

CURRICULUM AND REQUIREMENTS COMMITTEE MEETING

29 JANUARY 1991

SUMMARY REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Professor Ken Pellow, Chairman of the English Department made a presentation to the Committee in which he discussed the history, current status, and strengths and weaknesses of the program. A summary of Professor Pellow's presentation follows.

From approximately 1971 to 1978/79 CLAS had no composition requirement. A composition requirement was instituted due to what was perceived as inadequate writing skills of our students. A six credit hour requirement was instituted, and Janice Hays was hired as the Director of the composition program.

Currently students who enter UCCS as freshmen are required to take a placement test known as the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE). The TSWE is part of the SAT, but is also a test which can be given by itself and is given the first and third Saturdays of every month except for the first Saturday at the end of the free drop/add period. The TSWE tests grammar and vocabulary, but it also tests for preferred rhetorical strategies (for the most graceful wording, in other words). Students who score 43 on the TSWE are permitted to enroll in English 131, Composition I. Students who score 59 on the TSWE are permitted to enroll in English 141, Composition II. Students who score less than 43 on the TSWE are referred to English 121, a writing class designed to get students' writing skills up to a level whereby they will be able to enter and pass English 131. A score of 4 on the CEEB Advanced Placement test (AP) will qualify a student for English 141. An AP score of 5 will satisfy the composition requirement. As per all courses on this campus, students may challenge English 131 and 141.

No data is available to measure the success of the TSWE as a placement instrument, but there is a strong suspicion that while a high TSWE score may yield a poor writer very rarely will a low TSWE score yield a good writer.

Students who transfer to UCCS with the equivalents of English 131 and 141 must score a 50 on the TSWE in order to satisfy the graduation writing requirement. Transfer students who score less than a 50 face complications. One alternative for them is to take and pass the English 131 Exit Essay Exam.

The English 131 Exit Essay Exam must be passed before a student can successfully complete the course. The English 131 Exit Essay Exam is the challenge exam for the course. Each student's Exit Essay Exam is read by two different people, and no instructor grades their own students' exams. If one reader scores the essay a pass and the other a fail, then a third reader is utilized "to

break the tie." The exams are graded in a holistic fashion, with the grader looking for theme development and cause and effect arguments. Approximately 10% of English 131 students fail the Exit Essay Exam and receive either an IW or IF until the retake the course. Another 10% to 15% receive a "pass with lab" which means the student receives either an IW or IF for the course until such time as the required Lab is completed. Students who perform well in class but can't pass the exit exam are given retake possibilities. In addition every instructor has the right to appeal their students' scores to a three-member board of appeal. Such appeals number approximately 15 each semester.

The purpose of English 131 is the enhancement of students' cognitive development. Writing is correlated with thinking. Students begin with short papers which focus on the development of a theme and proceed to more sophisticated levels in which students learn more about paragraph relationship, analysis, and cause and effect. In English 141, students write an argumentative research paper and become more aware of both rhetorical strategies and audience awareness.

A strength of the program is a very strong support system. The Writing Lab is manned by an excellent tutorial staff who will assist weak writers. The improved Lab allows for more testing and analyzing of students' abilities. Currently there are two MacIntosh classrooms with 22 stations each. All writing courses are presently taught on computers. Student morale in the program is described as high, but there are still less well prepared students whose reading and writing skills are weak and who, therefore, are not eager for a writing requirement.

A program weakness is that there is no stipulation which makes students take the writing requirement at any particular point in their program. Such a stipulation could cause transfer problems. One means of encouraging early completion of the requirement is the prerequisite of completion of English 141 before a student can enroll in the required upper division Core Humanities. Professor Pellow noted that early completion of the requirement (includes taking English 141 immediately after successful completion of English 131) is better for the student than is postponing its completion, but this conclusion could be a function of self-selection.

The Committee discussed requiring students to begin the English 131 and 141 sequence at an early date. Passing those courses should not be mandated before students would be allowed to take other courses. This is to prevent the emerging of a backlog by having students taking English 131 and 141 taking those courses again and preventing new students from getting into the classes. Professor Pellow indicated that to prevent backlogs, the current practice is to permit some students to pass even though the English Department feels uncomfortable with the students' writing abilities.

Professor Pellow discussed the possibility of a junior writing exam, given during a student's fifth semester in college. If the student could not pass the exam, a writing laboratory could be required.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Require students to enroll in composition their first semester at UCCS, and stay in the program until the sequence of English 131 and 141 is completed. (A unanimous recommendation)
2. In order to ensure that writing skills be emphasized beyond the required composition courses (writing across the curriculum), all departments must have a writing requirement. Students who cannot write well are to be referred to the Writing Lab. The Composition Program is to provide the necessary support for these students including a mechanism for referral. (A unanimous recommendation)
3. In the event that means are agreed upon for the emphasis of writing across the curriculum, the TSWE should be discontinued as a part of the graduation writing requirement.

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MINUTES

For the January 29, 1991, Meeting

Cragmor Hall 113 - 8:00 A.M.

See the attached summary and recommendations