

Date: June 11, 2001

To: Richard Watts, Chair
UCSB Academic Senate

From: Academic Senate Task Force on General Education
Muriel Zimmerman, Chair

RE: **General Education Task Force Recommendation**

In the attached report, we present the results of eighteen months of work on the charge you gave us. We have reviewed the current General Education requirements, studied GE programs in comparable universities, and consulted widely. In what follows, we summarize the results of our deliberations, including our recommendation of a revised curriculum and a new plan for GE governance.

Our committee has had representative membership from the three undergraduate colleges (L&S, Engineering, Creative Studies) as well as knowledgeable and articulate students. Our consultants have included V. Johns, D. Estrada, F. Cordova, A. Wyner, J. Sonstelie, B. Huff, D. Marshall, T. Lee, E. Zimmerman, S. Velasco, S. Forester, L. Roberts (for WASC), L. Lytle, UCLA Provost B. Copenhaver, UCLA Vice Provost J. Smith, and Bard President L. Botstein. S. Velasco from UCSB Budget and Planning provided reports about GE enrollments at several stages of our work. We appreciate the support we have received from the Academic Senate Office. Debra Blake, Claudia Chapman, and Dorothy Fernandez have been active participants in our project, and their dedication has been invaluable.

The Task Force expects that this recommendation and report will be widely shared with administrators, appropriate Senate committees, the faculty legislature, and the campus community.

Attachment: **General Education Task Force Recommendation**

Revised 6/11/01

**General Education Task Force
Recommendation Report**

June 11, 2001

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- Appendix 1.
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1.0 Overview

On May 9, 2001, the General Education Task Force endorsed a recommendation for a revised General Education Program, firmly based in a new administrative structure to ensure programmatic quality and meaningful ongoing review. That recommendation, as well as our rationale, is enclosed. The committee was unanimous in its support of all features of the recommendation except one: two members (one faculty, one student representative) do not support the elimination of a specifically western civilization requirement, though they support all other features of the recommendation (see Appendix 1a and majority response Appendix 1b).

The General Education Task Force first convened on November 5, 1999, and we have had eleven additional meetings of the full committee since that time, as well as numerous meetings of workgroups. Our agenda has been a direct response to the charge we received. We were asked to review the current GE requirements; to study GE programs in other comparable public universities; to consult widely with knowledgeable parties; to consider GE in the context of a program that might have some element or elements that all UCSB undergraduate students in the colleges could share as a common experience; and to recommend possible revisions of the requirements subject to approval by the Faculty Legislature. We were also asked us to consider the recommendation of Governor Gray Davis for a community service requirement and to discuss possible additional ethnic studies courses within the GE requirement.

The community service requirement appears no longer to be an issue; we recommend a revision of the present description for courses that meet the GE ethnicity requirement, but we do not recommend an expansion of that requirement; neither do we recommend a common GE program for all UCSB students. Our recommendation is intended for the vast majority of students, those who earn B.A. degrees in the College of Letters and Science, though we think it entirely appropriate for students in alternate degree programs.

The program we recommend reduces by three the number of courses required to satisfy the GE requirement (one course reduction in Areas C, D, E), and it makes explicit what is often now the case: students do not need to do GE work in the area of their major or in the area of *some* minors. The revised requirement assumes the establishment of a new General Education governance structure that provides meaningful planning and ongoing review of all courses. The reductions are predicated on the GE courses actually fulfilling the functions that are designated for them in the proposal. Without the establishment of a reliable governance structure, the new program will not, in the view of the Task Force, be effective.

We agree that the existing GE program has numerous intellectual strengths; the following recommendation is based largely on modifications of the same academic design. Many of the problems we identify have come from the proliferation of courses and absence of an effective governance structure. We continue to believe that the GE program is a valuable common intellectual experience of all UCSB students, whatever their major: (1) the GE program has a crucial role in helping students to become broadly educated; (2) GE courses often help students identify a major (and minor) field of study; (3) GE courses help students to acquire needed communication, language, and computational skills.

2.0 TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP AND WORKGROUPS

Members:

T. Carlson, R. Bergstrom*, A. Bermingham, C. Gutierrez-Jones, D. Kunkel, A. Kuris, U. Mahlendorf, H. Marcuse, J. Michaelson*, C. Michel, A. Stewart-Oaten*, R. Wood, W. Yuen, M. Zimmerman (Chair). Ex-officio: R. Watts. Permanent consultants: S. Forester, G. Johns, D. Estrada. Student Representatives: D. Dimitriu*, J. Gertwagen*, C. Smith*, R. Blair. Staff Support: D. Blake, D. Fernandez.

*1999-2000 academic year

Workgroups:

- ❑ T. Carlson, M. Zimmerman, Area A and GE Writing Requirement
- ❑ U. Mahlendorf, Area B
- ❑ W. Yuen, A. Kuris, R. Wood, A. Stewart-Oaten, Area C
- ❑ D. Kunkel, C. Michel, Area D
- ❑ R. Bergstrom, H. Marcuse, Area E
- ❑ A. Bermingham, Area F
- ❑ U. Mahlendorf, Area G
- ❑ C. Gutierrez-Jones, Ethnicity Requirement
- ❑ J. Michaelson, S. Forester, GE funding; enrollment, statistical data
- ❑ J. Gertwagen, C. Smith, D. Dumitriu, R. Blair, Student Representatives
- ❑ M. Zimmerman, U. Mahlendorf, GE Seminars for Freshmen
- ❑ T. Carlson, Improvement of Teaching

3.0 FINDINGS

We were both invigorated by our charge and also overwhelmed at the task before us. We found more than 1200 courses on the GE list. A large number of those are open to *majors only* for the first two registration passes. Many courses on the GE list are defunct or offered only rarely. From data provided by the College of Letters and Science advising office and the Office of Budget and Planning, we see that only a small percentage of the courses on the GE list are frequently used by non-majors to satisfy General Education. In a many classes on the GE list, more than 50% of students enrolled are departmental majors (see Appendix 2).

Students and advisors find our GE program hard to understand, and faculty are frustrated by the way that the categories in our present program do not always match their understandings of the current status of their disciplines. There is, for example, no convenient place on our present GE list for interdisciplinary courses. The majority of the courses on the present GE list are upper division, and while we do not think that GE is something that students should necessarily “get out of the way” in their first and second years, we are convinced that a larger number of lower-division GE courses should be available. Intellectual exploration in search of a major has always been one of the most important functions of GE, and our GE program, with its shortfall of lower division courses open to non-majors, does not adequately fulfill that function.

The result has been that a relatively small number of huge enrollment courses enroll a large number of GE students. Though these courses generally have discussion sections, sections are frequently too large and not always well-supervised. Instructors of these large courses often find that their students lack respect for intellectual inquiry, as well as for their teachers and fellow students.

Ladder-rank faculty are notably absent from GE teaching. In 1999-2000, approximately 35% of regular primary courses giving GE credit were taught by ladder faculty (see Appendix 3). We are dismayed by the very unfavorable student/faculty ratio at UCSB. Many departments are unable to participate in re-design of courses for non-majors because they can hardly meet the needs of their majors.

Another part of the present GE requirement which appears to work very poorly is the Writing Intensive Requirement, fulfilled by writing a minimum of 1800 words in each of six GE courses. The idea of a writing requirement connected to subject matter courses is academically sound, but it requires that instructors and TAs have a meaningful understanding of assignments and responses to writing. At present, though the writing requirement is a valuable feature in some GE courses, it is overall at best perfunctory. The Academic Senate GE Committee has no time to re-examine courses that claim to meet the writing requirement, and it appears that at least some courses in which writing was assigned when the course was first proposed continue to carry "writing requirement" designation though writing may not have been assigned at all in recent years.

We have identified widespread campus concern for student communication and critical thinking skills. These crucial issues are the concern of all classes at UCSB, but they are the particular focus of courses in present Area A, Reading and Composition. We urge that all courses in Area A be reevaluated and also that additional Area A courses be developed, ideally from a variety of departments. For any class that satisfies a revised writing skills requirement, we suggest requiring multiple, interrelated writing assignments in which students receive sustained instruction and regular, substantial criticism with regard to the fundamental elements of language (grammar, syntax, style), the formation of logical and coherent argument, and the effective use of relevant evidence in the development of argument. We have also based our proposal for a revised GE program on the important idea that *all* courses in the GE core will include relevant communication activities.

In considering the present structure for review of GE, we found that the GE Committee's workload is so heavy that the committee in any given year can do little more than review the large number of new proposals that are submitted. There is little time for ongoing monitoring of academic quality, and courses once put on the GE list stay on the list no matter how their content may have been altered.

In studying the GE programs and governance structures of other research universities, we find that most have a designated General Education Administrator and a simple process for monitoring quality.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

4.1 Revised Curriculum: Skills, Core, Ethnic Studies

SKILLS

- Writing: 2 courses. Upper division students may not satisfy the writing skills requirement with lower-division courses. Strongly urge development of significant number of upper-division writing-in-disciplines courses in many departments.
- Quantitative Reasoning: No change in present requirement. 1 course, likely to be fulfilled in Core Area 5.
- Foreign Language: No change in present requirement. Strongly urge departments to develop intensive language courses of the sort now available to graduate students.

CORE

Students take 2 courses in each of the following areas, except the area of their major or some minors (not Physical Activities or Professional Writing):

Art Studies: drama, dance, studio art, art history, music, film studies*

Disciplines that engage with the practice, history, criticism, theory and cultural significance of the fine and performing arts, popular arts and visual culture.

Textual Studies: literature, philosophy, political theory, classics*

Disciplines whose knowledge claims are based on the analysis of writings and whose methods include careful consideration of ways of reading texts.

Historical Studies: history, religious studies, art history, archaeology, classics*

Disciplines whose knowledge claims rely on the analysis of a broad range of sources about past cultures with the aim of understanding those cultures in themselves, as they have changed over time, and in their relationships to other cultures.

Social Sciences: sociology, economics, social psychology, communication, anthropology, political science*

Disciplines whose knowledge claims are based upon the systematic study of human behavior, including analysis of how people interact in various contexts as well as examination of the organizational, institutional, and cultural conventions produced by collective groups and/or societies.

Science and Mathematics: astrophysics, biology, chemistry, biochemistry, biophysics, ecology, environmental sciences, evolution, geology, geography, marine sciences, mathematics, physics, psychology *

Disciplines whose knowledge claims are based on observation, experimentation, and deductive and mathematical reasoning with the aim of understanding and characterizing the origin, content, and evolution of the universe and the forces that continue to shape it.

**List of departments from which courses might come is not intended to be complete.*

ETHNIC STUDIES: 1 course, possibly fulfilled in Core areas 1, 2, 3, or 4

Current Description of Ethnicity Requirement:

At least one course that focuses on the history and the cultural, intellectual, and social experience of one of the following: Native Americans, African Americans, Chicanos/Latinos, or Asian Americans. Alternatively, students may take a course that provides a comparative and integrative context for understanding the experience of oppressed and excluded racial minorities in the United States.

Proposed Addition to the Current Requirement:

Alternatively, students may take either of the following options: (1) a course that provides a comparative and integrative context for understanding the experience of oppressed and excluded racial minorities in the United States, or (2) a course that pursues a comparative analysis of race and/or ethnicity in the United States as well as in other national settings.

4.2 Discussion

Core courses should be designed to teach both the methods of the disciplinary area and also to explore some significant set of problems. Where appropriate, core courses will consider issues of gender and ethnic diversity as well as a comparative global perspective. Instruction in writing will be integrated into the core: all core courses on the new GE list will require appropriate writing assignments, and for large classes with sections, teaching assistants will receive training in responding to student writing.

All Skills and Core courses carry a minimum of four academic units of credit. The Core contains only those courses that have been devised and approved for General Education. All courses presently on the GE list will be recalled, and departments will submit proposals for courses that meet the new guidelines. Core courses will be open to non-majors at the first registration pass.

Interdisciplinary courses are welcome: courses can satisfy more than one area of the core, although students may not use any single course to satisfy more than one area. We hope that all divisions and departments will develop two-course sequences in addition to individual courses that meet Core requirement.

4.3 Plan for Leadership and Governance

We recommend the appointment of an administrator of GE who will take responsibility for monitoring the quality of instruction and course design and ensuring that high standards are maintained throughout the GE curriculum. We would then have at UCSB an administrative office that can define resources needed and make budgetary recommendations.

We recommend the appointment of an assistant to the GE administrator who is charged with providing systematic training and other relevant resources for TA's who teach in the GE program, with particular focus on training in the teaching of writing. The assistant to the GE administrator can also work with faculty in a variety of departments to help them develop appropriate assignments for Core courses and new courses that fulfill the writing skills area of the new GE program.

We hope for an altered climate of attentiveness to and responsibility for GE on campus. All PRP reviews should, in our view, consider a department's contribution to GE. Any GE courses not offered for two years should automatically be removed from the list. All GE courses should stay on the list for a maximum of five years, at which time departments need to re-submit the course.

From meetings with W. Yuen, we know that the Task Force on Senate Reorganization is likely to recommend the creation of an Undergraduate Council, a unit that would incorporate the present GE committee into a unit combined with Admissions, CUC, and several other Senate committees. In this new structure, policy for GE but not implementation of GE, would remain as the Senate responsibility.

Senate reorganization presents the campus with an excellent opportunity to rethink GE implementation. It is not appropriate to micro-plan an implementation structure while reorganization is in progress, but it does seem to us that a simple and effective governance structure is possible.

We recommend a major role for the L&S Executive Committee, which already has some responsibilities for GE student petitions and is centrally involved in all new Committee on Undergraduate Course petitions, in changes to majors and minors, and all departmental PRP reviews. The L&S Executive Committee is elected, and it represents the three divisions of the College. We assume that representatives from the College of Engineering and the College of Creative Studies will serve on the Undergraduate Council.

5.0 GENERAL EDUCATION SEMINARS FOR FRESHMEN

Based on reports from our GE Task force student representatives as well as reports from WASC focus groups, we were persuaded that many freshmen seriously want academic contact with UCSB faculty in small classroom settings. To address this need, we endorsed a pilot program of GE Seminars for Freshmen, partially funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the College of Letters and Science.

Five GE Seminars were offered in the 2000-2001 academic year, and ten will be offered in 2001-2002. Each seminar satisfies one area of GE, C through G, and also meets the criteria for a GE Writing Intensive course. Class size is limited to eighteen students, freshman status required. Faculty design GE seminar courses in ways that provide freshmen with an understanding of the issues in an academic field, including how questions are framed and answers are sought, validated, and presented. The small-class setting provides students with practice and experience in critical reading, writing, and speaking. Students have multiple opportunities to take responsibility for learning and for practicing skills of argument in vigorous discussion.

Proposals for courses have been solicited from L&S faculty and also faculty from the professional schools (Education, Engineering, Bren). As a result, the GE Seminars courses include offerings from a wide range of academic disciplines. We want to be both cautious and realistic about the likelihood that even so many as half of our freshmen will ever be able to take a GE Seminar. The seminars are only a small move toward the rethinking of GE. In the 2001-2002 academic year, 10 GE Seminars will be available, serving at most 180 students of a freshman class of ~3600.

6.0 NEW CLIMATE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Our deliberations have caused us to question the pedagogical effectiveness of the high proportion of large courses, and we hope that the rethinking of GE will set in motion a campus-wide discussion of how to make large lecture classes engaging academic experiences for undergraduates. We are concerned about student attitudes and behaviors in some large classes, and we want the revised GE program to articulate an appreciation for the communal nature of education and an acceptance of the obligations that bind every individual student who works within the UCSB community.

The General Education Task Force has been acutely aware of the obstacles to reform of General Education. At 20:1, UCSB has a higher student to faculty ratio than any other university of the top 50 in the country: (see http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/natunivs/natu_a2.htm).

The College of Letters and Science operates with an even higher overall student-faculty ratio (23:1), and the Division of Social Science has a student-faculty ratio of 29.71: 1). Many departments are so pressed to provide classes for their majors that they cannot at this time consider making a stronger contribution to General Education. The

implementation phase of any GE change will be, as someone on another campus remarked, like “moving a graveyard.”

Without an effective GE administrative unit, without committed faculty and well-prepared teaching assistants, and without the funding and incentives that these would require, any attempts at GE reform are likely to be useless.

Many of the consultants to the GE Task Force have urged that we recommend interdisciplinary core courses as the basis for our GE program and a freshman seminar for all students. Such initiatives are absolutely consistent with our recommendations, but will require leadership and funding commitments. Other campuses have been able to support the transformation of the undergraduate curriculum because of visionary moves on the part of their senior administration: Stanford departments, for example, were invited to compete for 12 FTE, to be given to departments that agree to make a significant commitment to offering freshman seminars. UCLA departments that offer writing-intensive courses of the sort we have proposed for our Core receive additional funding so that TA's have classes limited to 20 students, as well as instruction in responding to writing, provided through the office of the associate provost for undergraduate studies.

Any good GE program is *always* under reconsideration. Any campus concerned with the quality of undergraduate education will ensure that GE quality is the business of the entire faculty, of all departments, and of all academic administrators. Students receive strong messages about what the campus values from the General Education classes they take.