

To: Language Arts Faculty
From: Kathy Scott
Date: February 27, 2007
Re: Minutes from February 12, 2007 Department Meeting

These are lengthy. We had a number of items, and I want people to be informed – if they want to be. For people who don't have the time or interest, please look at just the parts in bold. Thanks.

1) Assessment Update

This month, the college will begin using the CTEP (California Test for English Placement), created by a faculty member at SBCC, for both composition and reading assessment. The test was created specifically for community college students, and VC faculty members who reviewed various state-approved assessment tests believed that the CTEP was the best choice. It differentiates students at the lower levels well and has a paper/pencil version, which we need for assessment in the high schools, and a computerized version, which is exactly the same as the paper version. Carolyn Inouye, the district researcher, helped us to determine the initial cut scores for composition and reading based on a judgmental approach—looking at cut scores from other colleges using the same test. During the first semester of this test's use, we will collect data and then evaluate and modify our cut scores as needed. This fall, we will also run a pilot study for adding an essay component to our assessment process. Unlike the standardized tests, several of which are approved by the state, no state approved essay tests currently exist. We will have to create and validate an essay test ourselves, a process that will take at least a year.

With our current assessment test, more than 60% of our students are testing into English 1A, a rate far higher than that of most other community colleges. We anticipate that our change to CTEP using other colleges' cut scores will lower that 60% figure. In creating the fall schedule, I put in fewer sections of English 1A and more sections of English 2 and 3. As we see the enrollment patterns when fall registration begins, it is possible that we may have to change, for example, more sections of English 1A to 2. I put in a high number of demands to accommodate this possible need. We would appreciate instructors' flexibility during this first semester, and if changes are required, we will let people know as soon as possible.

2) Title 5 Grant

The college will be applying for a \$2.5M Title 5 grant (available to Hispanic serving institutions) for basic skills instruction and services. While various departments can include whatever they believe will benefit our basic skills students, those evaluating the grant proposals will be looking particularly for ideas involving technology and sustainability (projects or services that can continue after the grant money is gone). Meeting attendees discussed what the department would like to see in the grant. Among our suggestions were the continuation of Smart Thinking, the continued development of our own online tutoring service (Ask Online), reading software (Plato), and better grammar software (Skills Bank is not really sufficient). Some, however, expressed a concern that technology isn't what is most needed for basic skills students. The grant could also include staff development for basic skills instruction, but that funding may come to the Academic Senate through the Basic Skills

Initiative and may not be necessary. We may want to include money to coordinate more effectively the various instructional and student services programs (e.g. ESL, English, EOPS, EAC, Counseling, Financial Aid, etc.) to serve our students better. We could also use, for example, more money for basic skills tutoring (including bilingual tutors), tutor training, conversation tutoring, and Supplemental Instruction (SI) leaders, and motivational speakers (perhaps, for example, EAC or EOPS students). Note – since the meeting, I have been looking more in depth at how some other colleges have made those connections (SBCC’s Met Program and Los Medranos’ Title 3 report and will include some of those ideas).

3) Smart Thinking

Smart Thinking has been funded for this semester—thanks to Sandy Hajas and Tom Kimberling. Sandy reported, however, that the cost of Smart Thinking continues to go up at extraordinary rates (from \$15K to \$30K this year to possibly \$50K next year), and it serves only approximately 1,100 students per year. We will not be able to afford it on a continuing basis. We hope, though, that eventually our own online tutoring service—Ask Online--will allow us to replace Smart Thinking without a drop in the quality of service. **Sandy asked instructors who have not done so to have their students try Ask Online; she is interested in comments and comparisons with Smart Thinking. Students can access it through the VC website (Quick Links to Tutoring Center to Online Tutoring and then follow the directions). Students can also go there directly at ventura.askonline.net.** Ask Online may eventually be better for us because we will have more control over what students are told.

4) Book Reps

Houghton Mifflin has a contract with Smart Thinking to offer the service for \$15 per student with the purchase of a HM text. This may or may not be interested in this service in the future.

Some of the book reps are becoming increasingly pushy about wanting to attend department meetings to present their various products. The department agreed that instructors interested in these products should meet with the reps outside of our regular meetings.

5) Textbook Costs

We briefly discussed the issue of textbook costs also. We need to continue to do everything we can about the cost of books for our students. The handbooks with tabs (slightly easier to use) cost the students approximately twice as much (sometimes more) as the handbooks without tabs. Please be aware, too, that “deals” where two books are shrink wrapped together, often save the students nothing, and instructors often we get talked into including a more expensive book in the “deal.” Please check with the bookstore (rather than the rep) to see how much you are saving on such a deal. And, finally, whenever possible, please consider using a softback book; for example, an English 1B softback book is typically \$20 - \$50 cheaper than a hardback version.

6) Enrollment in Literature Courses

Enrollment in our literature courses, particularly those that transfer as electives (World Lit, genre courses, and multicultural/women's lit courses) is often lower than many at the college want to see. Attendees discussed the need for greater promotion—going to counselors, making up flyers, emailing former students, etc. Additionally, some were interested in the creation of a poster, which would list the lit courses being offered for a given semester, and could be placed throughout the campus.

Department members felt very strongly about the need for the college to support these classes and not cancel them, particularly before school has even started. These courses provide breadth to our departmental offerings, and they are extremely beneficial for many of our students. We will draft a letter expressing our concerns and our support for the continued offering of these courses as they appear on our lit matrix.

7) Enrollment in Basic Skills Courses

We are similarly concerned about the cancellation of basic skills courses. Some of these classes, too, were cancelled prior to the beginning of the semester, and the department feels strongly that they should not be cancelled. Students need them.

8) Department Brochures

We have money in a grant for outreach to create some brochures. We discussed the possibility of creating ones for literature courses, reading, etc. However, after some discussion, the department decided that it would rather have the money put into creating a department link off the web site where we could advertise our various courses and programs. Diane Moore agreed that it's a great idea, and we will pursue it.

9) Plagiarism/Library

We still have MyDropBox.com, a plagiarism filter instructors can use. Students do, on occasion, find a way to submit something other than the actual paper, so we need to monitor it carefully.

The topic of our last division meeting was library assignments. The library staff can do a better job of the library tour if they are given a copy of the assignment prior to the tour (no need, though, if instructors want just a general tour). Furthermore, if instructors are interested, library faculty would be willing to look at our assignments and give any suggestions before we distribute them to students.

10) English 1B novels

As people who love literature, we had no trouble coming up with a list of novels to use in English 1B. Suggestions given are listed below:

Tortilla Curtain
Uncle Tom's Cabin
Love in the Time of Cholera
The Fixer
Hadji Mu (Tolstoy)

Ceremony
Kiss of the Spider Woman
The Alchemist
Things Fall Apart (in conjunction with Sophocles)
Mother to Mother (Sindewe Magona) re South Africa
Blindness
Waiting for the Barbarians
Childhood Zen
The Kite Runner
The Color Purple
The Underdogs (re the Mexican Revolution)
Angela's Ashes
The Things They Carried
Chronicle of a Death Foretold
Metamorphosis
The Namesake
Perfume
Children of Men

Some felt, too, that we should not forget the classics since our students, in many cases, have little knowledge of them.

Peter Sezzi has a list of various Top 100 books – some of the lists, though, are a bit . . . unusual.

Thank you if you made it to the end of this report.

Kathy