

Committee on Preparatory Education
Minutes

Wednesday, March 31, 2010
9-10:30 a.m., Kerr Hall Rm 129

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

Absent: Anna Tsing.

Guest: Learning Support Services (LSS) Director Holly Cordova.

I. Announcements and updates.

The March 10 minutes were accepted.

At the April 21 meeting, Entry-level Writing Requirement (ELWR) Coordinator Sarah-Hope Parmeter will report on the College 10 stretch course, which intends to bring students up to the C2 writing level by the third quarter of their first year.

II. Math Placement Exam.

Last year the Mathematics Department was approved to limit students to three attempts at the math placement exam. It was also approved that no student could use the math placement exam to place out of a course he or she had previously failed to pass (by F, D, or NP). In their letter of support for the request, the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) wrote “CEP wondered whether two attempts should be the upper limit. In any case, we also discussed the desirability of requiring that students undergo some kind of verifiable course of study between attempts at the exam, in order to ensure that the best use is made of a second or third attempt.” CPE from last year agreed with CEP’s assessment.

This year the Mathematics Department has proposed that students be limited to two attempts. They did not place the condition that a student be required to take a course between attempts to, as CEP wrote, “ensure that the best use is made of a second ... attempt.” Member Bhattacharya recused herself from the discussion after providing information and answering questions.

Based on the assessment and feedback of CPE and CEP during 2008-09, CPE approved the request to reduce the number of attempts at the math placement exam to two. The Committee did not find it necessary to add the stipulation that students take a course between attempts. The decision will be effective with students who make their first attempt at the exam in fall 2010.

In the conversation it was noted that students who are barely at the level needed to take a class may be better placed into the course at the next level down.

The Mathematics Department will be asked to notify all affected Major sponsoring units.

Completion of the response letter was delegated to Chair Gamel.

IV. Follow-up consultation: Learning Support Services.

CPE continued its discussion with Learning Support Services (LSS) Director Holly Cordova who provided CPE with a draft study on Math 3 and equivalent courses (such as AMS 3) which serve as “gate keepers” for about 55 percent of the majors. Through a pre-test given at the start of Math 2, low-scoring students are identified and directed to take sections that meet twice weekly, rather than once weekly. Despite the extra section time, those students are the most likely students to not succeed in their first attempt at Math 2. Given the lack of support for remedial courses in the UC system, and the lack of funding for a version of Math 2 that would be conducted over two quarters, alternate ideas to support these students are needed. Director Cordova indicated that CPE will receive the report in its final form.

CPE asked whether the limiting factor in expanding Modified Supplemental Instruction (MSI) to its full capacity was faculty engagement. MSI sections are typically limited to 10-12 students. Some of the MSI funding (~\$180K) is provided by Measure 30 which UCSC students voted to impose on themselves. Director Cordova indicated that students do participate more when faculty are involved by at least recommending MSI, such as after the mid-term, or when faculty offer extra credit for MSI participation. The Committee asked whether it might be worthwhile for CPE to write to faculty to make them more aware of MSI options. Director Cordova supports the idea of a joint collaboration on a letter to instructors, noting that the level of faculty participation makes a difference to the level of MSI support given to some courses.

CPE asked what could be done to better serve under-represented students at UCSC. Director Cordova indicated that she would like to draw more attention to differences in educational equity. She would like to see the following question considered: Does UC/UCSC have a responsibility to try to equalize the education that students had before coming to a UC campus, in order to create equal chances for all UC students to meet their educational and personal goals. She shared with CPE that 24 percent of UCSC’s students qualify for Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) support, 18-23 percent of whom have a Latino background. When a campus reaches 25 percent Latino/Hispanic, it is designated as an Hispanic Serving college. It has been demonstrated as particularly beneficial for students to have a critical mass of peers to whom one can relate socially.

On the topic of academic preparation, Director Cordova encouraged that departments establish gates to ensure that the students who get in to their majors are successful. Prior to applying such gates, there should be guidance for students to have an understanding of whether or now they should attempt that major to begin with. The group was informed that VPDUE Bill Ladusaw’s office is working with major sponsoring units to develop advising statements to be posted in a central web page as a resource to prospective students. Members commented that it would also benefit students if instructors would put recommended preparation for courses in their catalog descriptions more often than is currently the case. For example, C2 could be recommended or

required prior to completing certain gateway courses to majors to encourage that students have more preparation in writing before starting their major.

CPE was made aware that of the UCSC Admissions/CAFA practice of requiring higher grades in certain English classes for transfer students who appear to have an English as a Second Language (ESL) background based on certain courses that appear on transfer student transcripts. The Committee would like to better understand why Admissions/CAFA finds it appropriate to impose a different standard for a portion of the prospective transfer student population if they are otherwise equally qualified with those who do get admitted.

The Committee wanted more data on what portion of the EOP students are considered to be ELS or English Language Learners (ELL). Director Cordova and Coordinator Parmeter will look into what data can be made available for consideration by CPE. For example, some students receive an E designation in light of their ELWR results, indicating that they were found to be at an ELL level in their writing. This information is provided to colleges and might be readily available for sharing with CPE.

V. Post consultation discussion.

CPE will continue the discussion of whether to communicate to faculty options available to them through MSI at its next meeting.

The Committee also discussed the idea of a report to the Senate on the challenging situation of support for EOP students at UCSC in order to make faculty aware of the need to aid in EOP students coming up to speed from their past educational experiences in a timely fashion, in order to be at fully competitive with their peers while at UCSC, and to be better positioned for graduate school and future careers.

So attests,

Mary-Kay Gamel, Chair
Committee on Preparatory Education