

Committee on Preparatory Education 2017-18 Annual Report

To: Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

ELWR

Oversight of the Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR) is a crucial part of Committee on Preparatory Education's (CPE) charge. During 2017-18, two important changes strongly influenced administration of ELWR at UCSC:

- UCOPE temporarily suspended acceptance of SAT scores for ELWR satisfaction, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of students needing to take the Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE).
- The transition to the Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC), which includes pathways for students who have not satisfied ELWR prior to the start of their first quarter at UCSC.

Changes in the SAT

ELWR can be satisfied prior to the start of a student's first term at UCSC by achievement of a sufficiently high score on

- one of several standardized admission tests,
- the exam for one of several AP or IB courses,
- appropriate transfer course credit, or
- the AWPE, a UC-created and administered exam.

The University Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE) oversees ELWR at the system level, including determining the cut-off scores for admissions tests, selecting the passages to be used in the AWPE, and calibrating scoring of the AWPE.

The AWPE serves as a last chance at ELWR satisfaction without UC coursework for many incoming students - it is administered in May, after students have been accepted to a UC campus, to students who haven't already satisfied ELWR. Students who are unable to take the AWPE in May (e.g. international students) can take the AWPE in the fall, shortly before the start of the quarter. The May administration of the AWPE is centrally managed, but the individual campuses administer and score the fall AWPE.

The SAT "Reasoning Test, Writing" was last administered in January 2016, and UCOPE did not immediately approve the new multiple choice "Evidenced-Based Reading and Writing" portion of the SAT for ELWR satisfaction. UCOP collected and analyzed UC student data from the first year that the new SAT was fully adopted by the College Board; that analysis was then used by UCOPE to determine an appropriate cut-off for ELWR satisfaction.

The unavailability of the SAT for ELWR satisfaction resulted in substantial increases in the number of students taking the AWPE; this was particularly challenging for the UC campuses, including UCSC, with lower rates of ELWR satisfaction via AP exam credit. The number of incoming UCSC students who took the AWPE in fall increased from approximately 540 in 2016 to approximately 1545 in 2017. CPE worked with the Writing Program to ensure that UCSC remained compliant with published ELWR policies despite the logistical challenges resulting

from the high number of students requiring last minute AWPE administration and subsequent enrollment in an appropriate Writing course.

AWPE scoring

An arcane but crucial aspect of AWPE scoring played an important role in the Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC) proposal. Each AWPE essay is initially scored by two readers; if the individual scores agree to within a point and are *not* a 3/4 pair, the student's score is the sum of the two scores. Papers whose composite scores are 8 and higher satisfy the Entry Level Writing requirement; papers whose composite scores are 6 and below do not. If the individual scores differ by more than a point or straddle the 3-4 divide, a third, highly experienced, reader scores the essay and that new reading alone determines the student's AWPE score. Since placement pigeon holes are at least two points wide, differences of a single point between individual scores do not affect students' coursework requirements.

This scoring protocol is designed to allow novice readers to gain expertise while minimizing the risk that students could be inappropriately placed. For example, in situations where there are significant variations in the sophistication and grammatical correctness within an essay, experienced readers are assumed to reliably distinguish essays written by students attempting to game the system by combining largely pre-written "generic" paragraphs with clumsy on-the-spot writing specific to the prompt from original essays in which the student initially struggles to express a strongly felt response, but then hits their stride and produces clear, if flawed, prompt-specific arguments.

The ALC proposal introduced the term "true 8's" and, in effect, proposed that UCSC split from the rest of the UC system and adopt distinct criteria for ELWR satisfaction via AWPE. Specifically, it was proposed that:

Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE) scores of "true 8s" or above (or the equivalent) satisfy the ELWR and the C1 requirement. Scores of 7/7E or below do not.

A footnote on that page elaborated that:

This percent accounts for students who satisfy the ELWR by means other than the AWPE. It also includes an estimate for the number of students who would have scored 7 on the AWPE if scores of 7 had been retained. The current system "normalizes" 7s by resolving them into scores of 6 (not passing) or 8 (passing). We are assuming about half of the exams originally scored 7 were resolved to 8, and about half to 6.

The frequent references to scores of 7 in the ALC proposal indicated a fundamental misconception regarding the AWPE scoring process; poorly matched individual scores - particularly 3/4 pairs - are not combined, they are discarded. While most initial 3/4 pairs probably do receive a score of 6 or 8, the experienced readers aren't simply rounding the sum of the initial scores up or down.

The proposal to introduce an AWPE score of 7 and declare that scores of 7 would not satisfy ELWR appears to have been motivated by concerns within the Writing Program about the

academic success of students with AWPE scores of 8. CPE shares the Writing Program's concerns, but believes that efforts to better support these students should be data-driven and must be compliant with systemwide ELWR policies. CPE supports implementation of a research project involving acquisition, with the assistance of UCOP, and analysis of data on course outcomes for students receiving initial 3/4 pairs on the AWPE, and encourages the Writing Program to pursue such a project.

Time limit for ELWR satisfaction for students in the Multilingual Curriculum

UCSC has traditionally granted students an extra quarter beyond the official one year time limit for ELWR satisfaction. However, that blanket extension had for many years been inconsistent with UCOP interpretation of systemwide Senate regulations. Hence the Writing Program's request that the extension be continued, but only for students required to take all three quarters of the Multilingual Curriculum (MLC, Writing 25-27), required both careful consideration by CPE and consultation with UCOPE and UCOP Undergraduate Admissions.

The pertinent question is *not* whether any student who fails to satisfy ELWR within their first year at UCSC should automatically be barred from enrollment, but whether case-by-case review should be required or an automatic extension should be granted to all students meeting certain criteria. Hence natural corollary questions are: how many students are expected to need more than one year to satisfy ELWR, and what would determine whether or not these students should directly continue their studies at UCSC or should transfer to another institution until they have gained adequate writing proficiency for success in UCSC courses.

Without adequate data on the outcomes of prior offerings of the MLC, well-grounded estimates of future enrollments in Writing 25-27, estimated pass rates for those courses, etc., CPE did not believe that we could make an informed decision to either approve or deny the Writing Program's request. According to UCOP Undergraduate Admissions, granting a provisional extension to a well-defined cohort of students facing clear challenges in timely ELWR satisfaction would be compliant with systemwide regulations, but there should be a commitment to ongoing collection and analysis of outcome data to assess the costs and benefits to students of such an extension. It was also recommended that UCSC consider offering appropriate ELWR courses (e.g. Writing 27) during Summer Session to enable students who haven't passed all of the courses in the Writing 25-27 sequence on the first attempt to meet the one year deadline.

Communication with the Writing Program

CPE has traditionally had at least one representative from the Writing Program participate in the committee activities. In 2016-17, two Writing Program lecturers were members of CPE; in 2017-18, CPE had one WP representative, who attended only one CPE meeting, and did not participate in any of the committee's review activities. Given the focus on the Academic Literacy Curriculum (ALC) for much of the year, the resulting limited input from the Writing Program significantly complicated several of CPE's efforts.

The communication bottleneck was particularly troublesome in the context of CPE oversight of UCSC compliance with systemwide policies and procedures regarding the AWPE. At multiple times in summer and fall 2017 it seemed possible that there had been a breakdown of communication within the Writing Program, as well as with CPE and UCOPE. The extremely

limited CPE participation by the Writing Program representative made it difficult for CPE to make informal inquiries.

Future assessment of the ELWR course outcomes

For ELWR-unsatisfied frosh, participation in Writing 20 or Writing 25-27 will support their progress towards mastery of the communication skills deemed essential for academic success at UCSC. When considering possible approaches to evaluating the ELWR courses, CPE decided that grade analyses should be combined with more qualitative assessment. Before attempting to develop processes for determining how well the *new* ELWR courses were working, we needed to develop a meaningful interpretation of “working” to consider ELWR in the larger context of first year writing instruction, and establish benchmarks using the outcomes of the current courses in combination with student and faculty satisfaction with those outcomes.

To gain qualitative information about downstream output of the Writing Program pipeline, CPE interviewed the chairs of several representative departments. The results of these interviews suggest that many faculty frequently work with their students to improve their basic writing skills, even after students have successfully completed their non-DC writing courses. CPE encourages the Writing Program to work with CEP to ensure that course learning goals and outcome assessments address the needs of the full spectrum of UCSC major programs.

Further development of protocols for assessment of the ELWR courses was put on hold after CPE learned that there would not be a CPE committee in 2018-19, and that CPE’s charge might be permanently assigned to CEP.

Strategic Academic Plan

CPE, along with the other Academic Senate committees, reviewed key components of the Strategic Academic Plan, including the Campus Landscape Analysis and the Themed Academic Working Group (TAWG) proposals.

CPE is concerned that the Campus Landscape Analysis, and the requests for Senate and individual faculty input on the Landscape Analysis and TAWG proposals, may have very little influence on the actual evolution of UCSC. We suspect that some aspects of the development of the new Strategic Academic Plan, while well-intentioned, may have exacerbated the rivalries and competition for resources that were criticized by many faculty in the Landscape Analysis. The relationship between the dramatic restructuring of the School of Engineering and the Strategic Academic Plan is unclear.

CPE had several concerns about the review process for the TAWG proposals. CPE appreciates the decision to seek input from all faculty, but believes that some of the points addressed in the provided rubric could not be reliably evaluated by non-experts, and that the rubric did not provide adequate opportunity for faculty to openly express their priorities and preferences; several of the criteria addressed in the rubric would have been better addressed by independent expert reviewers in a process analogous to that used by major federal and state funding agencies. Reviewers in one academic division are unlikely to be aware of the “critical issues facing the research community” in areas represented in other divisions, and should not be expected to

reliably identify a “compelling case that the proposed research has distinctive qualities in an (inter)national context.”

Differences in academic cultures create substantial challenges in equitable reviewing; this problem is exacerbated by the limited guidance provided in preparing and reviewing proposals. In the absence of clear, precise instructions, people are likely to adapt proposal styles that have been successful in their native academic environment and undervalue proposals from other divisions not out of intentional bias, but because those proposals do not meet the common expectations of their research culture. This can reinforce perceptions of factionalism.

There were many important intersections between proposals - faculty, goals, and resources - but the desirability of coordination between projects does not seem to have been taken into account in the proposal creation or review processes. Shared resources, whether FTE, postdocs, staff, lab space, computers, or instructional studios, could greatly increase the cost effectiveness of several proposals. By failing to explicitly take possible coordination with other working groups into account, the rubric scoring system appeared to favor large, expensive proposals.

CPE hiatus in 2018-19

The Committee on Committees, in cooperation with Senate leadership, decided not to assign Senate members to CPE in 2018-19, against the recommendation of the outgoing CPE chair.

At the start of 2016-17, Senate leaders expressed concerns that CPE didn't have enough to do; we believe that the development of what was to become the Academic Literacy Curriculum, UCSC's recent attainment of Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status, and the challenges in coordination between stakeholders in math placement and remediation have provided ample activity for the committee in recent years. In spring 2017 and in 2017-18, concerns were communicated to CPE that CPE might be too small to be a viable Senate committee, and a possible transfer of CPE's charge to CEP was mentioned as a possible approach to remediating this perceived problem. We believe that a better approach would be to *increase* CPE Senate membership and to support increased interaction between CPE and CEP. “Fly on the wall” attendance, or even participation, by a CPE member in relevant sections of CEP meetings could address concerns that CPE may lack a sufficiently broad perspective.

We recommend inviting undergraduate representatives to participate in CPE meetings, to obtain firsthand information about student's experiences with ELWR satisfaction and math placement.

CPE believes that the committee has served the Senate and the campus well, and hopes that it will continue to serve in the future. Permanently subsuming CPE into CEP would deprive the campus community of valuable opportunities to learn about multiple Senate perspectives on some important issues in undergraduate education. Compromises are inevitable when complex projects are developed and implemented; the greater the transparency regarding those compromises, the easier it will be in the future to evaluate their consequences.

Respectfully submitted;
COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION
Dongwook Lee
Kip Tellez
Debra Lewis, Chair

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