

# Reexamining General Education at UCSC



Committee on Educational Policy - 2006

## Our General Education Requirements

Academic Area		Category	Code	Distinct Courses	Possibly Overlapping
Humanities & Arts		Intro Discip	IH	2	
		Topical	T(4,5,6)	1	
Social Sciences		Intro Discip	IS	2	
		Topical	T(2,5,7)	1	
Natural Sciences & Engineering		Intro Discip	IN	2	
		Topical	T(2,6,7)	1	
Further Breadth		Ethnic	E		1
		Art	A		1
Skills	Writing	Composition	C1&C2	1	1
		Writing-Int	W		1
	Math	Quantitative	Q		1
Total (=10-15)				10	5

Why reexamine General Education?

## External Reason: WASC Accreditation

From the Report of the WASC Visiting Team (2005, pp.10-1):

*The campus has moved more slowly with regards to general education. The current requirements were adopted in 1985...*

*UCSC faculty must continue to probe this question and determine what foundation UCSC students should have in their lower division education. The next WASC review should revisit this vital topic.*

[WASC = Western Association of Schools and Colleges]

To this end, VPDUE Ladusaw has asked CEP to provide an explicit rationale for our general education requirements, in the form of *educational objectives* and *learning outcomes*.

## Internal Reasons

1. GE requirements amount to roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  or more of an undergraduate's UCSC education (depending on how requirements are combined).
2. Majors have departments looking after them every year. GE is spread all over campus units, belonging to everyone and to no one.
3. The last major overhaul of our GE program was in 1984.

In the past 25 years or so, there has been much discussion across higher education about the goals of GE, and much change. As VPDUE Ladusaw has noted, from this external perspective our approach is looking dated.

# CEP's Intentions

1. Clarify the educational objectives of our GE designations, as well as the criteria by which courses proposed to satisfy them are evaluated.

- ☞ What is our GE system trying to accomplish?
- ☞ Is it succeeding?

2. Initiate a campus conversation about GE.

- ☞ Are we satisfied with our GE system?
- ☞ If not, what could we change?
- ☞ What are other universities doing?

## Some Questions to Consider

1. Should we rethink our GE subject areas?

*What do we think UCSC graduates should know?*

Should there be a *core* that all students experience?  
Or do we like the emphasis on choice?  
(But should choice be narrowed?)

An oft-noted downside of very open distributional systems like ours: no content or methodology links one GE course to another. GE has no soul.

The upside: because nothing defines it, faculty can agree on it.



## 2. Should GE go further beyond subject breadth?

Our GE design emphasizes the *subject areas* to be taught (IH, IN, ...)

There is less emphasis on what is arguably more important: the intellectual *skills*, ways of learning, values, etc., we want to impart.

- E.g.
- Critical thinking
  - Writing and other communication skills
  - Quantitative/formal reasoning
  - Research experience
  - Understanding of different cultures
  - Ethical exploration

This is the role that our W, Q, and E courses play.

But we might go further, both in

the number of such “modes of inquiry”, and

the extent of their integration with GE content

## Example: Duke University's "General Education Matrix"

"This is a graphical representation of the architecture of the Curriculum. It represents how a single course can reflect an Area of Knowledge as well as Modes of Inquiry.

Almost all courses, even the most upper-level courses in your major, can accomplish a general education learning objective."

	MODES OF INQUIRY					
Areas of Knowledge	Cross Cultural Inquiry	Science, Technology, & Society	Ethical Inquiry	Foreign Language	Writing	Research
Arts, Literatures, & Performance (2)						
Civilizations (2)						
Social Sciences (2)						
Natural Sciences (2)						
Quantitative Studies (2)						
<b>TOTAL Minimum Exposures</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1-3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>

3. How can we address campus capacity issues? How does this interact with our theory of GE?

Enrollment capacity is becoming a serious issue on campus. GE courses are no exception.

Particular crisis: the W

Last year, CEP received  $\approx$  150 petitions from students to have the W satisfied by unconventional means.

The question of how to solve capacity issues cannot (and should not) be separated from the question: what is GE supposed to accomplish?

4. What is the effect of our GE system on recruitment and retention?

UCSC's own retention study last year, and the experiences of other institutions, raise questions. Could we improve retention by

- Improving rigor and coherence of GE curriculum?

- Finding ways to speed up engagement in the major?

Does the tradition of "getting GE out of the way first" hamper the latter goal (and marginalize GE's role in education)?

## Summing up: possible benefits of reform

- a. Add coherence and rigor to the GE experience.
- b. Clarify educational objectives and learning outcomes.
- c. Help admissions and retention.
- d. Strengthen UCSC's public profile and sense of identity.

# First steps

Propose detailed educational objectives for GE designations, and criteria by which courses bearing them will be evaluated.

Involve more of the campus in the conversation

- senate forum?
- consultation with divisions and departments?
- web site or email forum/discussion?

Establish focus groups that will

- study best practices in specific areas of GE
- working with CEP and the administration, develop a range of alternative proposals for further campus conversation and review



# References/Resources

General education page of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U):

<http://www.aacu.org/issues/generaleducation/index.cfm>

Duke University's Curriculum 2000 Report:

<http://www.aas.duke.edu/admin/curriculum2000/report.html>

Commission on General Education in the Twenty-First Century (UC Berkeley's CSHE):

<http://cshe.berkeley.edu/research/gec/index.htm>

Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Princeton University Press, 2006.