

**Central Connecticut State University**  
UNIVERSITY SENATE ACTION

**Senate Motion Number FS 13.14.005B**

TO: President Jack Miller  
FROM: President of the University Senate

1. The attached motion of the University Senate, dealing with: **Placement Standards into Remedial English** is presented to you for your consideration.
2. This motion was adopted by the University Senate on **10/14/2013**.
3. After considering this motion, please indicate your action on this form, and return it together with the original copy to the President of the University Senate.
4. Under the By-Laws of the University Senate, Section 3.7, the following schedule of action is to be observed.
  - a) By **10/15/2013**, Senate action reported to the President of the University. (Within five school days of the session in which they are adopted).
  - b) By **10/29/2013**, the President of the University to return the motion to the President of the Senate. (Within ten school days of its receipt).

**10/14/2013**

Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephen Cohen, President, University Senate

ENDORSEMENT:

TO: President of the University Senate  
FROM: President Jack Miller

1. Motion Approved :  \_\_\_\_\_
2. Motion Disapproved: \_\_\_\_\_ (Explanatory statement must be appended).
3. Action "is deferred": \_\_\_\_\_
4. Resolution Noted: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10/25/13  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
President Jack Miller

**Proposal for New Writing Placement Test**  
**English Department**  
**9/17/13**

**Background**

1. The current placement process for freshman writing at CCSU is based entirely on SAT or ACT scores: students with scores above the cutoff are placed in ENG 110, and those below it in ENG 099. A written placement test evaluated in-house is made available only to a small number of students—usually international students and veterans—who enter CCSU without test scores. National disciplinary norms, an overwhelming body of scholarly evidence, and our own experience all indicate that this is an ineffective system: the SAT and ACT are unreliable predictors of writing ability, and the result is far too many students either forced to take a class—ENG 099—for which they are overprepared or allowed to take a class—ENG 110—for which they are underprepared. Neither situation is conducive to student success or persistence.
2. Public Act 12-40, signed into law last year, mandates (*inter alia*) two things. First, that ConnSCU schools use “multiple measures” to place students in first-year writing classes: a single test score will no longer suffice. Second, that ConnSCU schools offer “embedded remediation” courses—courses that “embed” basic writing instruction within a credit-bearing first-year writing course—for students who do not need a full semester of remediation but are not prepared to succeed in a conventional freshman composition course. The English Department has consequently designed an “embedded remediation” first year writing course—ENG 105—which is currently making its way through the university’s curriculum approval process, with the expectation that it will be piloted in spring 2014 in order to comply with PA 12-40.
3. The inadequacy of our current placement system, the need to use multiple placement measures, and the increased complexity of our placement situation caused by the introduction of ENG 105 have led the English Department to redesign its placement process for first-year writing.

**The Proposal**

1. In place of the current single cut score to determine placement, we propose a two-stage process. The first would involve a more nuanced use of SAT/ACT scores. Students whose test scores fell below a specified “floor” score would be required to take ENG 099, and students whose scores were above a “ceiling” score would be placed into ENG 110. All students whose scores fell between the “floor” and “ceiling” would be required to take a written placement test. All students without SAT/ACT scores would also be required to take the written test.
2. The written placement test would be administered on-line, via Blackboard Learn, at a location of the student’s choice. (National data shows that on tests like this plagiarism and other cheating are not significant issues, largely because of the nature of the test and the method of its assessment.)
3. Students who confirm their intention to attend CCSU and whose SAT/ACT scores indicate the need for the written test will be informed of their need to take the test and sent instructions.

4. Students who log on to take the test would first see a set of instructions which would include the test procedure, grading standards and rubric. They would be able to review this material at any time during the test process. Once they read this material, they would have the option of continuing or logging out and returning at another time.
5. If they choose to continue—or when they log on again—they would be given a series of multiple-choice or short-answer (250 character limit) demographic and self-evaluative questions concerning their language skills and writing preparation. These questions will not be used in the placement process itself—and students will be so informed—but rather to help us assess and improve the process and gather data on our student population. After completing this section, students would be given the option of continuing or logging out and returning at another time.
6. If they choose to continue—or when they log on again—they would be given the test itself. Once students begin the test, they cannot stop the process: they will have two hours to complete and submit the test. This will of course be made clear to students several times before they begin.
7. The test will ask students to read a short (500-600 word) text and give them a prompt asking them to write an essay of their own responding to the text and relating it to their own thoughts and experiences. Students will be given one of several text/prompt combinations, distributed randomly. The test will help us to evaluate the skills at the core of our writing program: the ability to read, respond to, and appropriately utilize written arguments and to make a clear and persuasive argument of one's own at an appropriate level of discourse. Students will have two hours to read the text and conceptualize, write, and edit their essay.
8. In the event that legitimate technical or other difficulties arise that prevent students from successfully completing and submitting their essays, we will make available a backup test that students can take on campus in order to minimize further difficulties.
9. Once a student's essay is submitted, it will be evaluated by a trained member of the English Department faculty and a placement decision—ENG 099, ENG 105, or ENG 110—will be entered into Banner and the student will be informed.

It is our hope and expectation that this new procedure will result in more accurate placement in freshman writing classes, leading to reduced failure rates and reduced student frustration and underpreparedness for college-level writing, and thus to greater success in subsequent classes and greater persistence to timely graduation.

## Demographic and Self-Assessment Data

Please take a few minutes to answer the following demographic questions. This data will help us better understand the characteristics, goals, and abilities of our student population so that we can improve our program. All data will be held in strict confidence and will not be shared outside of internal departmental and university assessment processes. None of your responses will be used as part of the placement process, or as part of any grade assessment in any composition course. The time you take to answer these questions **will not** count against the two (2) hours you have to complete the exam. Thank you for your time!

- 1) What do you consider your primary language?
  - a. English
  - b. Other (choose from list)
  
- 2) What is the primary language used in your home?
  - a. English
  - b. Other (choose from list, option for multiple language)
  
- 3) Other than English, are you fluent in another language?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes
    - i. If so, what language(s)? (choose from list, option for multiple languages)
  
- 4) What level of English courses did you take in high school (choose all that apply)?
  - a. AP
  - b. Honors
  - c. International Baccalaureate
  - d. A-Level
  - e. College-Prep
  - f. Remedial
  - g. ESL
  - h. Other (please explain)
  
- 5) Briefly, what are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer in English?
  - a. Strengths: (250 char limit text box)
  - b. Weaknesses: (250 char limit text box)
  
- 6) What do you hope to learn and improve upon in a composition course?  
(250 char limit text box)
  
- 7) Please take a moment to review the assessment criteria for the placement exam again, as well as the course descriptions (*provide pop-up box link for*

*rubric/criteria and course descriptions*). Based on this information, which course do you think you are best suited for?

- a. ENG 110
- b. ENG 105
- c. ENG 099
- d. ESL 108/109

8) Briefly, explain why you think the course you chose above would best support your writing instruction

- a. (250 char limit text box)

9) *(to be asked after exam is submitted)* After having submitted your exam response, into what class do you anticipate being placed, and why?

- a. ENG 110
- b. ENG 105
- c. ENG 099
- d. ESL 108/109

10) Briefly, explain why you think you will be placed in the course you chose above

- a. (250 char text box)

## **Writing Course Descriptions**

**ENG 110 Introduction to College Writing** is an introductory course in college-level academic writing focusing on reading complex sources and writing about them. It emphasizes critical thinking and inquiry; writing as a reflective, social act; locating, evaluating, and using evidence; and applying conventions of the academic community. The course offers discussion of and guided practice with writing as a process that includes multiple drafts, peer review, revision, and careful editing. ENG 110 satisfies CCSU's first-year writing requirement.

**ENG 105 Enhanced Introduction to College Writing** is an introductory course in college-level academic writing for students who would benefit from additional individual and small-group writing instruction. The course shares ENG 110's focus on reading and responding to complex sources; critical thinking and inquiry; writing as a social act; use of evidence; academic conventions; and the writing process. Students in ENG 105 take the equivalent of the 3-credit ENG 110, supplemented by two additional hours of basic writing instruction and tutorial assistance. ENG 105 satisfies CCSU's first-year writing requirement.

**ENG 099 Remedial Writing** focuses on improvement of basic writing skills in order to meet entrance requirements for ENG 110. In addition to a review of grammar and punctuation, the course emphasizes sentence and paragraph formation and the development of coherent essays through a writing process that includes multiple drafts, peer review, revision, and careful editing. Students who are required to take ENG 099 must pass the course with a C- or better before successful completion of 30 hours of coursework. Grades in ENG 099 will affect GPA as if ENG 099 were a three credit course, but these credits will not count toward the number of credits required for graduation. ENG 099 does not satisfy CCSU's first-year writing requirement, but passing the course with a C- or better qualifies a student to take ENG 110.

**ESL 108/109 English as a Second Language Writing I and II** offer instruction in writing in English for students whose native language is not English. ESL 108 includes a review of English grammar and work in speaking and comprehension as well as an introduction to academic writing. ESL 109 emphasizes academic writing skills for second-language learners in preparation for ENG 110. ESL 108 and 109 meet at the same time: students who have not already passed ESL 108 who wish to take an ESL class should enroll in ESL 108, and the instructor will determine whether the student needs ESL 108 or can go directly to ESL 109. Neither ESL 108 nor 109 satisfies CCSU's first-year writing requirement, but passing ESL 109 with a C- or better qualifies a student to take ENG 110.

# Sample Essay Prompt

**Instructions:** Please read the following excerpt from an article written by an experienced middle and high school teacher named Herbert Kohl. After reading the excerpt, please respond to the writing prompt that follows the piece. You will have two (2) hours to complete all tasks (including reading and re-reading, drafting, writing, editing, and submitting/uploading your written response to the prompt).

[BEGIN READING]

Years ago, one of my fifth-grade students told me that his grandfather Wilfredo wouldn't learn to speak English. He said that no matter how hard you tried to teach him, he ignored whatever words you tried to teach and forced you to speak to him in Spanish. When I got to know his grandfather I asked, in Spanish, whether I could teach him English and he told me unambiguously that he did not want to learn. He was frightened, he said, that his grandchildren would never learn Spanish if he gave in like the rest of the adults and spoke English with the children. Then, he said, they would not know who they were. At the end of our conversation he repeated adamantly that nothing could make him learn to speak English, that families and cultures could not survive if the children lost their parents' language, and, finally, that learning what others wanted you to learn can sometimes destroy you.

I discussed Wilfredo's reflections with several friends, and they interpreted his remarks as a cover-up of either his own fear of trying to learn English or his failure to do so. These explanations, however, show a lack of respect for Wilfredo's ability to judge what is appropriate learning for himself and his grandchildren. By attributing failure to Wilfredo and refusing to acknowledge the loss his family would experience through not knowing Spanish, they turned a cultural problem into a personal psychological problem; they turned willful refusal to learn into failure to learn.

I've thought a lot about Wilfred's conscious refusal to learn English and have great sympathy for his decision. I grew up in a partially bilingual family and in a house shared by my parents, born in New York City, and grandparents, born in the Yiddish-speaking Polish part of the Jewish settlements in East Europe called the Pale, and know what it is like to face the problem of not-learning and the dissolution of culture. In addition I have encountered willful not-learning throughout my 30 years of teaching, and believe that such not-learning is often and disastrously mistaken for failure to learn or the inability to learn.

Learning how to not-learn is an intellectual and social challenge; sometimes you have to work very hard at it. It consists of an active, often ingenious willful rejection of even the most compassionate and well-designed teaching. It subverts attempts at remediation as much as it rejects learning in the first place. It was through insight into my own not-learning that I began to understand the inner world of students who chose to not-learn what I wanted to teach. Over the years I've come to side with them in their refusal to be molded by a hostile society and have come to look upon not-learning as positive and healthy in many situations.

Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity. In such situations, there are forced choices and no

apparent middle ground. To agree to learn from a strange who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject their world.

[END READING]

In 500-600 words, please address the following prompts in one, coherent, formal response:

- 1) Briefly summarize Herbert Kohl's purpose for writing, and his reasons for believing in his point of view. This should take up approximately 20% of your response.
- 2) After having read Herbert Kohl, and after considering your own experiences, beliefs, and educational goals, as well as the responsibilities of a public university like CCSU, respond to Kohl's essay. Beyond "agreeing" or "disagreeing" with Kohl's ideas on language, culture, learning, and "not-learning," what do you find useful, important, or troubling about the argument(s) that Kohl puts forth? Be specific in your response; do not try to respond to everything in the article, but do take up the issue or issues that you find important and relevant, and organize them into a focused, purposeful essay in which you lay forth your argument and support it with specific reasons and/or examples (from your life and/or from Kohl's article). Consider your audience to be the English faculty of CCSU, who are both experienced instructors, and also veterans of many conversations with students of different backgrounds. This should take up approximately 80% of your response.

Advice:

- 1) Read and re-read the article, making notes about words, sentences, and ideas that provoke a response within you.
- 2) Read and re-read the writing prompt(s)
- 3) Stay true to the writing prompt—going off topic, writing in an inappropriate style, ignoring your audience, or addressing interesting-but-irrelevant ideas will only make it harder for the faculty assessing your writing to see your ability to compose a focused, purposeful essay.
- 4) Read the assessment criteria carefully so that you fully understand the terms on which your writing is being judged.
- 5) Leave time for editing and revision at the end!