

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY
Report on Recent Activity Related to UCSC's Writing-Intensive Requirement

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

At the winter quarter 2007 Senate meeting CEP introduced the following resolution, which passed unanimously:

WHEREAS

- The ability to write effectively is fundamental to a university education;
- Writing is a complex skill that must be nurtured beyond the first year of college;
- Writing in a discipline promotes a deeper understanding of the substance of that discipline;
- Effective evaluation of and feedback about writing puts a special demand on evaluator-to-student ratios and therefore on resources;
- The current capacity shortfall in W offerings at UCSC places an unacceptable burden on students, advisors, and faculty;
- This problem of capacity cannot be addressed without an increase in resources devoted to W, unless the quality or meaning of W is to be eroded;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate calls on the Central and Divisional administration to work with departments and with the Senate committees to find a solution to the W crisis and to allocate the funding needed for it.

Getting this Resolution passed is only one step in an on-going effort to rethink UCSC's writing-intensive (W) requirement, an effort that is necessary for both pedagogical and logistical reasons. For those unfamiliar with the background and recent events, please refer to CEP's two documents "CEP resolution on the writing-intensive requirement" and "CEP slides on the writing-intensive requirement" at <http://senate.ucsc.edu/cep/reportsindex.html>. Both reports, which formed the context for the Resolution, argued that a meaningful approach to the issues involved would cost at least several hundred thousand dollars annually. CEP made the following recommendations:

1. *Restore the Peer Writing Assistant Program*

Students need support – outside of a W class – for their basic writing skills.

2. *Provide FTE for professional writing instructors to support writing in the disciplines*

Writing instructors are needed to consult with faculty teaching W courses, and to offer training courses for TAs and writing assistants.

Consider especially hiring instructors dedicated to writing in the sciences and/or engineering.

3. Provide TAS funds to targeted departments or divisions where the need for W support is greatest

For graduate students and/or lecturers.

Support for W in the form of TA or TF funds could enable UCSC to meet its goal of combining graduate growth with improvements to undergraduate education.

Cost at UCLA of providing matching TA funds to departments for W-like requirement: \$250,000.

4. Reformulate W as a requirement that students learn to write according to the conventions of their own academic field

Departments must be involved, even if they do not sponsor W courses themselves.

5. Broaden W to a "Disciplinary Communications" requirement encompassing not only writing but other forms of communication

This initiative on writing is in turn part of a larger effort by CEP, to continue all next year, to encourage campuswide discussion and reform in general education. (See "CEP slides on general education" at <http://senate.ucsc.edu/cep/reportsindex.html>.)

Since the last Senate meeting, CEP has been consulting with all of the divisional deans, and with the Committee on Planning and Budget, and we will continue to do so. The goal is a Senate proposal, by both committees and possibly Graduate Council, to the Executive Vice Chancellor building on (1)-(5) above.

In addition we have begun to approach departments directly. This is an important step in addressing the writing-intensive requirement for two reasons. First, the W is meant to be a *disciplinary* writing requirement. Disciplines by their nature have different approaches to writing, and our first goal is to invite and encourage departments to articulate clearly what their own expectations are of their majors in this regard. Second, since departmental expectations or requirements vary, and since divisional contexts vary, resource solutions to the writing-intensive issues may be in part department-specific.

The process of approaching departments began with a letter recently sent to all departments (attached to this report). We are now following up by meeting with a number of departments in an attempt to develop pilot approaches to disciplinary writing in each division. To help with this, we have obtained extensive data from the Institutional Research and Policy Studies Office on the availability and distribution of W seats in relation to campus divisions and majors. On the basis of the progress we make on this between now and next fall, our plan is to encourage *all* departments, by the end of next academic year, to articulate their own disciplinary communications objectives for their majors and to work with us and the administration to realize their own goals.

Respectfully submitted,

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

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May 15, 2007

ADDENDUM #1

May 15, 2007

DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

Re: University writing requirements

Dear Department Chairs:

The Committee on Educational Policy is requesting your feedback on a matter important to all undergraduates and most departments.

As you may have heard, CEP has been working with the administration and other Senate bodies in a reconsideration of our campus's approach to upper-level (non-frosh) writing requirements. These requirements are currently embodied in the writing-intensive (W) requirement. This requirement needs attention for two reasons. First, there is a serious shortfall of W course capacity on campus, a problem that is negatively affecting the quality of campus courses and threatening students' ability to graduate in good time. Second, the current requirement falls short of its educational goals: it focuses exclusively on one required course while writing is a broader pedagogical need; it does not extend to forms of communication besides writing; and most important, it provides no guarantee that students will receive practice and training in the kind of writing that is appropriate to their chosen fields.

With this message we are including URLs pointing to (i) CEP's report and Senate Resolution [<http://senate.ucsc.edu/cep/CEPResonWSCP1521.pdf>] and (ii) its slide presentation [http://senate.ucsc.edu/cep/senate_W_talk1.pdf], both from the winter 2007 Senate meeting. There you will find more detail on the writing-intensive requirement issue as well as a list of CEP recommendations. The resolution itself calls "on the Central and Divisional administration to work with departments and with Senate committees to find a solution to the W crisis, and to allocate the resources needed for it". This resolution passed unanimously. With this faculty mandate, CEP and the Committee on Planning and Budget will be engaging with the deans and the Executive Vice Chancellor in the hopes of resolving the resource issues.

But addressing the writing-intensive issue in a way that takes seriously its educational rationale will equally require participation of departments. For example, CEP is considering broadening the W requirement to a Disciplinary Communications requirement, allowing it to be extended to include modes of communication besides writing (e.g., oral and poster presentations) while keeping writing central. Most important to departments, we are exploring an idea that students must satisfy the requirement through courses appropriate to their chosen major fields. This idea would **not** entail that departments must mount or sponsor the relevant courses themselves. It would require that departments help define the intellectual content and form of disciplinary communications courses appropriate to their majors. This is because only departments are in a position to say what kind of writing, speaking, or presentation skills their students should acquire as part of an education in the relevant major.

The requirements for many majors already entail passing a writing-intensive course. For departments sponsoring such majors, this campus-wide discussion provides an opportunity to evaluate and reaffirm or adjust their approaches to disciplinary communication. Other major programs do not currently require that students pass courses in disciplinary communications appropriate to that major. CEP is well aware that for such departments to do so might involve questions of resources. Addressing this issue will be an important component of any revision to the writing-intensive requirement.

Put simply, CEP is asking all departments to reflect on the following questions.

- What communication skills do you think your majors should acquire, with attention to writing and other forms of discipline-related communication?
- What are you doing to aid your majors in acquiring these skills already? How well do you think those efforts are working? Which courses in the major already address these needs?
- What would it take to make up the difference (if applicable)? In particular, what kind of course or course sequence would you propose given adequate support?

We ask, first, that you share this email, and the two document (via webURL), with your department's faculty. Second, either this quarter or in the fall CEP representatives will be in touch with your department in order to hear your views and discuss the questions given above. We are especially eager to work with departments with majors that do not currently require satisfaction of W, in order to discuss what those departments think are appropriate disciplinary communications requirements for their majors and what would be needed in order to realize those pedagogical goals.

CEP members are happy to respond at any time to questions or concerns related to this proposal. Given the capacity and pedagogical issues involved, the campus must take some action on this matter soon, and there is broad support to do so. But we understand that moving forward will require broad consultation with departments and a good deal of problem solving.

You may wish to include another faculty member of your department (such as an undergraduate director) among the people for CEP to be in contact with on this issue. If so, please send their contact information to me, Jaye Padgett (CEP chair), at padgett@ucsc.edu. Since we don't believe that this important and complicated issue will be resolved this year, it would be helpful to include contacts who will be available in the 2007-08 academic year.

Thanks for your attention on a matter that is important to our students and to our educational mission.

Sincerely,

/s/

Jaye Padgett, Chair
Committee on Educational Policy

CC: Senate Chair Crosby
VPDUE Ladusaw
CPB Chair Gillman

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ
CEP Addendum Letter to Chairs re: "W"

AS/SCP/1538-6

College Provosts
Divisional Deans
Senate Director Harhen
Department Managers