

October 21, 2004

Alison Galloway, Chair
Academic Senate Office

Dear Chair Galloway:

Re: COT Comments on the WASC Essays

Thanks for giving COT the opportunity to respond to the WASC essays. Our comments are enumerated below. We have made an effort to respond to the specific questions you and Faye Crosby asked in your call for comments, but also have a few questions raised by the essays that may best be addressed in campus conversation. We begin with those.

- Essay 1 refers to two measures of student satisfaction, the NSSE and UCUES. We wonder who (beside the VP-DUE) is reviewing these surveys, and whether COT should review them as well to see if they offer information that would help us improve the quality of teaching. We are also curious about the details of these surveys. Essay 3, on undergraduate education, mentions some information these surveys don't provide and some approaches the campus is taking or will take to get that information. We wonder if these instruments ask for information on student satisfaction with core skills (e.g., critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, etc.)
- In general we note very little mention of COT and CTE in these essays. We mention this not because we're grubbing for attention, but because (1) some of the work we do is relevant to the aims of these essays (we mention some specifics in the the comments below); and (2) because we wonder whether the Committee on Teaching and the Center for Teaching Excellence might be of greater assistance in developing "educational effectiveness" at UCSC. One example: while COT's charge does not limit our scope of interest to undergraduate teaching, for the most part our efforts have been concentrated on undergrad courses. (That's partly because Instructional Improvement Grants, which we adjudicate, are specifically for improvement of undergraduate teaching. While they may be used for training of grad students preparing to teach undergraduates, this aspect of the program has not been emphasized in the past.) As the campus prepares to increase its grad population, COT and CTE might consider ways that we could help. E.g., CTE's efforts to offer teacher training to grad students is one effort that could be expanded and enriched with sufficient campus support. The question of COT/CTE's role on campus is perhaps more appropriate for campus conversation than for the WASC essays, but we want to bring it up here to start the conversation.

Respectfully submitted,

COMMITTEE ON TEACHING
Elizabeth Abrams
Charlie McDowell, Chair
Bakthan Singaram
Elizabeth Stephens

James Sheldon, Student representative

ESSAY 1: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS APPROACH

The essay appropriately emphasizes measures to assess educational effectiveness for undergrads as a model for methods of assessing grad programs. Per our comments below, perhaps this essay could also give information about methods of assessment conducted internally within programs or indicate whether the campus is interested in examining such methods as well.

Comments/suggestions/corrections

p. 4: “UC’s uniform standards of eligibility for admission insure that the first benchmark [a comparable average measure for UC’s undergrad campuses] represents a population with an academic background comparable to that of UCSC’s students.”

- Uniform eligibility requirements don’t necessarily ensure comparable student populations. We note Computer Science students as an example.

pp. 4-6: On these pages the essay focuses on the forms of data collected about educational effectiveness for undergraduate students and programs. We note that the essay accounts for assessment measures and data collection in degree-granting programs only, and emphasizes end-of-college measures such as graduation. The essay might also note assessment efforts in non-degree-granting programs (the Writing Program, Language Program) and efforts within programs to assess the effectiveness of courses affecting a significant proportion of the undergrad population. For instance, we note the ongoing effort of the Writing Program to understand and assess the effectiveness and consistency of its delivery of Writing 1, and wonder if there are comparable efforts or plans in other programs to assess similarly foundational courses (core math courses, etc.).

A couple of other comments in the section apply only to degree-granting programs; wording could be adjusted in sentences or in the introduction to the section as a whole to clarify:

- p. 4: ¶ beginning “We begin by examining three indicators associated with the outcomes of program completion.”
 - The indicators mentioned have to do with degree-granting programs
- p. 4: penultimate ¶: “We propose to develop a measure of retention and graduate rates for individual majors to use in assessing program effectiveness.”

p. 5: “All UCSC undergraduate programs have a senior comprehensive requirement.”

- Change to “All degree-granting undergrad programs...”

p. 5: “...satisfaction of the comprehensive requirement is judged by the faculty of the program independently of the students’ grades in courses.”

- Is it safe to say satisfaction of comprehensive requirements is judged independently of course grades when the comp requirement is a capstone course?

ESSAY 2: GRADUATE EDUCATION ESSAY**Comments/suggestions/corrections**

p. 5: “It would be counterproductive to attempt to increase the percentage of graduate and post-doctoral students at UC Santa Cruz without also improving the quality of their experiences at UC Santa Cruz.”

- We can see that it’s not optimal to raise the number of grads without bettering the quality of their experience, but don’t see why it would be “counterproductive.”

p. 9: This page is part of a section about support services for graduate students. In general, we find that the section gives the impression that not much is currently being done for grads. We think the point that more needs to be done for grads can be made better by indicating the pre-existing programs the campus might capitalize upon—e.g., pedagogy courses or classes on grant-writing offered within departments, services that might be expanded, etc. Some specific comments on this page:

- The first bullet point implies that the campus does not currently provide a central orientation or workshops on teaching for TAs. In fact, there’s an annual half-day conference for new TAs each fall, CTE offers a limited set of workshops on teaching specifically for TAs (a program started in 2003-04), the Writing Program offers a 5-week seminar on teaching writing within disciplinary contexts for TAs across the campus, and there may well be other such skill-specific workshops and seminars available.
- The final bullet mentions support for students writing their dissertations. We concur, and would like to expand the suggestion to support of grad students’ writing more generally. Grad students unfamiliar with the conventions within their own fields need support well before they embark on their dissertations, as do students whose written expression interferes with their ability to communicate their aims and findings satisfactorily. To our knowledge, no such services exist. We suggest that support for international students and others should include services to help with their writing.
- The list of services we should be offering to grads in all programs does not account for opportunities already offered by programs for their own TAs. Various divisions (e.g., SOE and Natural Sciences) and individual programs offer for-credit courses on teaching or teaching practicums. Perhaps the essay could suggest that available courses could be made more accessible across the campus, where appropriate. This might be particularly important for those departments without grad programs of their own that rely on TAs from other programs. These TAs often don’t have specialized training in the fields in which they’re teaching.
- We also note that while TA training is generally considered a departmental responsibility, there is no oversight over these efforts—no method of finding out what kind of training is taking place. Some coordination of TA trainers (and not just of TAs in training) would be worthwhile. We believe that expanding the function of CTE to work more closely both with graduate students and their sponsoring programs would enhance the training of TAs and TFs. With current staffing levels, however, this is impossible. Two attachments to this letter provide useful information. The first, “TA Development Overview” compares resources for TA development at UCSC with resources at other UCs and universities nationwide (note that most of these institutions are considerably larger than UCSC, but that the resources allocated are disproportionately greater than at UCSC).

The second, “Inventory of TA Development Models in Place at UCSC,” is a somewhat dated (1999-2000) but still useful overview of types of TA training already in place at UCSC.

p. 12: On this page the essay mentions that developing new interdisciplinary graduate programs might in some cases make more sense than putting more resources into existing programs. We concur with the point, but want to mention that such programs can put unexpected strains on existing ways of conducting business. For instance, unless planned for ahead of time, students in interdisciplinary programs may not get priority in teaching assignments in their areas of expertise or even in enrolling in courses in related single-discipline grad programs.

p. 12: A very small comment: we find the heading “Prioritization of Utilization of Resources” to be opaque. Two suggestions: “Prioritization of Resource Use” or “Prioritizing Our Use of Resources.” Or consider something else altogether.

p. 15: “The key advantage to increasing the mix of (terminal) masters programs is that those students are expected to primarily fund themselves.” Are there hard data to support the claim that these students “primarily fund themselves”? We note that at least in SOE and Natural Sciences, even terminal masters students are not expected to fund themselves, and that at least the stronger students expect TA and RA support or go elsewhere.

ESSAY 3: UNDERGRADUATE ENGAGEMENT

Comments/suggestions/corrections

p. 3: “Large lower division courses make it difficult for faculty to provide meaningful narrative evaluations of student work in large courses.”

- Consider swapping “personalized” for “meaningful.” It is possible to provide meaningful and useful performance evaluations in large lecture classes (e.g., by discussing the students’ performance on various components of the course); it is harder to provide personalized ones.

p. 4: the last ¶ of the section on GE requirements (1st full ¶, p. 4) anticipates that CEP will return to reviewing the objectives of GE requirements after the WASC review. As the previous paragraphs review the history of the GE with respect to lower-division writing requirements, why not mention the Senate’s passage of the C1/C2 revision to campus requirements? The information is tucked away in Exhibit J, which might profitably be mentioned here.

p. 5: Unless we misunderstand the approach of the NSSE, one concern about the survey, which polls samples of first-year and senior students, is that it’s not truly longitudinal: the sample of students polled in freshman year is obviously not the same group of students polled in senior year, as the polling all takes place in a single year. Results suggesting change over time (or no change), then, might not be convincing. It’s possible that the UCUES survey corrects this approach and offers results more directly meaningful to UCSC student experiences (Exhibit K is not yet available on the website so we can’t tell). If it does not, we would be concerned about the statement that, in general, UCUES “shows that senior year students are more satisfied than are first-year students.” More satisfied than they themselves were as frosh, or more satisfied

than the sample group of frosh polled in the specific year in which both first-years and seniors were polled? Is there any interest in a longitudinal study that would track the same sample group of students? Such a survey might help uncover some reasons UCSC is less successful at retaining students from first to second year than other UCs (rates noted on p. 2).

p. 7: The penultimate ¶ implies that Writing Program internships are mentioned within Exhibit L (they're not). And (a factual note) with a couple of exceptions those internships are no longer offered through the Writing Program, but as tutorials through College 8, so that note will need to be changed or dropped.

p. 9: The 3rd-to-last ¶ indicates that Writing 1 is "required" during the first year. It's not at the moment, though students are strongly encouraged to take it then.

p. 11: In the second full ¶, we are concerned that CEP's recommendation that comprehensive exams be replaced by some other form of exit requirement has not been adequately communicated to departments. While this is not a matter necessarily for the WASC essay, we wanted to register the concern.

p. 11: In the third full ¶, is there an appropriate alternative to the word "contaminate"? "Skew"? Or something more neutral, such as "affect"?

p. 11: In the fourth full ¶, we return to our comments in Essay 1: that understanding the extent to which programs meet their educational goals might be enhanced by understanding the extent to which key courses that serve large populations of students, and key required courses within majors, maintain consistency and meet their goals.

ESSAY 4: INTEGRATIVE ESSAY

We find this essay to be earlier in the drafting process than the others. One effect of this is that while the essay is concerned with what the campus should address in the coming years (the italicized points in the essay), it does not provide much information about how the campus should go about achieving these ends. We also find this essay to be relatively loosely tied to the findings and recommendations of Essays 2 and 3, and suggest that the connections between them be more directly drawn. Brief references to the findings in those essays should suffice. Our specific comments follow:

p. 5: last full ¶: This paragraph makes rather sweeping declarations: that student demand should not principally drive resource allocation, and that the campus should direct students to underutilized programs. We are concerned that these are offered as accepted truths ("...UCSC does not wish to allow student demand for programs to be the principal driver of the deployment of academic resources") rather than questions that the campus should examine. More specifically, why shouldn't student enrollment demand drive resource allocation, and why should we direct students to underutilized programs? On the first point, what are the other drivers of resource allocation that should supplant student demand? On the second, it is perhaps the case that we would want to steer students to under enrolled majors—but before doing so, we should decide first whether those programs are sustainable, and examine the reasons that they are under enrolled.

p. 5: In discussing enrollment priorities, the essay suggests that future increases in enrollment shift the balance toward transfer students, noting that “there is more ability to absorb increases in enrollment in much of the upper-division curricula more efficiently than to expand lower-division curricula.” We note that while the lower division curricula have indeed been hard pressed by the increase in freshman enrollment, a shift to a greater proportion of transfer students does not come without costs and needs for compensation. For instance, students who have satisfied transfer requirements might not yet be performing to UC expectations in such areas as qualitative math skills, writing, research skills, etc. Absorbing more transfer students will mean shifting resources to support their needs, and especially to providing support in areas where there currently is little or none. (For instance, aside from very limited drop-in tutoring and services available to EOP students and students with documented disability, there is no writing tutoring available, and tutoring in other areas is limited.) The essay might also mention outreach efforts or plans to work with community colleges/feeder schools on articulation: are students coming to UCSC having received training equivalent to that which they would receive at UCSC? Furthermore, the founding premise of this passage is that upper-division courses can absorb greater enrollment more easily than lower-division courses. We imagine that required small courses in the first-year curriculum might be part of the limiting factor, that they’re more expensive to mount than large lecture courses; we imagine there might be other reasons as well. But we’re just imagining these reasons: the essay would do well to spell them out.

p.6: In discussing improvements in retention and graduation rates, the essay declares that academic advising should encourage “retention and timely achievement of [students’] academic goals.” We wonder what steps the campus will take in academic advising to keep students on time, and mention that one way of doing this is to limit the extent to which students themselves are in charge of the decisions. We note, by way of example, that in SOE students have a choice of a BA or BS degree, and that students opting late for the BS might delay their time to degree. Good academic advising would steer those students to the BA and an on-time graduation, and might be supported by some limits on the extent to which a student’s desire for a particular course of study is equivalent to his or her discretion to pursue it.