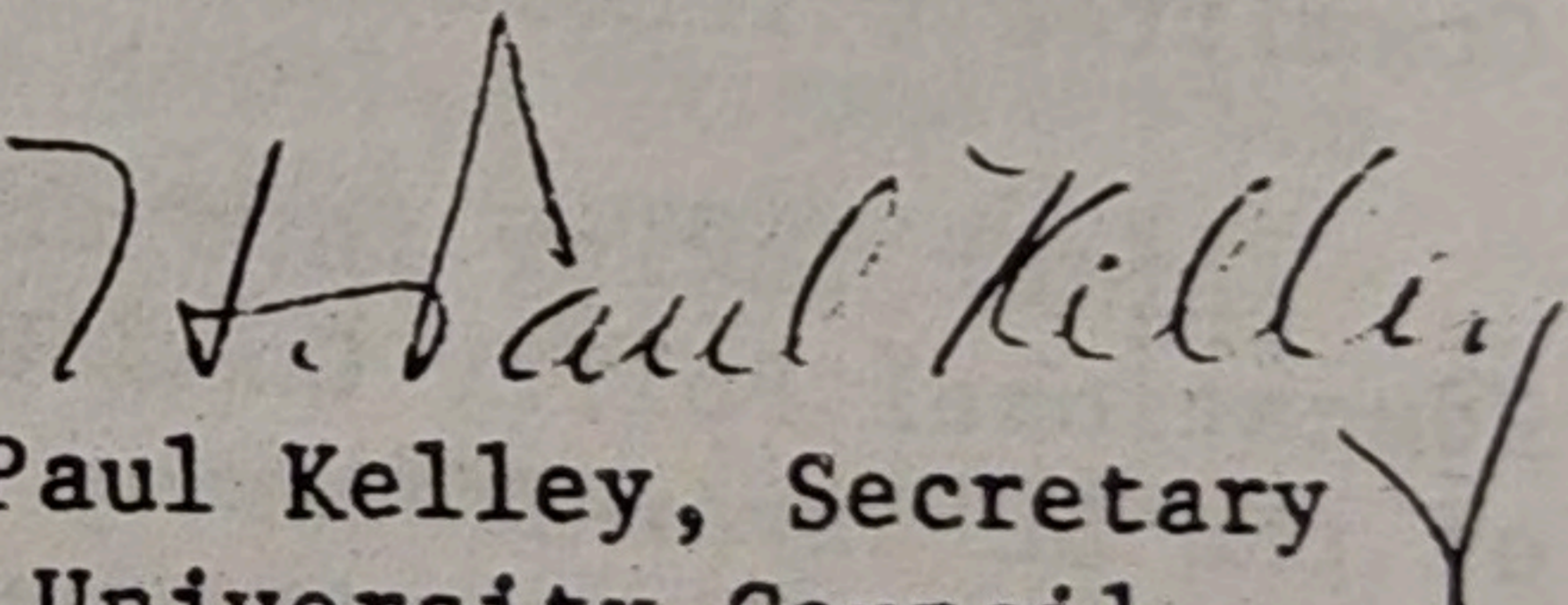


DOCUMENTS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL

REVISED RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING
SUBSTANTIAL WRITING COMPONENT COURSES

Joseph J. Lagowski (Chemistry), Chair of the Educational Policy Committee, has filed with the Secretary of the University Council a revised version of the Educational Policy Committee recommendations concerning the "Fowler Report" recommendations about Substantial Writing Component courses (D&P 12270-12273). The Secretary classified the earlier version of the recommendations as major legislation. The 21-day circulation rule for major legislation was complied with on April 28, 1989.

Notice is hereby given that these revised recommendations will be presented to the University Council for action at its meeting on May 8, 1989.


H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The University Council

REVISED RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING
SUBSTANTIAL WRITING COMPONENT COURSES

Introduction

The University Council at its meeting of May 9, 1988, (D&P 11934) voted to refer the "Fowler Report" (D&P 11715) to the Educational Policy Committee (EPC) for review and to make recommendations. Although the "Fowler Report" incorporates a review of the Basic Education requirements, the University Council apparently was most interested in questions arising from the Substantial Writing Component (SWC) requirements.

Accordingly, at the University Council meeting of April 17, 1989, the Educational Policy Committee submitted a set of recommendations (D&P 12270-12273) concerning the SWC courses and requirements and stated that recommendations concerning the remaining items in the "Fowler Report" on the Basic Education requirements would be forthcoming. At the April 17 meeting, Teresa Sullivan (Sociology) and James L. Kinneavy (English) proposed that a number of changes and additions be made to the Committee's recommendations. Considerable discussion followed.

After taking into account the University Council discussion, the Educational Policy Committee revised its proposal, incorporating most of the Sullivan-Kinneavy changes and additions. At the Council meeting on May 8, 1989, the Committee will submit its revised recommendations as a replacement for its original recommendations (D&P 12270-12273). So that the reader will not have to refer to the earlier version in order to find the Committee's explanation of each proposal, the text of the earlier document, with only minor modifications, is repeated below; major revisions were made only in the numbered recommendations.

SWC Requirements

The present SWC requirements can be traced to a letter (23 September 1983) from (then) President Flawn establishing an ad hoc committee to develop a statement of University-wide minimum criteria, which were recommended by the Vick Committee as a part of the Basic Education requirements, for certifying SWC courses. The report of the ad hoc committee was approved by President Flawn (14 November 1983) and implemented by a memo (17 November 1983) to the academic Deans from (then) Vice-President for Academic Affairs Fonken. The SWC requirements currently in effect are as follows:

"Each course certified as having a substantial writing component must include at least three writing activities per semester, exclusive of in-class quizzes and examinations. These three or more writing activities must total approximately 16 typewritten, double-spaced pages (about 4,000 words). A major re-writing of a paper (requiring additional original writing, not merely editing) can be considered a separate writing activity.

"During the course, each student must receive a timely and detailed critique following each writing activity concerning the quality of the student's written expression and ways in which the paper can be improved.

"The quality of the student's written expression must be an important component in determining the student's course grade."

EPC agrees with the general premise which led to the inclusion of SWC within the Basic Education requirements, but believes that the experience gained from the five (5) years since the institution of these courses indicates some adjustments need to be made in the details of expressing the SWC within the University community. These details involve access, flexibility, accountability, and resource availability.

Access

EPC believes that students too often encounter severe difficulties in gaining admission to current SWC courses. The following recommendation is an attempt to provide more SWC courses and to level out the load in each college.

1. "The committee RECOMMENDS that each college or school be directed to offer sufficient courses to allow all of its majors to satisfy The University's Substantial Writing Component requirement within that college or school."

Flexibility

The EPC concluded that the most important aspect of the criteria established for SWC courses was the total experience prescribed by the published criteria, and not the number of credit hours involved. The intensity of the experience currently is established by the number of courses that have been required under the previous guidelines, which are expressed in terms of numbers of credit hours. The EPC believes that much is to be gained in terms of availability of courses if the offerings could be made more flexible. Accordingly,

2. "The committee RECOMMENDS that The University's Substantial Writing Component requirement be fulfilled by passing any two courses (except E. 306 and E. 316K), each of which is certified by the SWC committee of the college or school in which the course is offered to fulfill the criteria previously established [i.e., three or more writing activities totaling approximately 16 typewritten, double-spaced pages (about 4,000 words); a major rewriting of a paper (requiring additional original writing, not merely editing) can be considered a separate writing activity]. One of the SWC courses must be an upper-division course."

Accountability

One of the more serious problems with the current SWC courses is the paucity of details concerning the availability of SWC courses for planning purposes. Accordingly,

3a. "The Committee RECOMMENDS that the Course Schedule indicate the number of spaces available in each SWC course after the room number. This will enable the college or school SWC committee to plan for the required number of students in the college or school. It will also give students a clear notion of the availability of classes."

3b. "The committee RECOMMENDS that each college or school SWC Committee establish a method of periodically monitoring the quality of the writing in SWC classes in a way that respects the anonymity of teachers and students."

We anticipate that such information would be useful to assure that the spirit of the SWC expressed in Recommendation 1 is equitably fulfilled as far as is possible.

Resource Availability

Because the expression of the SWC within different colleges and schools often requires the training of assistants to help evaluate the "English" associated with the SWC, several members of the Committee indicated that part of the early successes in the early SWC courses arose from the availability of training workshops for this purpose. The Committee agreed that the training workshops associated with SWC courses be regularly given.

4. "The Committee RECOMMENDS that sufficient resources be made available (1) to the Center for Teaching Effectiveness to organize and conduct regular workshops to train assistants for SWC courses and (2) for the provision of adequate TA support for the faculty teaching SWC courses. The University should request specific moneys for this so that other uses of TA's are not preempted.

Finally, the Committee discussed each recommendation associated with the SWC in the Fowler Report. Other than the issues associated with statements 1, 2, and 3 (above) the Committee did not support the other recommendations mentioned in the Fowler Report.