

To: Jaye Padgett, Chair
Committee on Educational Policy

From: Carolyn Martin Shaw
Undergraduate Director
Anthropology Department

The Anthropology Department is deeply concerned with CEP's pre-proposal for GE reform. We do not accept its general orientation and philosophy of education, and we disagree with the particular features it plans to institute. Given our unanimous dissatisfaction with the pre-proposal's overall direction, we, as a department, have declined to engage in the discussion of educational objectives. In particular, we are concerned about three specific aspects: the ways of learning, disciplinary writing, and assessment through educational objectives. I will examine each of these in turn below.

Ways of Learning and Subject Area Breadth

Although CEP's pre-proposal reduces the number of GE courses, most Anthropology faculty agreed that it does not make GE any clearer or more understandable. Department members are divided about the value of fewer GE requirements and the removal of the 'I' and 'T' designations for GE courses. Some welcome the breadth in subject area approach, but at least one person questions whether Engineering is appropriately a part of the arts, letters, and science education that GE represents. In support of breadth requirements without explicit "ways of learning," one anthropologist noted, "The main aim of a college education is to produce people who gain some important skills but, more importantly, want to keep on learning after they graduate. The best ways to ensure that are to expose them to a broad range of intellectual pursuits and to challenge them to think about things and ideas they never thought about before. If this is done by good teachers, they have a chance to become inquiring people." Many of us hold that if you make sure that students are exposed to a wide enough range of courses across the divisions, you give students both a substantive education and facility in various ways of learning.

Many Anthropologists find that, under a mask of rationality, "ways of learning" are inchoate and arbitrary. Specifically, the central issue of how does a "ways of learning" approach improve the GE system remains unanswered. These measures seem to us to be an attempt to regularize the breadth requirement by ensuring that in all GE courses students are not just learning a subject area, but are also meeting broader educational objectives decided by the campus through a consultative process. This approach, does not, at first review, sound objectionable, and it might not be if "ways of learning" are left as guidelines used by faculty in designing pedagogy. At present, however, most of us fail to discern any advances in clarity and elegance in the proposed GE reform.

To give a concrete example of our concerns, I would like to go through a thought-exercise on constructing and offering a GE course. Next term, I will teach a topical GE course, African Women, which I have not taught in five (5) years. This course fulfills a "T" and "E." Using the present system, I have to make sure that this course, as I re-

envision it, requires no prior knowledge of anthropology, that it deals with a broad theme, and that it increases knowledge of a non-western culture. Students will note the “T” and “E” next to my course in their schedule of classes. How would this change under the proposed reform? Do I have to state which Social Science educational objective it satisfies? For a committee review, would I have to state what ways of learning the course will cover? Would I have to show how I meet those “ways of learning” in my course syllabus? Would the “ways of learning” be listed in the catalogue and schedule of classes so that students will know which GE requirements they are meeting? Would college advisors be asked to track “ways of learning” until students have taken at least one breadth course covering each of the “ways of learning?” Or would this task be the responsibility of already overloaded department staff? Would all “ways of learning” taken by a student be recorded?

Disciplinary Writing

Writing is at the heart of anthropology. We applaud the provisions of CEP’s 2007 resolution, which the senate unanimously passed, that called for increased funding for writing on campus and a return to peer writing assistants. Nevertheless, we are still waiting to see whether these goals will be reached in actual campus practice. When Anthropology began its core undergraduate writing course, Communicating Anthropology, more than ten years ago, we had two teaching assistants and one writing tutor for the class. Now the course is taught with upwards of 40 students and only one graduate TA. Before we vote on the “Disciplinary Communication” requirement of the proposed GE reform, we would like an update on the administration’s response to CEP’s resolution.

The Anthropology Department is extremely satisfied with its present writing-intensive course offerings, which require at least 24 pages of writing in one course, including revisions, and typically entail oral presentations in the senior exit course. Each year students have eight choices of writing-intensive courses, divided into three categories, to fulfill this requirement. All but two of these courses have no TA or tutor support, imposing great burdens on their instructors. We have a winning program. We simply wish to have the resources we need—and once had—to meet our teaching goals.

The proposed “Disciplinary Communication” requirement weakens writing across the campus. We welcome the efforts of CEP to find a solution to the reluctance of some departments to offer a rich range of writing courses, because we have been the target of panicky petitions from non-Anthropology majors to enter our advance courses to fulfill the present requirement, which they cannot in their own departments. At the same time, we are concerned about the level of competence of students who enter our courses from other majors and about the skill-level of students who graduate from UCSC. Closer to home, we want to ensure that if we continue to offer a writing-enriched curriculum, we will have the resources to support it. For Anthropology, writing is not a pedagogic annoyance. It is central to what we teach. We strongly advocate for not diluting the present requirement, but rather providing the resources that make it workable.

Assessment

Members of the department who have been active in benchmarking exercises and external reviews across the country and in higher education systems in other parts of the world have brought back to us horror stories about systems that began with a simple statement of educational objectives and ended with yearly re-certification of GE courses, parsing of the syllabi to ascertain whether objectives have been met, and examination of students' work to assess the outcomes of teaching objectives. This has resulted elsewhere in "teaching to the test" rather than engaging broad and subtle aspects of the subjects of these courses. Research on intensive audit in higher education has also shown that administrators too find they spend a great deal of time processing reports, taking them away from their own productive work. UCSC should be in the forefront of developing processes that show that students are learning rather than following a trend that may be coming to its end.

To many of us the degree of active surveillance entailed by objectives and assessment is sufficient to give us cause to worry. This concern is compounded by the increased workload on faculty and the sense of drudgery with which faculty approach teaching under conditions that would result from such measures.

CEP's pre-proposal discusses assessment procedures in three instances, item 9, Educational Objectives; item 10, Committee on Course Approval; and item 11, Administrative Authority.

Regarding item 9, under educational objectives, the pre-proposal notes the following:
[Educational objectives] would similarly be the means by which those approving or reviewing courses could make consistent and defensible decisions. We further propose that departments be periodically asked to reflect on whether their general education courses are meeting these educational objectives. Reflection on this point should be integrated into the regular departmental review process.

Does CEP envision a new course approval form for GE courses that would indicate which educational objective (and way of learning) is met in a proposed GE course? Once the course has been approved and taught, how regularly should the conformance between the course taught and the course proposed be assessed? If there is continual assessment, will it be in the hands of the proposed Committee on Course Approval or the department? Is departmental consideration of its GE offerings at the time of departmental review sufficient to meet the assessment needs? How flexible will this assessment be in order to accommodate the dynamic nature of knowledge, methodologies, and professional ethics in individual disciplines?

Regarding item 10, CEP proposes a Committee on Course Approval distinct from CEP, which would approve, review, and oversee GE. Such a separation of powers is already in place on other UC campuses. The Anthropology Department's concern here is that the committee not see itself as the primary entity charged with policing GE. The broader the charge to the committee, the more likely it is that the committee will not tinker with how objectives are stated or not stated in syllabi and outcomes met in individual courses. We discussed the possibility of a divisional-level curriculum committee, comprising

representatives of all constituent departments, as an alternative to a new centralized committee.

Regarding item 11, Administrative Authority, we are similarly concerned about the centralization of administrative authority for GE. We worry about another level of bureaucracy seeking out new territory. Plenary power for curriculum must remain in the hands of the senate. Delivery and review of courses should be in the hands of departments and colleges, where the greatest expertise in judging criteria used in disciplinary and interdisciplinary GE courses is concentrated.

In sum, until these questions about assessment procedures are answered, Anthropology cannot support CEP's proposal for GE reform. Educational objectives are the tools used to determine whether or not a course should be approved as a GE course. CEP should include a statement about its assessment procedures in its final proposal.

Overall

At its heart, CEP's proposal is an attempt to rationalize higher education, to identify component elements of general education in a system of higher education that grew like Topsy. It is an attempt to hold faculty accountable for delivering those elements and it is an attempt to develop tools for assessing how well faculty meet the goals set by and for them. Some of the assumptions that underlie education by objectives and education by outcomes, which grew out of the "No Child Left Behind" policy of the federal government, are highly controversial. CEP may have done the best that it can with that paradigm. The proposed GE reform has come out of careful consideration by our colleagues, but it is incomplete and seriously flawed.