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To: Board of Trustees, Mt. San Antonio College
From: Jim Moore, English, Literature, Journalism Dept.

Report on Sabbatical Leave Spring 1977

Note: These are the conclusions of the study I made during Spring 1977. The details and especially the documentation are on file in my office.

I set out to study the writing programs in California colleges and universities MSAC students usually transfer to. I decided to limit my study to the journalism and creative writing programs, because these are areas in which my department has chosen to specialize. My study included campus and classroom visitations, usually for a 2-day period; interviews with teachers and department chairs; collection and reading of the studied college's handouts and its publications; wherever possible, student interviews; interviews with MSAC students currently or formerly attending the studied schools. I must admit that the result, which I will be distributing to our counselors, is opinionated, and that a different person might have reached different conclusions. However, I plan to act upon my conclusions in advising students in my classes.

The following summary is in, for want of a better order, the rank of favorable recommendation I plan to give these colleges.

San Francisco State University

Journalism. If I couldn't send a student to Stanford, Columbia, or the University of Missouri, I would happily send him to SFSU. The environment there is more like that of actual journalistic life than in any other college I visited. A high percentage of the staff are working journalists. Students regularly visit them in their newsroom offices, where they conduct research and get advice. Further, San Francisco itself is an ideal "laboratory", since students are never more than a 15-minute bus-ride from city hall, board of education, etc. and classroom assignments regularly require such real-life work. SFSU publishes two competing campus newspapers, one wholly financed through the college budget and one wholly a student endeavor. SFSU publishes Feedback, the only media review in California. Curricular innovations are high, for instance a "Literature of Journalism" course which I intend to pirate here. The college publishes all its material on-campus. Students are in touch with the entire

publication process. If I had to create a journalism program from scratch, I would imitate this one, including borrowing many of the classroom techniques.

Creative Writing. For many years, SFSU's program was literally unrivalled. But since the departure of famed author-teachers such as Clark, West, Boyle, and Harris and the creation of other creative writing programs around the state, SFSU's program seems to me very stiff and unresponsive, quite the opposite of any program intending to foster creativity. Community college transfers are at a disadvantage. Any creative writing course is disallowed. Transfers must take an "introductory" course scanning the various genre (fortunately, our 1B seems to transfer) and then various junior-level courses in specific genre before they are encouraged to write very much. The sections I visited were quite scholarly and quite (in my view) uncreative and the teachers showed little familiarity with the writing of the last 15 years. Individual help appears to be reserved for seniors and graduate students. Since this program is essentially divorced from the college's English program, it made me wonder about the wisdom of "majoring in creative writing." Many of our students have published good stuff without this rather ingrown kind of education.

Cal State U., Northridge

Journalism. This is the largest Journalism program in Southern California, very complete and well-staffed. Its drawback is that the program goes on an hour (on a good day) from downtown L.A., and the kind of "public affairs reporting" so well done at SFSU is harder to do. There is an excellent and award-winning broadcast journalism program here, and CSN is farther advanced in public relations curriculum than SFSU. SSN publishes a fine journal on journalism history and, like SFSU, is quite helpful to the community college graduate in adjusting units. The percentage of working journalists on the staff is lower than at SFSU, but like that college, CSN has seen the wisdom of financing the college newspaper out of instructional budget. The lawsuits are fewer that way. CSN does an excellent job in placing its graduates, especially in the San Fernando and Simi valleys, where small newspapers are quite numerous.

Cal State U., Long Beach

Journalism. It is really a tossup between CSLB and CSN, but the funding and continuity of campus (laboratory) publications seems more of a problem at CSLB. So students' oncampus ability to practice what they have learned is slightly jeopardized. The CSLB faculty is unusually solid, especially in re introducing students to the hard facts of journalistic life, and in subjects like public relations, students quickly learn that "selling" is secondary to telling the truth. Chair M.L. Stein, a first rate journalist himself, is also a friend to the community college and its products. Funding problems forced the discontinuation of a fine media journal, easily in Feedback's class. A number of working journalists are full or part-time faculty members. I would gladly hire a CSLB product.

Creative Writing. This program, an emphasis within the English major, gets lower marks than the journalism program because the department is not committed to it. The classes I visited were friendly places. If the surface suggested that people were encouraged to create because it was "good therapy," the truth seemed that the teachers were perceptive and critical, and that potentially good writers could receive a great deal of sharply helpful commentary. The lack of texts and similar materials was astounding, but the teachers seemed quite able to invent and improvise. While I was there, I found students coming in to talk about contracts they had just signed, which was a wonderful thing, but the CSLB teachers seemed quite insecure regarding whether the creative writing optional would finally be deemed "legitimate" by the department itself, or perhaps its leaders, and I will certainly warn students that the creative writing major at CSLB is a tentative thing.

University of California, Irvine.

Creative Writing. I could just as easily have placed UCI first on this list, since it is as outstanding in this field as San Francisco State in journalism. It is also the only place I would recommend any creative writer's attending. The program at UCI, through the Master's degree, very confidently interrelates comparative literature, language study, and creative writing, and one finally emphasizes his choice of these. The classes I visited were taught by people who were first-rate writers themselves, and UCI has built this program very carefully, emphasizing the quality of faculty. The work I observed was first-rate, especially in how the students were able to criticize and evaluate each others' creations from well-understood literary vantages. If I were entirely sure that a creative writing major is desirable anywhere, I would give this a Triple-A rating, and I think I will anyhow. The best "English" program I encountered was this one at UCI.

San Jose State University

Journalism. It is very close among the top four journalism schools. I rate SJSU below SFSU, for example, mainly because it is farther from a metropolitan center and thus not so excellent a "laboratory." But SJSU's curriculum has long been fine, and for advertising and public relations it is probably the best in the state. It has the largest campus radio station in California and a program to go with it. It compensates for not being in San Francisco with an energetic and wide-ranging intern program, so that if one waits long enough, he will get a lot of practical experience. Although all the state colleges and universities allegedly operate under the same rules regarding community college units, SJSU suggests more rigidity than the colleges I have ranked higher. But one will be trained well at this college.

Cal State U., Fullerton

Journalism (a subdivision within Communications.) The sheer size (more than 2000 majors, allegedly the third highest such figure in the U.S.A.) of the program is hindering its quality and focus. CSUF has chosen the "theoretical" rather than the "practical" approach. If one wishes to study the effects of the media or to learn communication theory, fine, but if one wishes to become a journalist, I don't think CSUF is the place. Lower-division classes, like the intro to mass communications, are large (150-200) and impersonal. Some upper-division classes are clearly taught by people who are interested, rather than expert. I found myself the guest expert, for instance, in a class devoted to article and feature writing. Campus publications are frequent and competent, but in some areas, for instance critical reviewing, they present no advance over a community college newspaper. Classes like public relations, for instance, are "learning" instead of "doing" classes. Like some colleges I list even lower, CSUF has the "Let us teach them" attitude toward much lower-division work. There are relatively few working journalists on this staff (though, interestingly, the few are very highly sought out) and Fullerton is more remote from metropolitan L.A. than the mileage would indicate. If one wishes to make his career in Orange County, it is a possibility, however.

Cal Poly, Pomona

Journalism (a subdivision with Communications.) Much of what is true about CSU Fullerton seems to apply here, too. But the smaller size and scope operates in Poly's favor. Unfortunately, there are no working journalists on the staff, and so the program is excessively provincial. The "special projects" feature at Poly (That's not the name anymore, but the idea continues) is good. Students can get a lot of individual attention in projects of their own invention, and can talk themselves into situations like helping to produce television shows at KNBC. The journalism curriculum, however, seems to me to be a slightly poor relation to speech communications at Poly, and I wonder whether, unless the student were determined to make his career in this geographical area, Cal Poly would stretch our students enough.

Cal State U, LA

Journalism. It is difficult to rate CSULA. Its program has been established for a long time and has produced journalists and teachers of journalism. However, the department itself seems to be undergoing a period of self-doubt which is connected with a changing campus population and the inroads made by the popular programs at CS Northridge and CS Fullerton. Cal State LA is a good place to go for broadcast journalistic training, since its classes are taught by professionals and much of the class work takes place at the major radio and television studios. Cal State

LA, however, has always been hard on community college transfers in any English-related area, and students from MSAC who have taken, for example, Broadcast Journalism 25 are going to find their experience discounted. CSLA has published good newspapers and literary magazines and its people know their business. One wonders, however, whether they are getting good enough students any more.

UCLA

Journalism. The UCLA program in journalism really doesn't exist, thanks to Regents' decisions of recent years. So there is no cooperation (really) between the journalistic classes that remain (although photojournalism seems to be thriving) and the Daily Bruin and its satellite newspapers. The Bruin, however, almost in the same vein as the Daily Californian, which has gone off-campus and become a successful community newspaper, has stayed alive and influential. If one joins its staff and hangs around a few years, one gets very valuable survival training, very much like that on "the outside." It is entirely a student undertaking, and it has influence in Westwood, Santa Monica, and West LA. Perhaps I should rate the program higher, but I still regret the academic de-emphasis and believe that the UCLA products are not getting the depth of training they used to.

Creative Writing. This program is handled through University Extension and is excellent. However, it is not one you can counsel students to transfer into. The "classes" are frequently correspondence between teacher and student, but the degree of critical reaction to student writing is quite high, depending upon the number of students a given "teacher" is handling. These people are pros, but the program is outside "regular" education.

Cal State U, San Diego

Journalism. SDS has had a good reputation in broadcast journalism, and one of the best texts in the field is co-authored by a SDS prof. But this is a college definitely uninterested in transfers from outside its immediate area (unless they are athletes) and another which says to the community college, "just teach them the general basics and leave the REAL teaching to us." I think most community college people would be rightfully angered by the narrowness of this approach. The college publications seem to me second-rate, and perhaps one reason is that the journalism staff, which is not particularly made of professional journalists, has decided to divorce itself from the newspaper entirely. While this situation (for another reason) has not markedly hurt the paper at UCLA, things seem much worse in San Diego. It is possible that the intern program the SD State staff describes has been able to make up for this lack of on-campus "laboratory" work.

University of California, Riverside.

Creative Writing. Despite a recent attempt (by hiring public relations personnel) to change its image, most things connected with the English program at UCR seem to me still arbitrary, ingrown, and unresponsive. It was very difficult to find out anything about the UCR program in creative writing, and I can testify that UCR interest in creative writing programs at MS&C, such as Writers' Day, has been infinitesimal. The student publications I have read, literary as well as journalistic, are poorer than at most community colleges.

University of Southern California.

Journalism. This is the oldest program of its kind in this area and, I believe, the most overrated. I believe that the schools at USC are wildly uneven in quality. The kind of professional excellence and keeping-up-to-date characteristic of the Film school at USC is absent in journalism, as well as in some closely related curricula. USC has steadfastly gone its own way, and is not particularly interested in community college transfers, if the tales told me by some of our students who have tried to get unit credit there are true. A 'USC' on one's diploma is obviously important to some people, but I am not recommending people to the USC program. As it touches photography and photojournalism, it seems to me more acceptable.

A Statement

I think that the foregoing commentary suggests how my study will improve my service to the college. I will be proposing new curriculum on the basis of what I have found (have indeed already proposed such in my department) and will be advising my journalism and creative writing students on the basis of my conclusions. In my current position as chair of the English, Literature, and Journalism department, I will probably have more opportunity for student advisement than in the past. I have already used my newly-gained knowledge in and out of class.

As in 1967, upon return from my first sabbatical leave, I continue to believe that the MSAC sabbatical leave policy is an enlightened one. The project I have completed and described herein and the many other experiences of the semester (including an intensive 2 weeks of New York theater which I am already drawing upon in my classes this fall) have simply made me a better teacher in ways which formal schooling cannot match. Thanks to the Board and all those who have made and maintained this policy for the semester and the opportunity.