Notes from English Discipline Workgroup Meeting #1 July 24, 2007

Hillary Fuhrman welcomed everyone and introduced Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) staff present.

Ms. Fuhrman proceeded with the rest of the introductions and then presented the goals for the meeting following the slide on p. 3.

Today's Goals
Particular attention was paid to:

1) The context of the current discussion on curriculum alignment.
    a. English is a stepping-stone to the rest of college work
    b. English is a skill vital to success in the workforce.
2) The urgent need for this work to be done:
    a. Need to address the tremendous gap between K-12 and higher education
    b. 35% - 40% of postsecondary students in Missouri need remedial work
3) The overall vision for these meetings is for faculty (the experts) to communicate how to reduce these percentages.
4) The importance of collective decision-making for this process

It was emphasized that those present were in charge as they were the experts in their field. The MDHE staff was simply there as facilitators to help the group focus and define their next steps. One of the necessary outcomes for this meeting was the selection of two representatives to serve on a Steering Committee.

National Curriculum Alignment
"Curriculum Alignment" is a "nebulous phrase" that is played out across two areas:

1) Secondary to Postsecondary Alignment
2) Postsecondary Course Alignment

Resources were passed around for those present to look at and discuss later. (See Resources Handout)

"Secondary to Postsecondary Alignment" is of particular concern as the expectations between secondary and postsecondary educators are so vastly different. Secondary curricula do not necessarily lead to postsecondary success, even though 90% of students profess interest in continuing on to postsecondary education. Much work has done to improve their chances of actually accomplishing this. Organizations like the American Diploma Project/Achieve and ACT have done this on a national level and have informed DESE's Course Level Expectations (CLE's). It was mentioned that the State Board of Education revised standards last year which led to the Coordinating Board of Higher Education (CBHE) revising the 42-hour General Education Block.

Students still do not currently have a clear message as to what they need to do to prepare for college. This has been exacerbated by the separate development of secondary and postsecondary institutional systems and their goals/ and standards. Assessment was described as being a gatekeeper between secondary and postsecondary education. MoDEC and placement tests were discussed as examples. The wide range of scores that were acceptable by various postsecondary institutions made preparation for these tests problematic, leaving students possibly even more confused about what to do to prepare for postsecondary education.

The discussion turned towards concerns with "Postsecondary Course Alignment". Paramount concerns were:

1) Differences between course numberings and standards
2) Differences between institutional missions, goals, and related standards

Resources aimed at correcting these differences were passed around. These included examples of state initiatives from Colorado and Illinois as well as The American Math Association of Two Year Colleges (AMATYC). Some of the more developed state-level alignment work involves course competencies, outcomes, and contents. Much of this work has been mandated by state law. In Missouri, the Department of Economic Development has been working hand-in-hand with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and MDHE to maximize the value of student learning to insure the future of the state's economy.

National Context/Drivers

On a national level, much of curriculum alignment has been driven by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Spellings Report "A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education." The Spellings Report has promised that it is not another NCLB for higher education. Instead, it is focused on increasing accountability, affordability, and accessibility to postsecondary education. The regional accrediting bodies such as the Higher Learning Commission have responded to this national conversation by relating accreditation and assessment issues. They are particularly concerned with assessing student learning outcomes and discerning the real value of what students actually learn.

Historical Curriculum Alignment in Missouri

The Missouri K-16 Coalition was formed in the mid-90s to coordinate alignment from secondary to postsecondary education. While some very good work was started and lines of communication were opened across sectors, it was driven by administrators and was not inclusive of faculty involvement or knowledge.

In 2005, a General Education Policy and Matrix were developed. As part of this, credit transfer guidelines were created to facilitate transfer among Missouri higher education institutions. This project was again primarily administrator-driven. The results were broad and its applicable courses were left up to the individual institutions

DESE had developed Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) in 2000 because of NCLB. More recently, they have begun the work of revising these standards, transitioning to

Course Level Expectations (CLE's) at the secondary level. The assessments associated with the revised CLE's would potentially compose anywhere from 10-20% of a student's grade. These evaluations would replace the MAP. The first of these exams will roll out by the 08-09 school year. These exams have been created primarily with input from secondary educators, with very little input from persons in higher education. Discussion ensued regarding the impact these exams could potentially have on curriculum.

MoDEC entry level competencies were also mentioned. The work done with this is going to be considered as a good starting point. It is again imperative that faculty be involved with whatever competencies/assessments are created next. DESE's "Grade and Course Level Expectations" was also referred to—it was reiterated that all students that graduate from high school should have at least the same level of general competencies, whether they plan on going on to postsecondary education or into the workforce. The Department of Economic Development has also been pushing for this as the vast majority of jobs in the state are on their way to becoming knowledge-based. This shift in the economic sector means that for state citizens to be employed, they will need to have the same competencies as their peers who continue into postsecondary education. It is becoming increasingly difficult for those without some sort of higher education to be able to find well-paying jobs. Traditionally, high schools have not been geared towards either track. Dual credit courses have also been problematic.

Current Missouri Drivers

Of particular importance to the current discussion is the Math, Engineering, Technology, and Sciences (METS, but also commonly referred to as STEM fields) Coalition, or the "Missouri METS Coalition". Formed by Governor Blunt, this coalition is concerned with the future of Missouri's economic development in METS fields. A summit last year included leaders in the business world who delivered recommendations to the Governor. These recommendations focused on the need to improve curriculum alignment across the board in METS subjects. They recommended that such alignment be particularly focused on math as this subject was often the gatekeeper to engineering, technology, and the sciences. These recommendations, in part, led to Senate Bill 580 and the creation of the P-20 Council. This council involves the Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE), the Coordinating Board of Higher Education (CBHE), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Department of Economic Development (DED). DESE has made a particular commitment to align with MDHE. Thus the work that will be done in these meetings will also inform the work that DESE does.

The recently passed Senate Bill 389 is the catalyst that drives this specific project on curriculum alignment. Section 173.005 states that

> *The coordinating board shall establish guidelines to promote and*
> *58 facilitate the transfer of students between institutions of higher education within*
> *59 the state* ***and shall ensure that as of the 2008-2009 academic year, in***
> *60* ***order to receive increases in state appropriations, all approved public***
> *61* ***two- and four-year public institutions shall work with the commissioner***

62 ***of higher education to establish agreed-upon competencies for all***
63 ***entry-level collegiate courses in English, mathematics, foreign***
64 ***language, sciences, and social sciences associated with an institution's***
65 ***general education core and that the coordinating board shall establish***
66 ***policies and procedures to ensure such courses are accepted in transfer***
67 ***among public institutions and treated as equivalent to similar courses***
68 ***at the receiving institutions. The department of elementary and***
69 ***secondary education shall align such competencies with the***
70 ***assessments found in section 160.518, RSMo, and successor assessments****;*

Of particular concern is the need for alignment between DESE and MDHE. At this time, 35% of students in Missouri higher education have to take remedial courses. This is cause for significant concern. These courses do not offer college credit and cost the state significant amounts of money. Those who must take these courses have a far lower chance of ever completing an undergraduate degree. Of course, these statistics vary by the selectivity of an institution. For example, at some selective/highly selective institutions, students who would typically be placed in a remedial course are offered other solutions, such as tutoring, that are not tracked in the same way.

Curriculum Alignment Organizational Structure
Senate Bill 389 mandated the creation of faculty-based discipline workgroups covering mathematics, sciences, English, social sciences, and foreign languages. The METS coalition has led the MDHE to develop a discipline workgroup in engineering and technology. The MDHE has also decided to create a discipline workgroup in the humanities so that no major discipline is ignored.

After these faculty-based workgroups have met and determined the scope of the work to be done, two members from each workgroup will become a part of an over-arching steering committee. This steering committee will be composed of faculty members, administrators, and staff from DESE and MDHE. While the official charge of this steering committee has not yet been developed, one of their primary goals will be to coordinate the efforts of the various discipline workgroups and to compile documents and recommendations for the MDHE Commissioner to present to the CBHE. The work of the discipline workgroups and the steering committee will not be tied to a concrete timeline until a better understanding of the scope of the work to be done is gained.

Vision
One of the key purposes of this meeting is for the faculty to tell the MDHE what their vision is. Once the faculty decide the scope of the work, MDHE will issue a "formal charge" meant to sanction the work of the English Discipline Workgroup. The vision of the MDHE for these meetings is to smooth transitions:

1) from secondary into postsecondary education (increase success and lower remediation rates)
2) among higher education institutions for those who do not finish the 42 hour general education block or those who go through transfer "swirl" or concurrent enrollment.

The decision of what course(s) to include as "entry-level' for a typical college freshman is up to participants in these discipline workgroups, particularly the knowledgeable faculty, to decide. At this point, it may be helpful to discuss what curriculum alignment is and is not:

This curriculum alignment initiative is an opportunity to influence public policy. Curriculum alignment is not a road to across-the-board assessment. The goal here is to realize and to demonstrate that local institutional autonomy and accountability can work well together, and that there is no need for a single statewide blanket assessment.

Much of the information that state legislators receive is anecdotal and may or may not be in tune with what is going on at state institutions of higher education. This is an opportunity for us all to make our legislators more aware of what is actually going on with the state's higher education institutions. It is an opportunity for us to have a say in determining and creating public policy. The MDHE staff is here to serve you and to help you achieve your goals. It is up to you to decide how detailed or how broad the core competencies will be. It was reiterated that there is a need to continue to raise rigor and set standards and send clear messages about expectations to high schools students and DESE.

The workgroup broke for a working lunch during which members discussed the direction of the workgroup.

After lunch, discussion resumed regarding the selection of entry-level and exit-level competencies. It was decided that this particular group would focus on English 101.

Problems with the lax standards of dual-credit programs were brought up continuously throughout the meeting. Ensuring alignment of dual-credit courses with the decided-upon competencies was very important to those present. This is an aspect of public policy that everyone agreed needed to be changed. It was noted that DESE's new emphasis on tracking such data is a positive step forward.

In order to begin creating a list of core entry/exit competencies, the participants asked themselves the question: "What type of student do we want to have at our front door and how much remediation do we want them to need?"

Discussions were held over whether critical thinking skills should be taught only at the collegiate level, or should be taught much earlier. Related to this was concern over the high level of testing that students encounter in high school and how this destroys their ability to think more critically. One participant argued that the powers of advance judgment don't develop in people until their mid-twenties. Another participant replied that the desire to learn and the foundation for critical thinking skills can be taught at a very early age and should be taught as early as possible to encourage such development. Another participant mentioned that the lack of critical thinking skills was essentially a language skill problem.

Debate over this was halted when it was brought up that students' simple reading and vocabulary skills were very poor in many postsecondary institutions. It was felt that much of this was because as a society, no one is encouraged to read and thus practice these skills. It was suggested that diagramming sentences was a good way to develop solid English skills because it was a visual, and not a reading, exercise. This, however, did not solve the more basic problem of a lack of reading, vocabulary, and writing skills. It also did not address the need for critical thinking and research skills. Several participants commented that students were not able to read textbooks, take notes, or even spell properly. It was agreed that collaboration with high school educators on grading and postsecondary entrance expectations was a good way to help coordinate efforts to smooth students' transitions from secondary to postsecondary education.

The work of Edward White on writing assessment was discussed as a possible starting point for developing entry/exit competencies for writing. The pros and cons of the MAP tests and the CLE for English that are being developed were also discussed.

It was decided that the focus of this group was going to be on designing needed competencies to succeed in "Comp 101." Individual institutions would decide what to do with students that did not have these entrance competencies. For further work, the participants were divided into two halves. One half was going to look at what competencies were already in place for secondary education while the other half was going to look at what was already in place for post-secondary education. Each group was going to share their findings over Share Point (which Ms. Fuhrman was going to set up and provide access to). Options for the next meeting, to be held in early October, would also be posted on Share Point.

The representatives for the steering committee are Karen Jones and Katricia Pierson.