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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Emphasis</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Distinct Courses</th>
<th>Possibly Overlapping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities &amp; Arts</td>
<td>Intro Discip</td>
<td>IH</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topical</td>
<td>T(4,5,6)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>Intro Discip</td>
<td>IS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topical</td>
<td>T(3,5,7)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences &amp; Engineering</td>
<td>Intro Discip</td>
<td>IN</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topical</td>
<td>T(2,6,7)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Breadth</td>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>C1&amp;C2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing-Int</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (=10-15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th># courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Arts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences and Engineering</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>(C1, C2, W)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>(Q)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minorities/non-Western</td>
<td>(E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>(A)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Knowledge</th>
<th>Cross Cultural Inquiry</th>
<th>Science, Technology, &amp; Society</th>
<th>Ethical Inquiry</th>
<th>Foreign Language</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Literatures, &amp; Performance (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Civilizations (2)</td>
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<td>Social Sciences (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantitative Studies (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL Minimum Exposures</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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


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