

**MINUTES**  
**International Students and Scholars Committee**  
**25 April 2018**

Present: Dr. Warren Johnson (Chair and Secretary), Dr. Rejoice Addae, Mr. Christopher Boothman, Ms. Sharon McDaniel (proxy for Ms. Tracy Finch), Dr. Thillainatarajan Sivakumaran, Ms. Shannon Wess, Ms. Victoria Williams, Ms. Qian Yu

Visitors: Dr. Airek Beauchamp (English, Philosophy, and World Languages), Mr. Jeff Chandler (English Learning Academy), Dr. Kristi Costello (English, Philosophy, and World Languages), Ms. Mallory Yarbrough (International Student Services)

Absent: Mr. Tarun Chincholi, Dr. Gauri Guha, Dr. Lynita Cooksey, Dr. Maurice Gipson, Dr. Mihir, Mr. Sumon Roy, Dr. Evelyn Taylor, Misato Tsuruta, Dr. Karen Wheeler

This final meeting of the committee for the year was devoted to a discussion of how best to help improve the writing of non-native speakers of English already admitted to degree programs. After calling the meeting to order at 3:32 pm, Dr. Johnson asked that visitors who were present because of their special expertise in this area introduce themselves: Dr. Airek Beauchamp, Assistant Director of the Writing Center; Dr. Kristi Costello, Director of the Writing Program and Writing Center; and Mr. Jeff Chandler, Coordinator of the English Learning Academy. Dr. Jill Simons, Associate Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies, was invited and indicated her intent to come with another representative from Undergraduate Studies, but neither was in attendance at this meeting.

Dr. Johnson began the discussion by asking: (1) what needs these students tend to have with their writing, and (2) how are these needs currently addressed at A-State, or how should they be addressed. The topic is important because student proficiency in writing can have a direct impact on overall academic success and therefore retention. In answer to the first question,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Beauchamp emphasized the difference between instruction in grammar and teaching students how to express their meaning. Non-native speakers may have a good command of the rules after many years of studying English, but still are not prepared for college-level writing, an issue that is especially acute at the graduate level. (Dr. Sivakumaran also noted that certain graduate programs require a high level of writing skill, and international students may struggle to meet these expectations.) Mr. Chandler expressed the view—with which others agreed—that non-native students have distinct learning requirements from those of native English speakers with deficiencies in writing, and should be taught separately, using methods appropriate to their needs and by instructors with specific training and experience in meeting those needs, rather than, for instance, by relying on computerized grammar drills.

In response to the second question, regarding what support A-State currently has and ought to have, Dr. Costello began by expressing her regret that the university does not currently offer credit-bearing bridge courses that would have assisted those students who may well work hard in

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<sup>1</sup> In the interest of clarity, some comments have been rearranged from the order in which they were made.

the basic composition classes (ENG 1003 and 1013), but still cannot not meet course expectations because of their previous preparation. Dr. Costello expressed concern that UC courses into which students not meeting minimum scores in writing are placed have not necessarily been taught by instructors with sufficient training to assist these types of students. [One course mentioned, UC 0164 (Academic Literacy), has been offered recently only on the Paragould campus.] Mr. Chandler also expressed his view that culture is intrinsically bound to language, and instructors need to keep cultural differences in mind in teaching these students. Dr. Beauchamp reminded the committee that by and large, the international students who come to A-State are smart, and should be approached with this in mind. Later in the discussion, Dr. Johnson remarked that such bridge courses did exist at one point—Mr. Boothman recalled that they were a requirement—and asked about them. Dr. Sivakumaran expressed the view that these courses were created more to make money for the university than to provide the assistance that students needed. [Subsequent research into this issue by Mr. Boothman revealed that IP 1111 and 4001, both called International Bridge Program, as well as IEP 5001 with the same title, have not been offered since 2013. Six other one-credit courses with the same prefix targeted at international students with English deficiencies—IP 1001, 1011, 1021, 1031, 1041, and 1051—exist in the Undergraduate Bulletin, but have not been offered since at least Fall 2006. UC 2013, Advanced Reading and Writing, aimed at international transfer students, has not been offered with enrollment since Spring 2015. The prefixes IP (International Programs) and IEP (Intensive English) are assigned to Global Initiatives; UC (University College) courses are under the aegis of Undergraduate Studies.]

There was a sense in the room that the current system is not working as it should. Dr. Sivakumaran suggested that since courses aimed at international students seem defunct and were not well conceived to begin with, and since the merging of non-native and native English-speaking students with writing deficiency as is currently practiced is not optimal, the best solution would be to start from scratch. A number of participants had ideas for what should be done and have in fact piloted some of them. Dr. Beauchamp indicated that he had already spoken with Dr. Simons regarding some ideas for a bridge class, which should be credit bearing. He has piloted special sections of Composition I (ENG 1003) targeted at non-native speakers, which involved having students read periodical articles that were incorporated into the class and arranging for them to work once a week with a tutor. Dr. Costello said that those teaching such classes—which would be targeted specifically at developing writing skills and which would not be remedial—should ideally be taught by full-time faculty with a dual expertise in composition studies and in TESOL or similar experience working with non-native speakers. Such people are already on the A-State faculty. As was indicated above, needs exist for both incoming first-year and transfer students, as well as for graduate students. Continued support for students should be provided throughout their academic career, or else gains in writing proficiency could be lost. (The tutors in the Writing Center receive training in helping non-native speakers, although students recommended to go to the Center unfortunately do not always follow up.) Issues of academic integrity (plagiarism) could also be part of such classes. Dr. Johnson raised the question of where such courses should be housed. In view of the expertise in the recently enhanced Writing Studies section within English, Dr. Sivakumaran argued that they should be assigned to that area, where he encourages the continuation of special sections of Composition I for non-natives. Others with related expertise, notably from the English Learning Academy and the World Languages and Cultures area, would be welcome to join in the

development of such initiatives. Mr. Chandler expressed his interest and willingness to work together on this project, within constraints of his time, since success of ELA graduates reflects well on that program.

On the other hand, since faculty in the various disciplines are responsible for assigning and evaluating student writing in their own courses, training for faculty could be part of an overall plan to improve writing outcomes for non-native international students. For instance, Dr. Beauchamp has experimented with having an embedded tutor to assist students in the MBA program. He suggested that he could help create a digital package on tips for faculty with working with non-native student writers and create workshops for instructors on how better to support non-native students in their writing. Dr. Addae noted that she has benefited from such workshops. Dr. Costello has organized meetings with some departments focused on supporting student writing and fostering intellectual integrity. (As Ms. Yarbrough pointed out, plagiarism is a topic included in the mandatory international student orientation, but for cultural or other reasons, the lesson does not always take.) Although the Faculty Center budget has suffered budgetary cuts, Dr. Sivakumaran expressed willingness to help pay for some such faculty training.

As the end of the hour approached, there was agreement to continue the discussion of course and faculty workshop development over the summer in an ad hoc group, which would be open to all interested. Dr. Johnson volunteered to facilitate the work of this group.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.