The meeting of the Writing Skills Subcommittee was convened by Mitchell Watnik, Chair of CIC

Members present were: Margaret Harris, Erik Helgren, Kaumudi Misra, Jennifer Nguyen, Sue Opp, Margaret Rustick, Nancy Thompson, and Donna Wiley.

The meeting began with introductions all around.

The next item of business was the selection of a chair and recorder. By consensus of the members, Margaret Rustick will chair and Nancy Thompson will serve as recorder.

Mitch Watnick delivered the charge from CIC: to investigate Writing Skills issues, especially as they relate to the conversion from quarters to semesters. Mitch stressed the need to determine how the University Writing Skills requirements will be satisfied on a semester system. He suggested that the committee may wish to consider the relation between the first-year GE requirement (ENGL 1001) and the second composition course (ENGL 1002), which is a graduation requirement. Writing across the Curriculum might be an alternative to the present system, although guidelines would be needed for writing courses in the different disciplines, along with support for graduate writing assistants. Jennifer noted the funding for the Graduate Writing Assistant program (GWA) may be restored. Margaret Harris said that a pilot project for the graduate program in Educational Leadership is currently in place.

Margaret Rustick questioned whether the first-year program should be included as part of this committee’s charge, as that has not been the case in the past.

Discussion: the CIC charge, GWAR, current issues

Sue Opp suggested that we start with CSU-wide requirements. Most quarter campuses require two quarters of composition, while other schools generally require one semester (MR). Community college transfer students typically bring in a Writing and a Critical Thinking course (SO). The latter is often a “Writing about Literature” course, which is not consistent with the Common Core emphasis on reading in the disciplines (MR). Sue Opp will bring in information about course articulation.

Margaret Rustick provided an overview of the university’s Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR), also known as the University Writing Skills Requirement (UWSR), which is often equated with the Writing Skills Test (WST). All students in the CSU must satisfy the requirement. East Bay students who met the requirement at another CSU do not have to do anything additional here. Some CSUs also evaluate classes taken by transfer students from other institutions to determine whether the student has satisfied the GWAR.
Students may take a first-tier course (ENGL 3000 or 3001) and develop a portfolio, which is assessed by readers drawn from several disciplines. The assessment determines whether students have Limited Competence, Developing Competence, or Clear Competence. The WST also assesses competence. Other CSUs report pass rates of 80%-90%. Our pass rate is around 60%.

Donna Wiley will provide the members with links to the GWAR data for committee members to review.

Donna Wiley also mentioned the need to get students to meet the GWAR earlier in their careers, when they have completed 90 units. Ideally students should treat the requirement as an indication that they are ready for upper-division courses, but they tend to look at it as a graduation requirement. Margaret Rustick described previous attempts to get them to meet the requirement earlier. Holds on their registration proved difficult, especially as transfer students may enter with more than 90 units. At present, students cannot file for graduation without completing the requirement.

Erik Helgren raised the question of revising or eliminating the WST. Margaret Rustick noted that the WST helps identify students who need support. Margaret Harris described the program at UC Davis, where writing courses are geared to students’ majors.

To do:
Margaret Rustick proposed putting the first-year course on a back-burner for now. The committee will concentrate on increasing student awareness of the GWAR, encouraging faculty involvement in the development of student writing, and converting the GWAR to a semester format.

Sue Opp will invite Kyle Burch, the articulation officer, to a Writing Skills Subcommittee meeting to discuss community college transfer issues.

Donna Wiley will send the committee members the links to access GWAR reports (currently housed in the Testing Office) and bring current GWAR requirements.

Committee members will look at the way other CSUs handle the GWAR (test only, course only, or a combination). EO 665, which established the GWAR, is available at the Chancellor’s web site.

Next meeting:
The next meeting will be on November 12, 2014 at 2:00. Location to be determined.