

October 13, 2008

Jaye Padgett, Chair
Committee on Educational Policy

re: Humanities Division Feedback on General Education Reform

Dear Jaye,

I write in response to your August 22, 2008 requests for divisional and departmental responses to the CEP pre-proposal on General Education Reform. In terms of providing you with feedback from the Division of Humanities, I held a meeting of our Council of Chairs on October 2, 2008 with the agenda wholly dedicated to a frank discussion of the pre-proposal and in particular to answer the five questions you pose to us on pp. 8-9 of the document. The meeting was also attended by our undergraduate faculty advisors and key divisional staff to provide an even broader palette of reactions.

Response to CEP Questions

1. Please propose a description of a SA breadth requirement in the area of (Arts and) Humanities. Descriptions can be short, of the sort seen for Ways of Learning above.

SA Breadth Requirement in Humanities

Humanities courses teach students how to study the human experience, and to analyze critically the breadth of that experience across differences in time, geography, language, power relations and culture.

The primary tools or “ways of learning” humanists deploy in these endeavors are textual interpretation, cross-cultural (or comparative) analysis, formal logic/reasoning and historical inquiry.

2. Also provide explicit educational objectives for the requirement.

The Humanities concern themselves with our culture's constitutive convictions about: justice and law; right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood; and about what to value -- verbal or nonverbal. These convictions vary over time, as do our understandings of them. Always, though, the humanities demand our alert attention to what we as a culture care about and why, to how our assumptions compare to those of earlier or different cultures, to why what we value matters, to how we can and why we must defend it. In this regard, the Humanities pursue at least three basic educational goals:

1) helping students understand the major accomplishments and limitations of distinctive cultural traditions, present and past,

2) helping them negotiate their culturally diverse contemporary world in knowledgeable and responsible ways, and

3) fostering their abilities to adjudicate important and enduring questions of value and ethics.

Pursuing these goals today requires addressing a complex and expanding world, with competing demographic and technological conditions for self-understanding, communicating effectively with others, and achieving cultural literacy. As the world changes, as both new problems and new opportunities appear, the Humanities provide opportunities for analyzing concrete human problems, projecting imaginative strategies for solving those problems, and providing conceptual and analytic tools for thinking about who we are, where we live, and how we ought to live.

*3. Describe at least three courses that in your view would make good candidates for having the (Arts and) Humanities designation. If they are existing courses, provide their catalogue course descriptions. Just as important, please give examples of courses in the area of (Arts and) Humanities that are **not** suitable and say why they are not suitable.*

LIT 1. Literary Interpretation. W,S Close reading and analysis of literary texts, including representative examples of several different genres and periods. An introduction to practical criticism required of all literature majors; should be completed prior to upper-division work in literature. Prerequisite(s): satisfaction of the Entry Level Writing and Composition requirements. Enrollment restricted to first-year students and sophomores, or literature and proposed literature majors and literature minors. (General Education Code(s): IH, W.)

LING 80C. Language, Society, and Culture. W The study of language from a sociological perspective. Multilingualism, language change and variation, pidgins and creoles, the origin and diversification of dialects. (General Education Code(s): T5-Humanities and Arts or Social Sciences.)

HIS 2A. The World to 1500. W Surveys the rise of complex societies: the formation of classical civilizations in Afroeurasia and the Americas, post-classical empires and cross-cultural exchange, technology and environmental change, the Mongol Empire, and oceanic voyages and the origins of the modern world. (Formerly course 55A.) (General Education Code(s): IH.)

HIS 2B. The World Since 1500. Examines major world issues over the past 500 years. Topics include European expansion and colonialism, the Muslim empires, East Asia from Ming to Qing, the Americas, Africa, the scientific-technological revolution, decolonization, and modern environmental problems. Designed primarily for first- and second-year students, it provides a time frame for understanding events within a global framework. (Formerly course 55B.) (General Education Code(s): IH.)

AS 10. Introduction to American Studies. F,W Introduction to American studies through interdisciplinary examination of past and present California and its diverse peoples. Addresses social, political, and cultural issues, and examines California with attention to regional, national, and global contexts. (Formerly course 1, *America and Americans*.) Satisfies American History and Institutions Requirement. (General Education Code(s): IH, E.) (F)

PHIL 11. Introduction to Philosophy. * An introduction to the main areas of philosophy using both classic and contemporary sources. Focuses on central and enduring problems in philosophy such as skepticism about the external world, the mind-body problem, and the nature of morality. (General Education Code(s): IH.)

FMS 1. Introduction to Feminism. F Core course for feminist studies. Introduces a gendered analysis of philosophical, scientific, historical, economic, political, and cultural issues from feminist perspectives, emphasizing complexities of globalization, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. (Formerly course 1A.) (General Education Code(s): IH.)

Examples of “unsuitable courses” for SA Humanities breadth designation include basic language courses, the Linguistics 51-55 series, since these courses are more technical and less positioned to *introduce* students to the wider educational goals of the Humanities, be they essential components for students majoring in the humanities. Likewise the Music 11 series of courses, which currently hold IH status, surely have their place in a university curriculum; and they certainly involve analysis and interpretation. But they are almost purely aural or visual and largely discontinuous with humanists' subject matter or methods.

For the following two questions, please understand “Arts” and “Humanities” in terms of educational goals, not divisional affiliation. In other words, “Humanities” courses might well be offered within the Arts division and vice versa – as is currently true.

4. Should there be an Arts general education SA Breadth category distinct from Humanities, reflecting distinct educational objectives? Or should there be one Arts & Humanities category? Why? If you advocate for a distinction, your answer to “why” needs to help future course approval committees decide whether a proposed course is best classified as “Arts” or “Humanities”.

5. If you advocate for separate categories, do you think that there should be an equal number of required courses in Arts and Humanities? Why or why not? Whether or not your answer is influenced by divisional resource or territorial considerations, please also address the educational rationale.

In terms of question 4 (should Arts and Humanities be considered as a single or as two separate categories), the consensus was that they should be treated as separate. The work of the Humanities is primarily interpretive, analytical, and text-based; while the Arts offer students a more experiential and creative task typically grounded in performance or work on material. Both are valid, valued and indispensable components of undergraduate education. There are, of course, obvious potential intersections (such as “creative writing” courses offered by the Literature department or courses given by the Theatre department that teach the critical interpretation of plays), but the differences between analysis and production, or interpretation and performance, or “studying” and “making” or “doing,” are serious enough that the traditional division of knowledge has been between “arts and sciences,” which is why most universities have a “college” by that name. Humanities or Human Sciences, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences were all ways of knowing (scientiae as Latin culture so called them), as distinct from ways of ways of doing such as arts, crafts, and for that matter engineering and technology. In fact, many institutions have a “separate” school of the arts just as we have our own school of

engineering. If CEP wants a breadth category, it may make more sense to institute one for “Arts and Engineering” rather than “Arts and Humanities,” which I tend to view as predominantly an American association fostered by the highly restrictive definition of science used by the NSF, the primary federal agency charged with supporting basic research in this country. In most European countries, and even in nearby Mexico, the agency equivalent to the NSF funds work across the broad spectrum of human, social and natural sciences while excluding the arts. In short, we strongly feel that the kinds of things artists do and the kinds of things humanist scholars do are different enough that they should have different GE breadth categories.

On the other hand, and this leads into Question 5, there was a great deal of discussion at our COC meeting regarding how breadth requirements should be allocated to divisions. Should each division own exclusive rights over the SA breadth category associated with it, OR should every division be able to mount courses that could meet SA breadth categories associated with other divisions. This question far transcends the local question of the overlap between arts breadth courses and the Arts division, on the one hand; and between humanities breadth courses and the Humanities division, on the other. Why, for example, weren't PBSci and Soc Sci included in this question since they both probably offer courses that could be “humanities”, and Humanities division in turn offers courses that probably would fulfill social science, art, or even science requirements? The current lumping of Arts with Humanities, on this campus, is historical as it is for PB Sci and Engineering, since in both cases a second division was born out of the first. The Division of Social Sciences, on the other hand, has always been separate and has taken advantage of the situation with a minimal (45-50) number of IS courses per year drawing huge enrollments. Although there is no “rule” stating that only Soc Sci can teach IS courses, there are, in fact, no IS courses listed in any other division.

Should breadth requirements be determined then by institutional boundaries or by pedagogical content? Most of our chairs and advisors believe the concept that determines a student's perception of Humanities should not be based on a divisional affiliation but on a proper definition of what constitutes Humanities work. The same should then apply to arts, sciences, and social sciences. On the other hand, concerns were raised over how such a system could be fairly implemented with procedures that could verify course content in a rigorous way. Limitations, for example, could be placed on Humanities courses offered by departments outside the division, or it could be arranged that all Humanities breadth courses have the Dean of Humanities approval. The same could be done for all other divisions and their breadth requirements. In fact, such formal cooperation among deans could encourage more and better interdisciplinary cooperation, as well as help assure a higher quality of pedagogy.

In thinking through these alternatives, the Division recommends either that ALL breadth courses be offered only by their respective divisions OR that breadth requirements be purely a function of course content, regardless of divisional home. Either way, clarity needs to be established for the sake of prospective students as well as for the proper deployment of divisional resources.

Ways of Learning

We enjoyed considerable discussion regarding the new “ways of learning” component, set to accompany SA breadth courses. There was significant dissatisfaction with the current slate. First of all, it was strongly suggested that Quantitative/formal and Statistical data interpretation could be combined allowing students the option of satisfying the requirement with one or the other

rather than both. Combining these would alleviate what is in many respects an historical problem (calculus vs. statistics). It was further pointed out that the last four ways of learning are really content-based topics. With the inclusion of the “or” in the “race, etc.” category, the possibility of comparative analysis is eliminated. There was also much concern about limiting cross-cultural understanding to “societies and cultures outside of the United States” and implicitly limiting the “race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality” category to groups inside the United States. This is a very old way of thinking through these issues, and both current research as well as demographic reality tell us that these distinctions are not at all coterminous with the territorial boundaries of the USA. There clearly needs to be a category that teaches cross-cultural *analysis* and there needs to be a strong “ethnicity et al” component somewhere in the general education template. A number of differing views were suggested at our meeting, and the Division (as well as its departments) would like to reserve the right to engage in further comment as the process moves forward. In any case, and especially in the context of a campus without a department of ethnic studies, there is a widespread concern that serious thought and consultation take place in exploring the best possible successor to the current “E” requirement. As for “technology and society” and “environmental understanding,” we feel these make much more sense as Interdisciplinary Topical Clusters (ITC) than as “ways of learning.”

There was also much comment regarding the apparent absence of some clearly-defined way of learning, such as creative endeavor, textual interpretation, and historical perspective (chronologically-based analysis). Of these, there was strongest expression of support for the inclusion of **“textual interpretation”** as a key way of learning. Not only is textual interpretation a foundational methodology in the Humanities but its current absence suggests an unstated presupposition that everyone knows how to read at the high analytic level we expect at the university level. It has been admitted that teaching writing (the “W” requirement or the new one for “disciplinary communication”) is a task every department must address in a systematic way. In many ways, what the humanities teach are higher-order modes of reading (patristics, midrash, hermeneutics, philology, exegesis, deconstruction, formal logic, discourse analysis, generative grammar, pragmatics, contextual or situational analysis, reader response, etc.) whose impact is felt far beyond the classic fields of humanistic research in any area where the analysis of written documents is crucial and especially in the kinds of learning epitomized by professional schools: law, policy studies, management, governmental affairs, journalism, etc. It is as inconceivable to prepare undergraduates for further careers without a strong commitment to textual interpretation as it would be to forego training in quantitative methodologies.

Language Requirement

Most departments feel strongly there should be a language requirement at the undergraduate level (we are the only UC campus without such a requirement). We do feel more study is needed to assess what an appropriate level of study in this area should look like as well as to determine in realistic fashion the resource implications. That said, we note two important developments. First, the number of students who come to campus from a multi-lingual and/or multi-cultural background is clearly on the rise, as evidenced by the tremendous numbers of heritage language speakers among our students. Many such students could meet a language requirement simply by testing out, thereby mitigating the resources needed to mount the requirement. Better and more systematic data needs to be collected, however, to judge the extent of this option. Second, the Language program is heavily impacted even now by students who clearly grasp the value of knowing foreign languages for success in a globalized society. In many ways, the students are

already well ahead of any faculty who wish to implement a language requirement. They already sign up for language courses without the encouragement of satisfying a requirement. Sympathetic instructors often allow excessive over-enrollments (40 or more in classes that should be capped at 25), with resulting workload issues for the program. In any case, I would be happy to work with CEP to establish in more concrete terms the specific challenges and benefits of a language requirement.

Miscellaneous

Finally, there were some additional concerns and questions expressed about the pre-proposal, both pro and con, which I would like to communicate to the committee in no particular order.

- Some felt there was insufficient background information summarizing what was wrong with the previous system. Was there a mechanism for evaluating the old system? Will there be a mechanism for evaluating the new system?

- There was concern expressed about how the new criteria will affect the development of new courses. Will the new courses committee simply be looking for buzz or “tag” words in assessing the appropriate designation of courses? What kinds of training or guidance will the committee members receive?

- Course descriptions will undoubtedly be written specifically to meet the criteria. Is this necessarily a good thing?

- If the criteria are “set in stone” how will interpretations change in the future?

- The document does not explicitly say how many of each breadth or topical course students will be required to complete.

- Despite these reservations, we appreciate the fact that CEP did a large amount of consultation prior to putting the pre-proposal together. We understand this is just a pre-proposal, that much needs to be fleshed out, and that there will be some opportunities for further input as CEP sharpens its recommendations.

- The document is viewed as helping foster and engage better interdisciplinary communication

- The document establishes a clear definition separating intro and topical courses and the differences between them, which is a reform long overdue.

- We do understand CEP can't review all courses. There is an expressed need for a courses committee. Many campuses also have a separate General Education committee to oversee the implementation/revision of GE from a campus perspective. On the other hand, that would be creating yet one more committee.

- Could SA breadth courses carry more than one designation? (And if so, – would we want criteria so broad that courses could carry more than one interpretation?)

- Will Deans and Department Chairs have veto power over potential course overlaps and breadth designations?

- Is there a mechanism for revisiting the process? It has been well over 20 years since the last substantial revision of the GE policy on this campus. Shouldn't we build in a periodic review, say after 10 years to take stock of changes.

Conclusion

I and the Humanities Council of Chairs look forward to the GE Forum and other opportunities to continue this difficult but necessary discussion of the future curriculum of our campus. In the meantime, I would be happy to respond to any questions or inquiries you may have.

Yours,

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Dean, Humanities Division