

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

132
S. 76-189

Senate

From: Senate Committee on
Agenda & Rules

Subject: English Placement Test

Date: September 21, 1976

MOTION

That Senate approve the participation of Simon Fraser University in the development and implementation of the English Placement Test proposed by the Department of Education. It is understood that this will involve:

1. The naming (by the President) of an individual to an ad hoc committee for refining the objectives of such a test.
2. Participation, either directly or through representation of the universities generally, in the governing board for the test.
3. Making available the data relevant to research associated with the development of the test, i.e. high school and university English grades.
4. A commitment not to use the test for admissions purposes, at least during the two year development period.
5. An opportunity to confirm participation or to opt out after the test objectives are further defined in the near future.

Note: During the past two years, in particular, several groups have responded publicly to the perceived diversity in the English language skills of students entering colleges and universities in B.C. The University of Victoria has been co-operating with a U.S. testing agency in administering College Entrance Examination Board tests, has found English Composition scores on that test low and the correlation between those scores and freshman GPA high. Test scores have been used to place students (by counselling) in particular first-year English courses with an emphasis on composition. U.Vic. representatives indicate, however, that they hope to eliminate the offering of such courses for credit. The UBC Senate has passed a resolution indicating its desire to eliminate "remedial" work in language skills by 1978. Most, if not all, of the Community Colleges have instituted some form of diagnostic testing for university transfer students. They are making valiant efforts to follow up such testing with differentiated instruction, e.g. Composition, English as an Additional Language. SFU introduced in 1975 for credit ENGL 010-3 Writing, an open-ended course with credit/no entry grading, designed to "help students improve their effectiveness in written expression." The English Department has during the past year experienced some difficulty in handling within one course the range of needs for language skills represented in the students who

register. In addition to ENGL 010, SFU offers some assistance, through Reading and Study, in the field of English as an Additional Language.

The English Studies Committee, a group of instructors from colleges and universities, some time ago recommended to the Minister of Education the development and implementation of a province-wide English Placement Test. Their emphasis is on diagnosis for differential treatment rather than screening. The Minister of Education has been very responsive thus far and, at a preliminary meeting (summary attached) representatives of each university and most colleges expressed interest in continuing the process of development. At this point, the indication is that all costs will be borne by the Department of Education.

It is recognized that the development process in itself is difficult, that it will not likely be successful without the full support of colleges and universities, and that implementation plans have yet to be developed. From the perspective of college and university personnel, placement testing is most likely to be helpful if it can be carried out in the secondary schools well in advance of admission.

SFU representatives at the meeting (D.R. Birch, H.M. Evans, A. Mc Millan, B. McDaniel) recommend acceptance of the above recommendation.

Proposal on a Province-Wide English Placement Test

The Deputy Minister of Education convened a meeting of officials of colleges and universities at Douglas College (Richmond Campus) on September 16, 1976 to:

"discuss the educational desirability and feasibility of developing and administering a Province-wide English Placement Test. The proposed plan would be a voluntary program for the participating colleges and universities."

The meeting was chaired by J. Carter, currently seconded to the Department of Education in the area of Educational Policy Development; was attended by representatives from the Department of Education, from almost all the colleges, and from the three public universities (SFU: Birch, Evans, McMillan, B.McDaniel).

Various reasons were stated for presenting the general proposal including: recommendation by the English Studies Committee that there be a suitable test on English Composition; a study prepared by G. Mussio last year; evidence of UBC and other agency concerns about English, including recent UBC decisions in this area. It was also stated that there was no interest in laying blame but rather finding a solution to some current difficulties, even more so than identifying the cause.

It was emphasized that the main area of interest was placement testing rather than admission selection as the former could find favour whereas the latter would likely be opposed by the Teachers' Federation. (A two year study is envisaged on the basis of which there might be recommendations on placement or admission selection, or dropping the development.) Participation by the individual institutions would be optional but if there were not strong participation, the proposal would likely be dropped.

It was stated that there were a number of implications, notably -- a requirement for differential sections of English, if it is to be worthwhile; a desire to improve significantly the quality of writing at post-secondary institutions; a study (with improvement) in the high school grade as a predictor of success in post-secondary academic studies. The emphasis would be on post-secondary academic areas, although there might be some use in the career program areas.

The Basic Proposal

1. Each institution decides whether it wishes to participate - at this stage
2. If it does, then appoint a teacher of English, or another individual, to a committee which will be charged to establish the nature and form of the test (not the content)

3. When this stage is reached, decide finally on whether or not to participate.

A Board would then be established (Department of Education, universities, colleges) to overview development. An outside agency would design, administer, research, etc. the test. A participating institution must be prepared to make available (or there must otherwise be available) the English Test score, the high school English grade, the first-year English performance.

The Chairman emphasized that there were no "funding" implications in the proposal; that there was a service being proposed in which institutions could accept or reject participation. It was agreed that it would not necessarily be a mandatory requirement on the student but that the testing could be used by a participating institution in an elective manner, i.e. counselling/ advising rather than making it a requirement.

(A UBC representative indicated that the UBC Senate wished institutions to get free of remedial instruction in English and Mathematics and a U.Vic representative indicated the desire to get free from "credit" remedial work.)

J. Carter indicated intent to ask the high schools to provide for the study purposes (not transcript purposes) split grades for English Literature/Composition.

A Suggested Time Table

1976	Oct. 29	English teachers and Dept. of Education Committee of those participating appointed (to establish nature/structure of test)
	Nov. 1	Final decision by Minister of Education to proceed/not proceed
	Nov. 15	Board established for overview (Department of Education, universities, colleges, teachers)
	Dec. 31	Form of test established
1977	Feb. 28	Trial testing
	Apr.-June	Test administration - colleges/universities - and/or schools
	July 31	Results to colleges/universities
	Sept.	First week, before registration second form of test for those not tested
1978	Jan.	Third test form administered.

(This is a suggested time-table, not fixed -- (and not fully accepted). There was not agreement or decision on where tests would be administered. There was emphasis on wanting the first stage of decision on participation reached quickly. The response was affirmative from those institutions represented, - subject to placement before Senates, Councils, etc.