Committee on Preparatory Education
Minutes
Wednesday, January 23, 2013
Kerr Hall Room 129, 12:00 -1:30 p.m.

Present: George Bunch, Gabriel Elkaim, Sarah-Hope Parmeter (ELWR Coordinator), Bruno Mendes (NSTF Rep.), SUA and GSA reps. TBA, David Smith (Chair), Susanna Wrangell (staff).

Absent: None.

Guests: Provost Crown College, Professor Joel Ferguson.

I. Announcements
Approval of the minutes
Approval of the December 7, 2012 minutes was postponed until Chairs Smith and Elkaim could discuss together the consultation with the VPDUE. Analyst Wrangell was temporarily out of the room during the discussion.

II. Pre-consultation for Crown C1 Pilot
The committee held a pre-consultation discussion of Crown Provost Joel Ferguson’s proposal for a winter core session at Crown College. The separate issue of non-ELWR-satisfied students possibly jumping too far ahead by satisfying C2 with an honor’s core section was briefly discussed in the pre-consultation, but we determined it was not relevant to the day’s main topic.

III. Consultation with Crown Provost Joel Ferguson
In the consultation with Professor Ferguson, the committee expressed unanimous support for the project, although a formal motion was not made. The outline of the project, as understood by the committee, is that a winter section of the Crown Core course would be held for students who failed in the fall. Both Professor Ferguson and the committee saw two major advantages: providing students who failed core, particularly those who are ELWR unsatisfied, a chance to retake without waiting a year, giving them more time to pass Writing 2; and to encourage core instructors to maintain higher writing standards by making the consequences less severe when a student fails core. In particular, the committee liked one version of the proposal in which instructors could choose a grade of "IP" instead of "F" for students in fall core who made clear progress but didn’t reach passing proficiency. At the end of winter core, these students would have the winter grade applied to both the fall and winter sessions. CPE would like to address CEP to encourage them to approve this option, which will require a change in current bylaw on grading of courses.

The consultation included discussion of the following issues associated with the proposal, and the committee and Professor Ferguson seemed to be in agreement:
CPE wanted to make sure that, in the implementation of the proposal, ELWR-unsatisfied students taking winter core would not be prevented or discouraged from taking Writing 20 at the same time. Member Parmeter pointed out that it’s not necessarily paradoxical for a student to pass core (carrying the C1 writing standard) while ELWR unsatisfied, because core also teaches many other aspects of academic discourse. However, since core carries the C1, standards for writing in core need to be raised, and core instructors need to be willing to fail students, even those working hard and showing progress, who don’t meet the C1 standard. Member Parmeter agreed to forward a link to the C1 standard to the rest of the committee. Professor Ferguson noted that Crown already has the highest fail rate in core because of his efforts to encourage instructors to take these standards seriously.

CPE advised that core instructors known to have excellent experience and training specifically as writing instructors be engaged for the winter core sections, whether those are instructors from the writing program or instructors particularly well known to the provost as having that training.

CPE inquired about the cost of the trial. Professor Ferguson said that the VPDUE would fund half of three sections of the winter core, and that Crown could cover the remainder of the costs.

The consultation included a more general discussion of how to raise writing standards for core throughout the campus. Professor Ferguson stressed making sure that instructors know they will not be penalized for failing students, and changing the student culture of expectation that core should be an easy pass as long as all assignments are completed. The idea was also raised of having a retreat/workshop in which core instructors from across the campus meet together to look at a set of sample papers, compare them together with the existing C1 writing standards, and learn from this experience to adjust their own grading rubrics to really reflect these standards.

IV. Math Placement Exam
Member Mendes reported on discussions with Mathematics Department Vice-chair Marty Weissman. Very preliminary analysis from this year’s new placement exam, given to more than 3000 students, shows that the test was a good predictor of success in math 3, less so in the calculus classes, and a higher percentage placed into math 3 than under the old test. A preliminary report from Vice-chair Weissman will be circulated to the committee by email, but we may want to wait for a later version and a visit from Marty before taking up the discussion in committee. Member Mendes said from his own experience that too many students in AMS3 are lacking the skills that would be taught in Math 2, but that a specifically pre-stats course would be more useful to them.

V. Plagiarism software
In a very brief discussion of the new proposal for campus purchase of plagiarism software, the committee was supportive of this as an educational tool -- whether in the hands of students, instructors, or both -- for demonstrating to students what plagiarism is, and how to avoid it. The sense of the committee was that
instructors should be encouraged to use the system mostly to get students to rewrite plagiarized work, since misunderstanding of what constitutes plagiarism is extremely prevalent, and probably more so than calculated deception. It was thought that its utility might be greatest in upper division courses, since in preparatory writing courses it is often very clear when the students' writing departs from their own voice. Chair Smith has seen the Turnitin system used very effectively at another institution, and pointed out that the tool would be useful even in the physical sciences for upper-division disciplinary writing. A formal resolution was not adopted, but the committee would like to work on a written response over email, and possibly vote on it at the next meeting if that occurs before the Feb. 15 deadline for responses.

VI. Report from UCOPE
There was no time for the Chair's report from the Jan 18 meeting of UCOPE, so it was postponed until the next meeting.

Next meeting

It was agreed to take a new poll for the time and day of the next meeting, since there is not a time that is convenient for the whole committee.

Committee on Preparatory Education, 2012 - 13