

General Education Assessment and Reform at UCSC

Presentation to Departments



Committee on Educational Policy – Winter 2008

I. Overview

- CEP's first big goal: clarify the educational objectives of our GE system
- Second big goal: *reform* general education
- Goals for today: give background on this issue; discuss educational objectives and ideas; get your feedback

II. Our current system

Academic Emphasis		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(3,5,7)	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

III. General reasons to reassess

- 1) How clear is it to our students what they are supposed to learn from GE? How clear is it to us?
- 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. (Compare the attention departments give to their own programs.)

- 4) GE requirements amount to roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ or more of an undergraduate's UCSC education (depending on how requirements are combined).
- 5) Message from the 2005 WASC [= Western Association of Schools and Colleges] review:

It is recommended that the UCSC Committee on Educational Policy consider how it might build its several probes of the curriculum into a University-defined philosophy of general education, with learning outcomes identified across the curriculum that describe and define the educational experience expected of all UCSC undergraduate students.

IV. Some specific reasons to reassess

What's the difference between a Topical and an Introductory course?

From the catalog:

Topical

These courses expose students to introductory-level themes of broad social or intellectual relevance

Introductory

These courses introduce a discipline's content, scope, and methodology

- Given the limited information available to faculty, and >20 years of 'drift', it's often hard to distinguish the categories 'Topical' and 'Introductory' based on inspection of actual T and I courses.
- There is similar unclarity elsewhere, e.g., What distinguishes an Introductory IH course taken in the Arts division from an 'A' (Arts) course?

What is the meaning and content of 'breadth'?

Are the three current subject areas still the right ones 25 years later?

See below.

Writing-intensive (W) requirement

Broken, both educationally and logistically

Logistically

- There is a shortage of W courses on campus. CEP receives ~160 petitions a year from students who are in danger of not graduating because they can't get a W course.

Educationally

- *W* was meant to ensure that students learn to write according to the conventions of their chosen discipline (major).
- But regulation doesn't require this, and many students end up scrounging *W* credit from any random course they can crash.

V. The way forward

GE reform requires a change in campus regulations, which requires a vote of the Senate faculty.

Goal for the year: bring GE reform to a vote this Spring or Fall quarter.

Therefore we want to have a concrete proposal for GE reform, including draft legislation, soon.

For this we need extensive input and feedback from campus faculty. Hence this meeting.

We assume that faculty find GE reform interesting because they care about education.

In case that is not (always) enough, remember that we should all participate in this discussion, because we will all have to live with the results.

VI. Educational Objectives for UCSC

Putting aside knowledge and skills imparted by a specialization (major)

What do you think a UCSC graduate should know and be able to do?

Take for granted:

Writing skills; quantitative skills; reasoning skills;
Exposure to (social-)scientific, humanistic approaches.

What about a requirement in *ethics or ethical reasoning*?

What about *civic engagement* or *service learning*?

Training in information literacy, computer skills?

Understanding of diverse perspectives in a global and community context?

Leadership and teamwork?

Aesthetic understanding and artistic creativity?

A language requirement?

Psychological and physical wellbeing? Physical education?

A requirement focused on sustainability?

What do you think about the idea that fostering of an investment in activism or social change would be an educational objective?

In its own discussions CEP ranked the following educational objectives most highly. What do you think?

1) Verbal Communication - critical reading; effective writing, speech, and advocacy

2) Quantitative Communication - numerical literacy, reasoning about and interpretation of data (also called Numeracy)

3) Reasoning/methods of inquiry - e.g. scientific or analytical methods; logic and formal reasoning

4) Diverse perspectives - exposure to and understanding of culturally diverse perspectives in a global and community context

CEP also found some consensus for these:

Government/politics/democratic methods/methods for social change

Fine arts appreciation, creation, or 'literacy' (e.g. art, literature, music)

Economics

Historical awareness

Ethics/social responsibility

VII. More issues

Subject areas

Our system is basically *distributional*: students must take a minimum number of courses each from several *subject areas*.

UCSC's current major subject areas (IH and T courses):

	# courses
Humanities and Arts	3
Social Sciences	3
Natural Sciences and Engineering	3

Duke University's subject areas (2 courses each):

Arts, Literatures, and Performance

Civilizations

Social Sciences

Natural Sciences

Quantitative Studies

Your thoughts?

Harvard University's subject areas (1 course each):

Aesthetic and Interpretive Understanding

Culture and Belief

Empirical and Mathematical Reasoning

Ethical Reasoning

Science of Living Systems

Science of the Physical Universe

Societies of the World

The United States in the World

Skills or “modes of inquiry”

Other aspects of GE are focused on skills, or ways of approaching inquiry

UCSC:

Writing (C1, C2, W)

Quantitative (Q)

Ethnic minorities/non-Western (E)

Art (A)

Duke:

Cross-cultural inquiry

Science, technology, and society

Ethical inquiry

Foreign language

Writing

Research

Faculty do not easily agree on *specifics* of subject areas.

Hence distributional systems emphasizing choice.

Choice is good, but the downside can be a lack of coherence or vision in the GE curriculum.

What can we do to get more out of the GE curriculum?

A. Pursue more vigorously the idea of using GE courses to strengthen skills and modes of inquiry?

Example: Duke University's "General Education Matrix"

	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)						
TOTAL Minimum Exposures	2	2	2	1-3	3	2

B. Interdisciplinary thematic clusters?

Sequence of 2-3 GE courses

Approaching a topic of importance to society

From multiple disciplinary perspectives

Benefits for retention and community-building

Could be linked to colleges *but would be offered by groups of departments and taught by regular faculty*

Other feedback?

Thank you!



References/Resources

Alexander W. Astin, *What matters in college*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1993.

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

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>