

COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION
Annual Report 2008-2009

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

The Committee on Preparatory Education (CPE) met once or twice per quarter throughout the academic year to deal with specific issues related to its charge. The work and accomplishments of the Committee during the 2008-09 year are summarized below.

Tracking Entry Level Writing Requirement pass rates:

In 2006-07, CPE noted an upward trend in the percentage of students who did not complete the Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR) by the end of their first quarter of enrollment. In order to mitigate the impacts of this trend, CPE worked on strengthening the enforcement of Santa Cruz Regulation (SCR) 10.5.2. The good news is that the trend seems to be reversing, as the ELWR pass rates at the end of fall quarter rose to 73 percent in 2007 and 70 percent in 2008 from a low of 66 percent in 2006. However, this is still significantly below the average pass rate of 78 percent from 1999-2004. It seems worthwhile to keep a close eye on the ELWR pass rates, particularly in light of the recent report on ELWR core course performance cited below.

In 2007, CPE discussed with the administration the tracking of students in order to see how language, culture or other factors correlated with students' success or lack of success in completing ELWR and with their overall academic success at the university. These data, and others, now show a disturbing pattern as seen in an analysis of ELWR core course student performance data prepared by Holly Gritsch de Cordova (Director, Learning Support Services), Charis Herzon (Assistant Director, Learning Support Services), Rebecca Anderson, (MSI/Tutor Coordinator, Learning Support Services), and Sarah-Hope Parmeter (ELWR Coordinator), submitted to CPE June 1, 2009. This study focused on students enrolled in ELWR sections of the core course at all ten UCSC colleges in fall 2008. It was reported that only 51 percent of the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) students satisfied ELWR by November 2008 compared to 79 percent of the non-EOP students. According to the report, "Low-income, first generation university students perform academically less well than more privileged students when enrolled in the same classes. Furthermore, students of color from low-income backgrounds and the first generation in their families to attend a university achieve less academic success than low-income, first generation white students enrolled in the same classes. The ELWR Core courses do not appear to be educating students equitably."

CPE is concerned with this finding, and hopes that this report informs the direction of the Committee in 2009-10. In our opinion, the delayed completion of ELWR by the most vulnerable members of campus is worth further investigation and intervention. We speculate that acculturation to academia, or the need to work more hours than others, may play a part in lower scores. CPE wonders whether there could be data to support these speculations and whether receiving financial aid other than work-study during their first year might mitigate the difference in scores between EOP and non-EOP students.

Math preparation, sequencing and placement exams:

CPE spent the majority of the year considering math preparation, sequencing, and placement

exams. In October, we were asked by the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) to consider a request by the Math department to revise policy concerning the mathematics placement exam. According to CPE's charge (SCR 13.25.2), the Committee supervises mathematics placement exams. At issue were the number of times students were allowed to retake the exam, and the use of the exam to place out of Math 3 if they received a failing grade. Our discussion revealed an additional problem with two distinct populations in Math 3--those who were continuing in a mathematics series of courses and those for whom it was a required terminal course for another major (e.g., Psychology).

CPE members voted in support of the request to limit students to three attempts at the Math Placement Exam and to disallow the exam as a substitute way of passing beyond a class that they previously failed. The change will be effective with the 2009-10 catalog year.

CPE also investigated the course offerings by Math and Applied Math and Statistics for social science majors and the requirements of various departments for mathematical coursework. In this, members considered the results of the May 2008 undergraduate student opinion poll conducted by CEP which contained comments related to mathematics at UCSC, course syllabi, and the opinion of course instructors. These data suggest that another course, such as Math 4, should be offered for social sciences students. Fortunately, Math 4 was developed for this purpose and offered as a new course this year. The Psychology Department confirmed that they are considering AMS 2 and Math 4 as alternatives for their precalculus requirement, which is usually satisfied through completion of Math 3. To date, a formal request has not been submitted to CEP to change the requirement in the catalog. The Math Department will continue offering Math 4 for non-mathematics majors in 2009-10.

Response to Proposed Revision to Senate Regulations Governing Undergraduate Admissions:

CPE discussed the proposed revisions to Senate Regulations governing undergraduate admissions. These were proposed to bring Regulations into compliance with the admissions eligibility criteria adopted by the UC Regents earlier this year. CPE's response focused on the areas of their charge related to preparatory education in mathematics and English.

On April 30, 2009, CPE submitted a letter to Santa Cruz Division Academic Senate Chair Quentin Williams this discussion. UC admissions currently require three years of Mathematics. The Committee would like to see four years of High School Mathematics required for UC eligibility. CPE also strongly recommends that students who are interested in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors take a year of precalculus as one of the four classes, in preparation for the University STEM courses. In addition, while CPE agreed that four courses of English is an appropriate requirement for admission, we would like at least one of these courses to involve writing on topics beyond literature. This change in subject area writing is aligned with the new UCSC Disciplinary Communication requirement and would begin to address the same concerns.

University Committee on Preparatory Education meetings:

The chair attended two University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) meetings in which the Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE) prompts were evaluated and chosen for

future use. Scoring was also calibrated for the exam. It was anticipated that approximately 17,500 students would take the AWPE in spring, even with a reduction in the freshman class. Budget implications were discussed systemwide and at individual campuses.

Continuing Concerns:

1) Academic Preparedness of Transfer Students

CPE remains concerned about the preparedness of transfer students to tackle upper-division course work. The Committee feels that there needs to be more formal academic support for transfer students at UCSC, especially in the areas of math and writing. There was speculation that some transfer students come to UCSC lacking academic vocabulary or experiences that could help with success in university. CPE recommends that next year's Committee consult with Services for Transfer and Re-entry Students in order to consider what support may be given to transfer students to help bridge gaps that might exist between expectations and experiences that are part of community college versus expectations and experiences at the university level.

2) Pre-Admission requirements for majors

CPE is concerned about a growing trend toward pre-admission requirements for certain majors at UCSC. Specifically, we are concerned about students' ability to obtain degrees of interest in light of such policies. The Committee wonders whether students who need more preparatory classes for English or math earlier in their time at UCSC will be shut out from some majors. The Committee wrote to CEP encouraging them to explore this important topic early next year and to ask that CPE be included in the loop.

3) Perceived gap between Math 2 and Math 3

Members of the Committee identified a perceived gap between Math 2 and Math 3 (or equivalent courses) this year. To view the contours of such a gap, it would be worthwhile to find out the correlation between the grades received in Math 2 with that of Math 3 and the fail rate for students who took Math 3 (and like courses) after taking Math 2. This can establish whether or not there are issues with this particular transition, whether or not the curriculum for Math 2 should be restructured, and what, if any, additional support might be given to students who take Math 3 (or equivalent courses) after Math 2.

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Respectfully submitted,

COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION

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