Date: 12 April 2012

To: Chancellor Griffin

From: Jessica Brown, Chair English Department

RE: Issues Surrounding the English Department “Placement Plus One” Pilot Proposal

CC: Vice Chancellor Low, Dean Davis, Dean Boegel
    Academic Senate President, Karin Saginor
    Board of Trustees

Background

When the idea of NO placement test was circulating around campus recently, the English department was concerned, knowing that according to Title V guidelines we were following a multiple measures placement procedure. However, the English Department has been exceptionally proactive in making changes in curriculum and practices with our students’ needs at the forefront; thus, we were willing to take a look at how our current placement test was or was not working. In spring 2011, we conducted a survey of student satisfaction and experience with placement. 72% of students reported that they felt their placement accurately reflected their reading and writing abilities. However, given further research into issues of placement, we found that to meet the needs of the 28% who felt incorrectly placed, we could start by modifying our cut scores, which allowed 30% of all students to achieve a higher placement. With higher placement and acceleration, students can move through the sequence in 3 or fewer semesters to graduation, even if they score at the lowest composition level.

Further research revealed that most students believed that they only needed to be placed one course higher. Given that, along with allowing students to accelerate through creative new course sequencing, we came up with a pilot plan that was presented to the Bridge to Success steering committee on March 22nd, the day before Spring Break. It was titled, “Proposal to pilot a new multiple measure policy for English placement.”

Most importantly, this proposal was intended as a “pilot” in conjunction with the Bridge to Success grant.

On April 3rd, a very different proposal was voted on by Student Prep and Success committee that included an additional proposal from SMAC that the English Department
was not aware of, and this very same proposal went to CAC two days later, without much discussion, I understand, certainly without including the English Department’s developing concerns, and was voted on.

Somehow, since that time, the English Department’s original proposal to PILOT this idea has morphed into something else entirely, with little input from the English Department as the originators of the pilot.

Issues Involving Shared Governance/Lack of Departmental and Academic Senate Input

1) The “SMAC (Student Matriculation Assessment and Choice?) Act 2012” Resolution is confusing the clear limits and intent of the English Department proposal. First, the word pilot has disappeared, and the issues of placement retake and placement policies for all students, “incoming and current” have become part of a new proposal that we were not party to. Further language about placement test retake policy was also part of the proposal--this without the English Department or Matriculation’s input.

2) No representatives of the English Department were invited to the CAC meeting held two days later to explain our pilot proposal, its limitations, and the complexities and nuances that need to be fully worked out before it could be implemented, yet apparently a vote was taken to approve several proposals that came out the Student Prep and Success Committee.

3) The Academic Senate has not weighed in as of this time. However, this pilot need not have gone through any of the aforementioned shared governance processes as this was only informational to the college-at-large, not a plan to change policy and procedure until it was piloted. This process that is taking place seems to have misconstrued the intent of the “pilot” and may be in violation Title 5 language which specifically states “The Board of Trustees, and its official representative, the Chancellor, shall rely primarily upon the advice and judgment of the Academic Senate in the following areas as defined by Title 5, Section 53200:

1. Curriculum, including establishing prerequisites and placing courses within disciplines
5. Standards or policies regarding student preparation and success

Issues That Must Be Resolved in Order to Implement a Pilot “Placement Plus One” Option

The English Department passed the concept of piloting “Placement Plus One” at the last English Department meeting before Spring Break. We had no chance to vet this proposal with the many constituencies within the college that would be affected by it. What we have found over the last week is that these problems and issues are many and most likely
cannot be easily resolved in time for the pilot for “Placement Plus One” to be implemented for Fall 2012 with the current miscommunication taking place.

1) The English Department, the Office of Matriculation, Registration need to work out how to program and code student placement in Banner and how students will be able to activate or pursue the “Placement Plus One” option.

2) As we move to support forms of Directed Self-Placement for students we need to be able to write and construct strong, useful resources for students, counselors, and staff. Included in this are:
   - accurate student-friendly course descriptions
   - sample writing assignments
   - sample readings and reading lists
   - sample essays that meet student learning outcomes and criteria

These resources need to be made available on the web and in hard copy form when the wrinkles are ironed out before becoming official college policy. There is no way that all of the changes and work necessary can occur for a fall 2012 college-wide policy and implementation. With this diversion from our original goal, we may lose valuable time in attempting just to pilot it for fall 2012.

3) The English Department also needs to work with to determine how the “Placement Plus One” option will impact prerequisites.

Example: Admission into the Diagnostic Medical Imaging Program has an English prerequisite of passing English 93 or obtaining an “English placement score into English 96 or ESL 170 or higher.” The new “Placement Plus One” policy would mean that a student who places into English 93 also can place into English 96. These kinds of prerequisites need to be explored and resolved between departments and programs before the policy can be implemented.

4) The English Department also needs to work with the ESL Department to determine how the “Placement Plus One” policy will impact both programs. Both programs already have problems with ESL students jumping from the ESL program into the English program because they perceive the potential path to transfer as being shorter. Given the new lower cut scores on the English Placement Test, the broader placement avenues offered by the “Placement Plus One” policy, and the new Accelerated English curriculum, this needs to worked out with ESL. Very few English faculty have significant formal training in teaching English Language Learners. This could disrupt the redesign of the English curriculum which was calibrated for students meant to take English classes and not ESL classes. It could set up many, many ESL students for failure and denial of reaching their educational goals and dreams. We have already heard objections from the ESL Department on this issue.

5) The English Department needs time to develop new policies and procedures for this pilot. Our goal is to designate a group of high school students for our cohort who
would take our placement test, which according to students is accurate 72% of the time, and, with our professional recommendation, offer them the choice to self-place one level above. We planned to collect data and evaluate the pilot to measure its impact and effectiveness, and address aforementioned issues before implementation at the policy level.

A. At the Test Prep and Success Committee meeting of Tuesday 4/3/12 both English Department representatives, Jim Sauve and Craig Kleinman repeatedly stressed that the “Placement Plus One” policy was clearly designed for “Initial Placement” of students, that is, those students who had not yet taken an English class at CCSF. Further, both representatives said that the English Department was working on crafting new policies and pathways for students to re-place into the sequence and/or skip classes in the sequence. Other than supporting students retaking the English Placement Test within the confines of existing policies, and altering cut scores, the English Department did not commit itself to a specific course of action except to present the idea as a “pilot” with Bridge to Success.” The document presented at the April 3rd meeting did not have the word pilot on it, which may have started the problems we are now encountering. I was on personal leave and my representative, Jim Sauve, presented some of the “nuts & bolts” of the pilot, but he inadvertently did not put the proposal title I had already given to Bridge to Success and the Chancellor on it—this error may have caused the problems that ensued. Nonetheless, the original document clearly states “Proposal to pilot a new multiple measure policy for English Placement.” It was never intended to be an official policy proposal.

B. The English Department was not informed, let alone invited, to the CAC meeting two days later. Had we been invited we would have once again reiterated what was said above. Moreover, the English Department is concerned that our proposal is misunderstood by other stakeholders who had nothing to do with its inception/creation and, seemingly, had no interest in conveying the fact that it was presented as a pilot and, as such, limitations are built into it.

C. The “SMAC Act 2012” claims that all policies must apply to new and current students alike, but SMAC representatives were present at the Bridge to Success Steering committee meeting where I stated that we would be interested in piloting this proposal, our proposal, with Bridge to Success. We are not recommending college-wide policy change. For example, the SMAC Act advocates are proposing that the “Placement Plus One” policy be retroactive to all students, even if they have been enrolled in English courses, despite catalog language and course prerequisite issues. It further involves further changing the new placement test retake policy.

Given that the State Student Success Task Force mandates are being written into law, which will require a fuller look at how we use multiple measures, we should not act prematurely to change policy in this way. Things are in flux, an interim Chancellor will be at the helm, and the new SSTF strictures will make failure more high stakes for students at all levels. Moreover, national and CCSF data both confirm that initial success in a class is critical. And accurate placement is essential to enable that first-time success.
To attempt to implement the “pilot proposal” with Bridge to Success will take time and countless hours of work in order to establish the policies, procedures, materials, and counselor awareness to implement and assess the pilot’s efficacy. Until we can address the five major problems outlined above, to act now would be premature. We have a professional responsibility to place students accurately so that they will have the maximum opportunity for success. We are already involved in creative and complex changes in our department with academic integrity and solid research and assessment; we ask that our initial proposal to pilot this idea with Bridge to Success be honored.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Jessica Brown
Chair, English