

Committee on Preparatory Education
Minutes

Wednesday, April 21, 2010
9-10:30 a.m., Kerr Hall Room 129

Present: Nandini Bhattacharya (NSTF Rep), Mary-Kay Gamel (Chair), Roxanne Monnet (Staff), Sarah-Hope Parmeter (ELWR Coordinator), David Smith, Anna Tsing.

I. Announcements and updates.

The February minutes were accepted.

II. UC Commission on the Future Recommendation.

The Committee on Educational Policy (CPE) discussed the UC Commission on the Future recommendations. In general the Committee was quite concerned about some of the recommendations and found the report to be generally lacking in creative suggestions that would not significantly diminish the value of a UC undergraduate degree.

In the report, a general statement was made about considering alternates to regular UC courses for ELWR satisfaction and math preparation. No details were included. This topic is core to CPE's charge and the committee feels strongly that no action be taken without the Senate vetting proposed changes, at least by CPE and the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP).

CPE had a number of concerns regarding the recommendation to get students through their degrees in three years. This seems like a plan that would tone down options for outstanding students and could result in such things as eliminating time for undergraduates to engage in research opportunities. This would result in fewer or less qualified students for graduate education, reducing California student participation in careers that require advanced degrees and causing a shortfall of qualified candidates for certain professional and academic positions in California. The suggestion appears not to recognize that many students are not prepared by their K-12 experience for what is currently the typical UC workload, let alone a more accelerated workload.

The Committee drew a distinction between on-line learning (components) and on-line instruction (full courses). The former can be a useful tool which allows for innovative possibilities. However, CPE does not believe that fully on-line courses are an appropriate way to deliver a UC level education as a rule. CPE wanted to know how much of the pilot described in the proposal is actually distance learning rather than on-line components.

The proposal calls for gateway courses, general education, and other developmental courses to be offered on-line. It is the opinion of CPE that fully on-line courses might be appropriate in certain medium sized upper-division courses, but that on-line courses will never do as well for students as excellent faculty in the classroom.

CPE is highly concerned about the idea that on-line instruction might be offered to the most poorly prepared students. For example, a fully on-line version of Math 2 would seem to guarantee less prepared students who, if retained, may need to repeat courses and may be behind for the duration of their education—resulting in fewer graduate school and career opportunities. The Committee finds that these students are particularly in need of a learning environment that is motivating. The absence of the physical classroom seems likely to diminish the performance of these students. The report points to on-line instruction at certain comparison institutions as being successful. However, not all UC campuses have the resources of those private institutions to augment those classes or instructional shortfalls overall.

It must also be noted that the less prepared students are often the under-represented students who enter UC disadvantaged by their K-12 experiences. Some of the recommendations in the proposal seem likely to result in a less-diverse student body or, in light of reduced retention, a less-diverse alumni body.

Additionally, UC should continue to recognize the need for students to be introduced to a broad set of educational experiences through person to person contact in determining their major and future careers. Gateway courses intend to direct students toward a discipline. Non-majors do not have the same commitment to the discipline as majors. To move these courses to a fully on-line environment loses the appeal that is present in high-quality in-person instruction.

The bottom line is that CPE is concerned that use of on-line instruction will hurt retention of both UC's strongest and least-strong students.

III. Modified Supplemental Instruction Communication.

CPE discussed points to be made in a draft letter to go to instructors urging greater use of Modified Supplemental Instruction (MSI) which is provided through the Learning Support Services (LSS) office.

Students are more likely to make use of MSI when instructors mention it in class or create an incentive for participation. For example, faculty could give an incentive that would encourage students who performed poorly on the mid-term to participate prior to the final. MSI keeps track of attendees and will provide that information to instructors upon request.

CPE will encourage collaboration with LSS on how best to coordinate the class with MSI support. Faculty should consider encouraging their top undergraduates to become MSI tutors. By assisting in identification of LSS tutors, there is an opportunity to help train people who could provide other support in the future and who may be the teaching faculty of the future. CPE discussed the idea of departments formalizing their Teaching Assistant training into a credit bearing graduates class that could be cross-listing for your undergraduates as preparation to being an instructional assistant for academic credit, an MSI tutor, or a paid Undergraduate Teaching Assistant.

A draft letter will be considered at the next meeting.

IV. ELWR Coordination Update.

The ELWR Coordinator update on college core stretch courses was carried forward to the next meeting by which time more feedback should be available.

V. Proposal to Expand Area “D” admissions requirement.

CPE briefly discussed the proposal to expand undergraduate admissions Area D to include Earth Sciences. It was noted that the Earth sciences faculty who gave input to the proposal were not in support of it and indicated that students who had such courses in the absence of a course in chemistry, for example, were less prepared to begin university level Earth sciences. CPE’s response will be completed by email.

VI. Retention Services.

Further discussion of how to respond to the letter on Retention Service was carried forward due to lack of time.

So attests,

Mary-Kay Gamel, Chair
Committee on Preparatory Education