April 1, 2016

Dear HECC members and other interested parties,

I am writing to members of HECC to provide feedback on the proposed accelerated learning standards that were circulated at the February 19th meeting at LBCC.

As a longtime teacher of college writing, member of the National Council of Teacher's of English and of the Council on College Composition and Communication, past chair and current chair-elect of OWEAC, I have to say that these recommendations strike me as problematic. I have no doubt of the good intentions behind this proposal—the desire to lower the cost of college for students; the recognition that there is a correlation, although not a causal relationship, between students' accrual of college credit while still in high school and their ability to complete college; and the hope of increasing the number of highly educated citizens in our state—but the proposal itself confuses accrual of credits with increased writing competency and improved communication and critical thinking skills, neither of which will necessarily be borne out through the policies and procedures that are suggested.

In part, my perhaps too frank response is colored by over a decade of contact with the dual credit program on my own campus and all of the attendant challenges it faces; these experiences, along with ongoing conversations with English and Writing faculty at other CCs across the state, give me pause.

The quality of instruction in our own dual credit program varies widely and wildly—all of the instructors are dedicated, and while some of the instruction is outstanding, much is acceptable, and some is substandard, and we have few, if any, mechanisms to address curricular or pedagogical concerns given that dual credit garners significant FTE and the institution has a vested, financial interest in maintaining, if not expanding, the program. In fact, we have very, very little oversight of the program beyond the vetting of syllabi.

High school faculty are frequently over worked, over-extended, and unable (and sometimes unwilling) to dedicate the time and energy necessary to remain current in the field of composition and rhetoric. To whit, last month when I met with area high school faculty to discuss recent changes in Writing Program Administrator's (WPA's) 2014 Outcome Recommendations for First-Year Composition, I encountered a fair amount of resistance to the impending changes in curriculum and instruction. A few faculty members indicated that they simply couldn't and can't expect that high school students are able to engage with the complex writing tasks recommended in the WPA outcome statements (one implication is that these high schools students are not developmentally ready for such tasks; another is that the high school context is such that teachers cannot expect students to engage in such challenging work). Yet I know that none of those who articulated these concerns will stop offering dual credit in their schools. The pressure to maintain programs is simply too strong.

Indeed, given the exigencies of the high school faculty's workload and working conditions (and the necessity of paying for subs when faculty are absent the high school classroom), it is nearly impossible to hold any kind of regular and meaningful faculty professional development (FPD) opportunities like the ones that are called for in NACEP standards 1-3 for faculty. Our professional development and mentoring support is relegated to 2-3 hours, yearly, which is simply insufficient. Conversations with peers at other institutions reveal that our program is not anomalous: almost universally, English and Writing colleagues across the state of Oregon indicate that they have found the support and infrastructure necessary to maintain vibrant dual credit programs to be severely lacking at their home institutions, given that reassignment time or support moneys to work with high school faculty is often

the first thing cut during financial crises, and Oregon has been in a financial crisis in terms of educational funding for nearly three decades.

This extended discussion of the challenges of offering dual credit through financially strapped community colleges has been presented in order to set the context for my concerns about HECC's proposal. If the adoption of NACEP standards in 2010 did little to effect the quality and support for dual credit throughout the state, what mechanisms will ensure that partnership or credit-by-proficiency programs are any better? Both the partnership and credit-by-proficiency models promise to continue what is already sometimes a specious business—a lack of accountability in ensuring ongoing and quality FPD for high school faculty, offered by college mentors with sufficient resources and time to provide such support.

But perhaps the most alarming element of HECC's proposal is what seems to the exploitation of a loophole for qualifications to teach at the college level, through the designation of the college faculty involved as a teacher-of-record and the high school faculty member, who lacks appropriate credentials and education, as a mentee akin to a teaching assistant at a university.

Although this relationship might sound as if it's analogous to that between graduate student and professor at a university, the context is significantly different: GTFs/GTAs at our local universities are taking coursework in writing pedagogy, being closely mentored by faculty with expertise in the subject area, and are regularly supported by other graduate students undertaking the same labor. Their students are enrolled in courses on a college campus, with other college students. On the other hand, high school faculty are typically isolated in their institutions, lacking regular contact with college faculty or even with other high school peers teaching in the same field. These teachers most likely do not have ***any*** graduate credits specific to the teaching of writing since the MAT requires only education methods coursework.

Unless the state sets specific standards and thresholds for funding/support, partnership models are likely to continue, at best, the benignly neglectful mentoring relationship between college and high school faculty that is currently in place in many dual credit programs throughout the state, and this situation sets the stage for uneven and inadequate writing instruction, which is even more problematic than our current dual credit system in that the expansion of accelerated learning opportunities through credit-by-proficiency or partnership models appears to be targeting students who would not otherwise qualify for dual credit instruction, students who are underprepared and at-risk.

In other words, absent some very deliberate, specific, and enforceable parameters around the proposed accelerated learning models offered by HECC, I cannot in good conscience offer anything but an objection. If the goals are ***truly*** quality instruction and increased learning, the state would be much better served by one of two strategies: by adequately funding actual community colleges and lowering tuition than in developing and expanding questionable partnership or credit-by-proficiency programs; or 2. Affording high school faculty tuition subsidies to pursue coursework in composition and rhetoric that is available from institutions like OSU or EOU so that the instructors meet the standards for dual credit certification.

Respectfully,

Kate Sullivan
LCC Writing Faculty
Interim Composition Coordinator
Chair, Assessment Team

Co-Chair-Elect, OWEAC, 2017-2019
Past Chair, OWEAC, 2008-2010

We the undersigned include our signatures in support of the above letter of objection:

Christopher J. Syrnyk, Chair, Oregon Writing and English Advisory Committee
Assistant Professor, Rhetoric and Composition
Chair, Composition Curriculum Committee
Oregon Institute of Technology

Donna Evans, Past Secretary, Oregon Writing and English Advisory Committee
Assistant Professor of English and Writing
Director of the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum
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Jodie Marion
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