WRITING PLACEMENT EXAM

Dear Mary,

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional in-person systemwide Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE) was administered online in June 2020. Undergraduate Admissions provided UCOPE with the attached memo delineating a plan for the 2021 AWPE administration, which the committee discussed by email.

UCOPE supports the central administration of the AWPE for 2021 and requests that Academic Council endorse the following recommendations:

- Approve administration of the Exam in 2021 as an online, un-proctored exam and using anti-plagiarism software on submitted essays, if the software license is available;
- Invite only students who submit Statements of Intent to Register to the five campuses that have committed to using the AWPE in 2020-2021 (UCB, UCLA, UCM, UCR, UCSD);
- Approve use of a past Exam for which training materials already exist;
- Support minimal investment in needed enhancements until UCOPE's long term commitment to continuation of centralized AWPE is established; and
- Explore alternative funding models after 2021.

The systemwide AWPE is a valuable option for incoming freshmen students who have not satisfied the Entry Level Writing Requirement by other means as described in Senate Regulation 636. UCOPE appreciates Academic Council's support in maintaining this important option. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. Gagnon".

Jeff Gagnon,
Chair, University Committee on Preparatory Education

cc: Yvette Gullatt, Vice President and Vice Provost, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs
Han Mi Yoon-Wu, Interim Vice President, Undergraduate Admissions

DATE **August 18, 2020**

To Darlene Francis, UCOPE Chair
 Jeff Gagnon, UCOPE Chair-elect

From Han Mi Yoon-Wu, Executive Director, Undergraduate Admissions

Subject Planning for 2021 AWPE

I. Summary and Specific Request:

Vendor contract for the Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE) support expires on September 30, 2020. Scope of work for the spring 2021 AWPE administration must be determined no later than September 11, 2020 in order to complete contract negotiations no later than October 1, 2020. Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs (GUEA) requires confirmation from UCOPE that it intends to administer the systemwide AWPE in 2021, the format of the administration (in person v. online), and what investment, if any, is expected for test development for a new exam.

II. Background & Current Status:

The AWPE is a centralized service to the nine undergraduate campuses to assist in placing students in the appropriate first-year writing course and meeting UC's Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR). The AWPE is a self-supporting program funded through fees paid by test takers.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 systemwide AWPE was administered as an online exam. Unlike previous years when only California students were invited to take the in-person AWPE, all domestic students indicating intent to register were invited to take the online exam if they had not satisfied ELWR through other means. The exam was not proctored, however, all exams were run through anti-plagiarism software and essays with the highest "Similarity Score" were flagged for writing office review.

Four UC campuses (Davis, Irvine, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz) developed local processes as an alternative to having students take the AWPE. It is likely these campuses will continue this practice for 2021 and request their students be exempt from the AWPE, thus reducing revenue generated from test takers.

There are no new passages for UCOPE to review as potential exams for 2021 as test development was suspended in 2020 to reduce costs.

The 2020 exam ran in deficit due to various COVID-19 impacts.

III. Discussion/Analysis:

A Task Force of the Academic Senate is anticipated to review the ELWR and efficacy of the AWPE during the 2020-21 academic year. Until the Task Force completes its work, the ELWR remains in place with the AWPE as a mechanism for clearing the requirement.

The campuses in favor of the AWPE feel the exam outcomes result in appropriate course placement and is beneficial for academic success on their campus; without the AWPE, some campuses may not have an alternative placement mechanism.

The abrupt transition of the 2020 AWPE to an online administration raised concern around test security that were addressed primarily through messaging. As the exam is used for course placement purposes, it is not viewed as a high stakes exam. Communication to the students stressed the importance of receiving an authentic sample of the student's own writing, required acceptance of a "Statement of Integrity" in order to take the exam, and cautioned that anti-plagiarism software might be used on the submitted exam essay as an additional deterrent. Adding a proctoring component to the AWPE not only adds to the cost of administering the exam, it raises concerns around privacy, equity and accessibility.

Using a new exam passage for 2021, including the passage approved but not used in 2020, will require development of training material and a new remote sample selection system. Finding new potential passages for an AWPE in 2022 will require resuming the test development effort, fairness review, and campus pre-testing. A new exam registration and payment process are needed to optimize the transition to the online AWPE. All these efforts require resources that may not materialize if the number of test takers is reduced with only five campuses using the central AWPE.

IV. Recommendation:

If UCOPE supports the central administration of the AWPE for 2021, it is recommended that UCOPE:

- Approve administration of the exam in the same manner as in 2020, i.e. keeping the AWPE as an online, un-proctored exam and using anti-plagiarism software on submitted essays, if the software license is available;
- Invite only students who submit SIRs to the five campuses without AWPE alternatives;
- Approve use of a past exam for which training materials already exist;
- Support minimal investment in needed enhancements (i.e., registration and payment system) until long term commitment to continuation of centralized AWPE is established; and
- Explore alternative funding models after 2021.