

MEMORANDUM

To SENATE

From DANIEL R. BIRCH, CHAIRMAN

Subject PARTICIPATION IN ENGLISH PLACEMENT
TESTSENATE COMMITTEE ON UNDERGRADUATE
STUDIES

Date FEBRUARY 23, 1977

By action of Senate in October 1976, Simon Fraser University has agreed to participate in the English Placement Test during the two year developmental period, 1977-78 and 1978-79.

Recommendations:

1. That all students entering first year at Simon Fraser University be required to write the English Placement Test (usage and composition).
2. That all students entering Simon Fraser University on the basis of graduation from a B.C. secondary school in 1977, 1978 or 1979 be required to write the English Placement Test.

The University will cooperate with the Educational Research Institute of B.C. in the collection of Grade 12 English grades, English Placement Test scores, and grades in 100 level English courses for purposes of evaluating and developing the English Placement Test.

3. It is understood that the information to be obtained from the English Placement Test is not to be used as a basis for admission or compulsory placement of new or continuing students during the two year development period.

Participation in the English Placement Test implies commitment by Simon Fraser University in developing program(s) to meet the needs identified, e.g. the teaching of composition skills to non-native speakers of English.

(Strong support for this last statement was expressed in SCUS but no motion was considered within the time limit of the meeting.)



Daniel R. Birch

BACKGROUND

Over a period of several years groups such as the English Department of each public university, the English Articulation Committee, the English Teachers' Group (Colleges and Universities), and the Senate of at least one university expressed concern about English usage and composition skills of students entering post-secondary education. Several such groups conveyed their concerns to the Ministry of Education and in September, 1976 the Deputy Minister convened a meeting of college, university, and ministry personnel to discuss the desirability and feasibility of developing a province-wide English Placement Test. A ministry representative indicated the Minister's interest in providing such a service should a majority of universities and colleges indicate their commitment to participation. Explicit in the meeting was the importance of providing opportunities for students to develop these skills, i.e. an interest in identifying differential needs implied an interest in developing differential programs. Simon Fraser University was represented at that meeting by D. Birch, H. Evans, A. McMillan, and B. McDaniel.

At the Senate meeting of October 4th, 1976, the following motion was approved:

"That Senate approve the participation of Simon Fraser University in the development and possible implementation of the English Placement Test proposed by the Department of Education."

Several implications were specified.

After obtaining a commitment to participation from each university and each college but one, the ministry engaged the services of the Educational Research Institute of B.C. to develop and pilot the English Placement Test. President Jewett named Dr. Messenger of the English Department to a committee charged with refining the objectives of the test and Mr. H. Evans to an advisory committee charged with guiding the development and implementation.

THE TEST

The test will consist of two sections. First, an "objective" section designed to identify errors in English usage common to native speakers of English and errors in English usage common to non-native speakers. A score out of twenty will be provided on each of these two scales. The second, and more major, element in the test is an essay with a structured approach to marking designed to reveal major aspects of skill in composition.

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Marking will be undertaken by teams of secondary and post-secondary teachers of English working under highly structured conditions. For example, each essay will be read by four markers and two marks will be obtained on each of four scales. The overall score for the essay section of the test will be out of a possible eighty. Scores on the two usage scales and the composition section will not be summed but will be treated as separate scores relevant to particular areas of skill.

The calendar for administration of the test is shown on a separate sheet.

IMPLICATIONS

It should be noted that all student members of the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies voted against recommendations one and two although they clearly supported recommendation three and spoke strongly in favour of program development designed to meet the needs diagnosed. Students were not alone in concern about potential misuse of data obtained from a testing program.

The Committee was informed that scores on the test will be provided only to the individual who takes the test and it will be that person's responsibility to provide information to the institutions to which he applies. In addition, there is no limit on the number of times a person can write the test. SCUS was unanimous in commitment not to use information from the test for purposes of admission or compulsory placement. It can not be stressed too strongly that members believed the value of the test to be two-fold:

1. To enable students to make better decisions regarding their needs and programs, and
2. To enable the University to engage in program development better designed to meet the needs of students attending it.

Daniel R. Birch

February 23, 1977

ENGLISH PLACEMENT TEST - PROPOSED ADMINISTRATION 1977-78, 1978-79

1. May 3, 1977 In all B.C. Secondary Schools enrolling Grade XII - primarily for enrolled students.
2. Mid-May 1977 In post-secondary institutions other than Universities - primarily for mature students and others who may require it.
3. Early August 1977 In all post-secondary institutions - for any students who may require it, including a further writing by students who may wish to take a second attempt.
4. Early September 1977 In post-secondary institutions for their students who require the test but have not taken it (for local institution marking only).
5. Early November 1977 Expected to be in secondary schools and post-secondary institutions admitting for January 1978 - primarily for students requiring the test for January 1978 admissions.
6. Early January 1978 In post-secondary institutions for their students who require the test but have not taken it (for local institution marking only).
7. May 1978 As in 1. above, and likely as in 2. above.
8. Early August 1978 As in 3. above.
9. Early September 1978 As in 4. above.
10. Early November 1978 As in 5. above.
11. Early January 1979 As in 6. above.
12. May 1979 As in 1. above.