

DATE: April 22, 2009

TO: UAF Faculty Senate  
Brian Rogers, Interim Chancellor  
Susan Henrichs, Provost

FROM: English Writing Sample Working Group  
Dana Thomas, Assistant Provost - facilitator  
Burns Cooper, Chair, English  
Rich Carr, English  
Dana Greci, Developmental Education  
Linda Hapsmith, Academic Advising Center  
Ron Illingworth, Interior Aleutians Campus  
Patty White, Testing Services  
Elizabeth Taguchi, Kuskokwim Campus

RE: Implementation Plan for the Writing Sample Placement Requirement

At meeting #155 on December 8, 2008 the UAF Faculty Senate passed a motion amending the Mandatory Placement Policy to include a scored writing sample. At the request of the Provost, the English Writing Sample Working Group was formed by the Assistant Provost to construct an implementation plan for the efficient delivery and scoring of writing samples and to provide information concerning the cost of implementation. The Provost and Chancellor would use this information to decide whether or not to approve the motion. Based on discussions of the working group during spring semester, the Assistant Provost provided the Provost and Chancellor rough cost estimates for implementation and the Chancellor approved the motion on April 20, 2009. Tim Barnette, Vice-Chancellor of Student and Enrollment Services, and Scott McCrae, Director of Marketing and Communication, were informed of the new requirement by separate memo from the Assistant Provost to facilitate changes in the UAF catalog, web page, and recruiting publications. Below is a summary of the working group's plan for an observational study to compare the College Board's Accuplacer WritePlacer machine scoring of writing samples and English faculty hand scoring and a rough faculty writing sample scoring cost estimate, in terms of faculty contract weeks.

The working group looked into the use of WritePlacer (see <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/higher-ed/placement/accuplacer/write>), a web based writing sample assessment, for use in distributing writing prompts and potentially for machine scoring of some or all writing samples for students not taking the SAT or ACT. The working group is considering the use of WritePlacer machine scoring because it provides an efficient and accessible alternative to hand scoring. The working group was delayed in this work because ACCUPLACER was being updated this semester and the writing prompts and scoring methodology were changed.

### The observational study

The working group agreed to conduct a comparative observational study of WritePlacer machine scoring and English faculty hand scoring of writing samples before deciding upon a final implementation plan. The group recommended that UAF implement writing sample assessment using ACCUPLACER WritePlacer with the implementation of the new version of ACCUPLACER, which is planned for mid May 2009. That is, beginning in mid May all students taking the English portion of ACCUPLACER will be completing a WritePlacer writing sample assessment. The working group requests funding for one week contract extensions for two faculty members just prior to the start of fall 2009 to score the resulting WritePlacer writing samples. The Fairbanks campus Writing Center rubric will be used for hand scoring. The goal is to compare machine and hand scoring for a sample of at least 100 writing samples at a variety of student ability levels. Based upon the comparative study the working group will decide whether hand scoring is needed at all, needed only for borderline placement cases or needed for every student. The results of this comparative experiment will also be used to decide score ranges for course placement and to determine if any WritePlacer writing prompts are problematic. Once the observational study is complete, and the decisions concerning the use of machine or hand scoring are made, the working group will prepare a detailed implementation plan for the Provost and Chancellor's consideration.

### Rough faculty writing sample scoring cost estimate, in terms of faculty contract weeks

Below is a rough plan of implementation for Spring 2010 and future years in the event that all writing samples will be hand scored by English faculty. The Provost and Chancellor used a sketch of this plan in making their decision to approve the motion.

Last year approximately 1800 students took Compass or ASSET placement tests for English (non writing sample) and Math placement; ACCUPLACER was first implemented across UAF in December 2008. Assuming similar student numbers taking placement tests and assuming that English faculty can score 5 writing samples per hour then  $1800/5 = 360$  faculty hours (or 9 weeks) will be needed to score writing samples. Most placement tests are administered from April through early September with a large peak in August and a smaller peak in January. The working group recommends the following implementation plan if all writing samples will be hand scored:

- While faculty are on contract during the 9 month academic period, writing sample assessment should be included in the workload of at least two UAF faculty members;
- During the summer when faculty are generally off contract we propose to have one faculty member on a half-time contract extension to assess samples from approximately May 20 (end of 9 month contracts) through July 31 (say 10 weeks half-time) and two faculty members on half-time three week contract extensions for August; this comprises a total of approximately 6 full-time weeks of faculty contract extension;

- An overload contract of two weeks for one faculty member to assess writing samples during the winter holiday, especially in early January, should be offered as an incentive for scoring during this period;
- A secured web site (faculty/staff access only) should be set up with a list of writing prompts, the scoring rubric, and examples of scoring using the rubric covering a range of writing samples and
- An email address and fax number should be set up to receive writing samples.

#### Further information

In the event that WritePlacer machine scoring is found acceptable, then the faculty workloads and contract extensions described above would be eliminated or revised downward if hand scoring is found necessary for borderline cases. At this time WritePlacer costs \$3.70 per student. Thus, we project that 1800 student assessments would cost  $\$3.70 \times 1800 = \$6,660$ . This amount would have to be available to Testing Services to implement the writing sample requirement; Testing Services makes ACCUPLACER available to all UAF's campuses.

During the review of WritePlacer, the working group provided the following recommendations for its implementation:

- The elimination of 3 of the 10 available WritePlacer writing prompts;
- Students will be allowed 30 minutes to complete their writing sample; timing starts once they begin writing and
- The time remaining and word count will be shown in WritePlacer during testing.
- There will be no warning time pop-up given during the test to remind students the number of minutes remaining (since students will be able to see the downward counting time while taking the test).

New student admits will be strongly encouraged by Admissions to take the ACT Plus Writing Test (<http://www.actstudent.org/writing/index.html> ). Students would incur the extra \$15 to add the Writing Test to their ACT Test package.