

Comp Quickreads

CSULA Department of English

April 26, 2010

Background

In April 2009, the English Council of the CSU issued a position statement opposing the adoption and implementation of mandatory "early start" programs. "Early start" would require incoming first-year students designated as "not proficient" to begin "remediation" in the summer *before* they begin college. (In some models of "early start" students must not only begin "remediation," but complete it before enrolling in regular classes.) Similar resolutions opposed to mandatory "early start" have been passed by the Academic Senate of the CSU and the Academic Senate of CSULA.

In October 2009, the English Council of the CSU was informed that a task force had been assembled to study and report on the implementation of "early start." In response the Council presented the task force with a "counter-proposal," which reiterated the pedagogic and philosophic objections to mandatory "early start," highlighted current successful practices, and offered the measured judgments of experts.

At their March 2010 meeting, the CSU Board of Trustees adopted an 'early start' policy. In response, the English Council of the CSU drafted and approved the accompanying position statement.

CSU English Council Position Statement: Mandatory Early Start (April 2010)

We understand that the Board of Trustees' resolution to implement Early Start programs on all CSU campuses is an effort to help integrate first year students into mainstream academic life quickly, humanely, and with a high degree of probability that they will graduate. We share this concern. However, along with the Statewide Academic Senate, the CSU English Council opposes a mandatory Early Start as a precondition for enrollment at any CSU campus. We believe that a mandatory Early Start program will not serve our students well for these reasons:

- Mandatory Early start is discriminatory, forcing an identified group of students to participate in summer as a pre-condition of enrollment to the university, even though this same population of students is not only fully qualified for admission, but arrive at the CSU having earned high school GPA's of B or better;
- While we do support voluntary summer programs, as a mandatory program, Early Start is punitive, placing high-stakes preconditions on admissions to fully qualified first year students. This raises the questionable legality of denying admission to these students;
- Mandatory Early Start places undo financial burden on students who can least absorb it. Whatever financial aid students may receive cannot compensate for summer income lost and summer costs incurred, which could lead to resentment, hardship, and disenrollment;
- No valid evidence has been presented to us that Early Start is effective, and we do not feel students should be forced to enroll in programs whose educational value is unproven;
- By contrast, in a two-year experiment at SFSU, Summer Bridge was designed as an early start, where students who were highly successful in this summer bridge course (earning a B+ or higher) were promoted to the next level composition course. The students did so poorly that Summer Bridge went back to its original model as an addition to, rather than a substitute for, the full sequence of composition courses;
- There is a great deal of evidence from a number of campuses indicating that innovative first-year programs (e.g. directed self-placement and stretch) are successful at retaining students, improving compliance with EO 665 (system-wide, roughly 85% of students are compliant within their first year), and improving graduation rates;
- In a CSULA study, students who placed into regular semester basic writing courses had higher persistence rates than students who placed directly into first-year composition, showing that students who go directly into our existing first-year courses do as well as, if not better than, their more "proficient" peers;
- From long-term consultation with Chancellor's Office representatives, we understand that remedial courses that do not count toward graduation are a problematic option in today's budget climate. We believe that directed self-placement and stretch courses solve this problem. Early Start, on the other hand, creates an additional remedial course;
- Early Start is an unfunded mandate that will require substantial resources to design, implement, and sustain and that will place differential burdens on individual campuses.

For these reasons, English Council recommends that writing programs throughout the system decline to participate in the design or implementation of mandatory Early Start Programs. We understand that conditions are different on different campuses and that some writing programs might for various reasons feel compelled to participate, and these programs have our full support. Nevertheless, the Council as a whole feels it is important to voice our strong opposition to this ill-conceived, however well-intentioned, program.