

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
COLLEGE AT OLD WESTBURY

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 21, 1991

TO: Faculty Council

FROM: E. Landy, R. Mukherji

RE: Addressing Skills Deficiencies: Committee Charge

In the past two years, three reports have addressed skills - related problems at Old Westbury: the Long Range Plan submitted by the Curriculum and Academic Planning Committee (October 1990), the Retention/Graduation Task Force Report (November 1990), and the Comprehensive Review of the Basic Education Program (April 1991). Each of these reports has made specific recommendations for improving the College's efforts to meet the needs of our students, which in turn should improve our retention and graduation rates.

The specific needs of First Time to College students and lower division transfers are addressed in CAP's recommendations:

1. Make Invitation to Learning (or another orientation course) mandatory for all FTC and Lower Division transfer students.
2. Specifically designate Freshman courses which would include peer tutors in their design (under aegis of General Education).
3. Assign every incoming student to an advisor.
4. Restructure the placement exam to include reading comprehension as well as writing skills to better identify students in need of basic education.
5. Restructure the Basic Education program to facilitate coordination among various parts of the program.
6. Implement a Pilot Program incorporating support structure for FTC and lower division transfer students.
7. Implement a formative evaluation of Basic Education.

The Task Force on Basic Education addressed the same group of students; its recommendations include:

1. Improve the advising and follow-up system of Basic Education students.
2. Revise placement instruments in all three areas (Basic English, ESOL, Basic Mathematics).
3. Provide additional resources for tutoring to integrate tutoring into Basic Education Program and to facilitate the transition from skills courses to content courses in the College.
4. Develop a workable coordination plan for Basic Education to actually implement the program.

Among the recommendations of the Retention/Graduation Task Force were:

1. Improve instructional support services, i.e., finding and hiring qualified tutors to start at the beginning of the semester, update equipment for the ESOL Center.
2. Implement a non-remedial Study Group Plan.
3. Implement an independent tutoring program.
4. Revive the Faculty Mentor Program.

Each of the reports spoke to the need for additional resources to support programs for FTC and lower division transfer students; each spoke to the lack of resources - especially tutoring - as one of the problems impacting on the success of existing programs.

Both the Task Force on Basic Education and CAP addressed the structural problems impacting the administration of Basic Education.

Skills related problems of upper division students, both transfers and Associate degree students, fall under the aegis of General Education's Writing and Reasoning Cluster which is to be implemented by each Program. The General Education Plan requires each Academic Program to implement the teaching of upper division writing and reasoning skills in its curriculum. As part of the review of General Education beginning in December 1991, Programs have been asked to articulate their course-embedded mechanisms for addressing the needs of upper division students.

Faculty and administration at Old Westbury have been concerned with and have attempted to address problems related to skills deficiencies and retention for twelve years. We have had a Block Program, a Structured Year Program, a Basic Education Program and a General Education Program. It could be argued that the problems encountered by each of these programs have had two common bases: lack of resources to fully implement all parts of each and structural isolation. We find the same themes again in reviews of the current Basic Education Program and recommendations that suggest that in order for our current program (Basic Education) to be successful, both additional resources must be given and its structural isolation must be addressed. General Education, the mechanism through which we attempt to address upper division skills issues, is about to be evaluated; an integral part of that evaluation will be an assessment of our efforts to meet the needs of upper division skills deficient students.

We feel that the reports summarized above have already addressed the issues any new committee would look at; evaluations have been completed and recommendations have been made. (In the case of upper division students, the review of General Education is scheduled.) Rather than create yet another committee to replicate the efforts of our colleagues, we suggest that Faculty Council ask for responses to the recommendations on the part of Academic Affairs so that we are able to move forward in our attempt to meet the needs of our students.