

PROPOSED NEW CORE AREA I: INTER- AND MULTI-DISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Prepared 10/20/03—Jim Proctor (jproctor@geog.ucsb.edu)

Justification

1. Inter- and multi-disciplinarity are major attributes of UCSB, as noted in the 2003 draft Academic Planning Coordinating Committee document “Enhancing Excellence in a Unique Intellectual Community”;¹ yet they are not featured in the current GE curriculum.
2. An explicitly inter- and multi-disciplinary component of GE could enhance UCSB’s distinctiveness in this area, and be perceived as a real strength by prospective undergraduate students and their families.
3. Current GE requirements are largely built on the distribution model, designed to promote breadth in undergraduate education by means of a distribution of courses from each core area. The proposed Area I requirement complements this backbone of the GE curriculum by helping students assemble the skills and insights gained from these courses into a more coherent whole.
4. The proposed Area I requirement need not necessitate major overhaul of the existing curriculum or new course development. Many existing courses may already qualify (see below), and many more may qualify with minor modifications.
5. The GE Task Force report of May 6, 2002 states as a goal: “To encourage divisional thinking about GE, so that more courses reflecting cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary divisional interests will be offered.” However, no structural provision is offered for such courses.
6. The requirement would accommodate an increasing number of courses proposed to the GE Committee that do not readily fit only one existing core area.
7. Ultimately, the proposed Area I requirement will promote the spirit of a diverse yet interconnected learning community at UCSB.

Proposed Wording and Explanation

“Inter- and Multi-disciplinary Studies. Includes courses that devote significant attention to topics, concepts, theories, and/or methods drawn either from at least two core areas, or from at least two distinct disciplines within one core area.”

The above proposed wording adapts recent in-depth discussions of inter- and multi-disciplinarity² to the core area structure of UCSB’s GE curriculum. It recognizes that different core areas generally embody quite distinct scholarly approaches, yet sometimes two disciplines in the same core area similarly embody distinct scholarly approaches. It includes both *interdisciplinary* courses, which seek to connect two or more disciplines, and *multidisciplinary* courses, which contain (but do not necessarily connect) material from two or more disciplines. In both cases, these courses must devote *significant attention* to at least two core areas, or at least two *distinct* (i.e., not overlapping or closely related) disciplines within one core area. In order to meet the criterion of *significant attention*, no more than two-thirds of a course may be restricted to any one core area or discipline. For instance, a multidisciplinary course that includes material drawn equally from three core areas or distinct disciplines, or an interdisciplinary course in which one-half of its lectures bridge two core areas, would qualify. In all cases, the appropriate GE committee(s) will show preference to courses that demonstrate particular novelty in the choice of, and/or connections between, included core areas or disciplines.

¹ Available from campus network connections at www.apcc.ap.ucsb.edu, password “framework.”

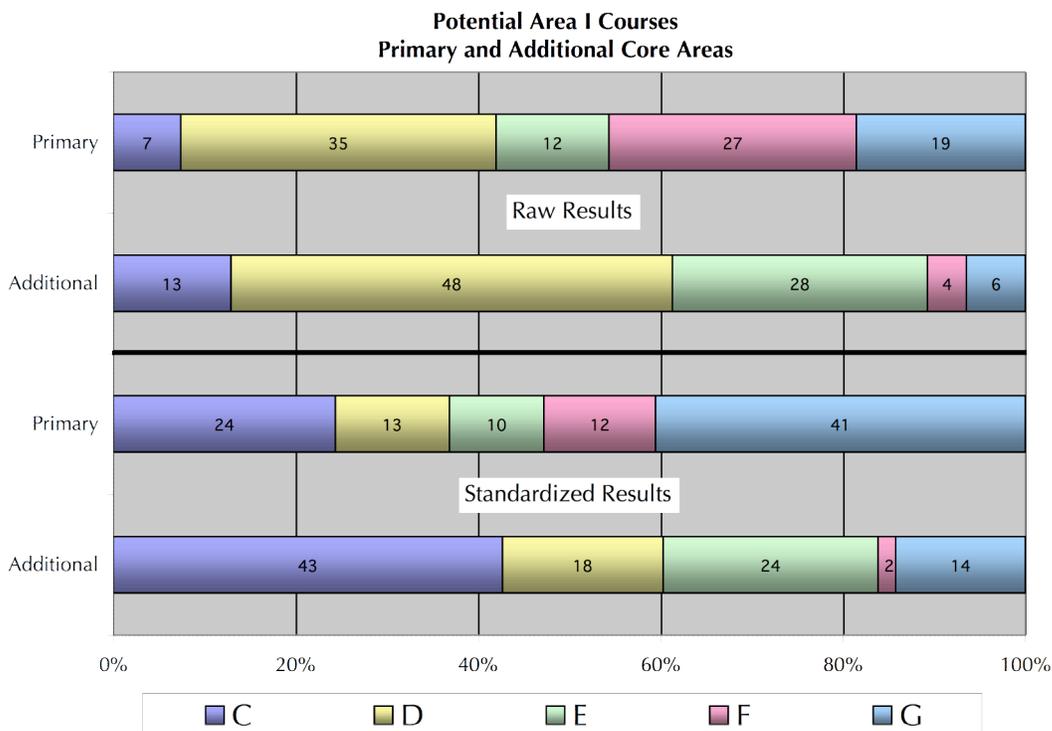
² See e.g. www.cll.wayne.edu/isp/mnissani/pagepub/smoothie.htm, www.interdisciplines.org/interdisciplinarity.

Potential and Sample Courses

A preliminary analysis performed spring 2003 identified UCSB courses that might qualify for Area I. Given the large number of existing GE-approved courses (approximately 1200) and time limitations, focus was placed on departments likely to provide interdisciplinary courses, including Anthropology, Art History, Black Studies, Chicano Studies, Environmental Studies, Film Studies, Geography, Geology, Global Studies, History, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, Sociology, and Women’s Studies. In all, 319 GE-approved courses from areas C through G were considered using criteria similar to the above, with the following exceptions:

- *Significant attention* was defined using the slightly more relaxed criterion of no more than three-quarters of a course restricted to one core area.
- Only courses which included or bridged two or more core areas were considered.³

Following these criteria, 80 existing GE-approved courses qualified.⁴ These 80 courses enrolled more than 9300 students during the 2002-03 academic year. The chart below, developed from these 80 courses, shows the primary core area in which each currently resides on the GE curriculum, and the additional area(s) for which the course also demonstrated significant attention. The raw results show uncorrected totals (reflecting the high proportion of area D and F courses in the 319-course sample), while the standardized results adjust these totals given the different number of courses considered from each core area. Bearing in mind the preliminary and non-representative nature of this analysis, these results nonetheless suggest that all core areas C through G could expect to participate in the proposed Area I.



³ For the purposes of this initial estimate, core areas were determined based largely on the course catalog description and anecdotal information versus actual syllabi.

⁴ Examples include Anthropology 5 (Physical Anthropology, areas C/D), Black Studies 142 (Music in African Cultures, areas D/E/F), Environmental Studies 2 (Introduction to Environmental Science, areas C/D) Film Studies 101A (History of Cinema, areas D/E/F), Psychology 106 (Brain and Behavior, areas C/D), Religious Studies 12 (Religious Approaches to Death, areas D/E), and Women’s Studies 40 (Issues in the Humanities, areas F/G).

Another way to envision the proposed Area I requirement is to consider sample existing courses at UCSB that may fall under this new area. Following are two courses drawn from each of the three divisions of the College of Letters and Science, and selected to illustrate a few of the many possible connections between core areas.⁵ Primary relevant core areas are noted following the catalog description.

Math, Life, and Physical Sciences

Geological Sciences 20. Geological Catastrophes (Ralph Archuleta, Cathy Busby)

Course deals with geological catastrophes, e.g., earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and landslides. Students will learn the basic physical causes of these naturally occurring events and discuss the consequences. [Core Areas C, D]

Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology 121. Ethics of Biomedical Technology (David Kohl)

An interdisciplinary approach to questions raised by advances in biotechnology including advances in human reproduction, definitions of "human life," the right to die, organ transplantation and donation, and animal rights. Discussants will include biologists, ethicists, and religious leaders. [Core Areas C, E]

Social Sciences

Anthropology 110. Technology and Culture (Francesca Bray)

Theories of technological evolution and innovation. Meanings of technology. The social and cultural impact of technology on our everyday lives, including automobile culture, industrial farming, the telephone, and technologies of the body. [Core Areas D, C]

Black Studies 14. The History of Jazz (Douglas Daniels, Earl Stewart)

A survey of the historical origins and development of jazz, beginning with the West African heritage and the Afro-American folk tradition, examining the social and cultural context of this twentieth century music. [Core Areas F, D]

Humanities and Fine Arts

English 25. Literature and the Culture of Information (Alan Liu)

Introduction to the age of information in its relation to history, society, and the arts. Topics include the history of information, hypertext, virtual reality, cyberspace, and the role of literature and literacy in the digital age. Introduction of practical skills and technologies associated with the digital age. [Core Areas G, C]

History of Art and Architecture 45MC. The University: Microcosm of Knowledge (Mark Meadow)

Introduces undergraduates to the university as a place of knowledge production through a combination of lecture and hands-on field research. Topics include the history of universities and the change of disciplinary approaches to research, evidence, and knowledge. [All Core Areas]

⁵ As there has been difficulty fitting inter- and multi-disciplinary courses into the existing GE core area rubric (see Justification point #5), these are not necessarily GE-approved courses.