

**PROPOSAL FOR A COMMISSION ON GENERAL EDUCATION
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

**Submitted to:
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**Center for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE)
University of California, Berkeley**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE) is devoted to the study of systems, institutions, and processes of higher education. Its mission is to produce and support scholarly perspectives on strategic issues in higher education, conduct policy relevant research, promote the development of a community of scholars and policymakers engaged in policy oriented discussion, and continue the Center's public service role as a resource on higher education.

We propose that the University of California should launch a major new commission on general education in the twenty-first century. Our goal is to develop a major report and a dissemination strategy that will facilitate rethinking the purposes and structure of general education efforts.

We are convinced that the University of California system—despite perennial obstacles to change in that massive enterprise—is currently prepared to move forward with significant reforms. The kinds of evidence that sustain this conviction are (a) the extraordinarily rapid and enthusiastic embrace of our proposal by the Office of the President and the relevant bodies of the Academic Senate of the University; (b) the fact that in the past dozen years improved machinery for innovation—in the form of Vice Chancellors and Deans of Undergraduate Education—have been consolidated on every campus of the University, and are eager for a general, articulated statement of principles of reform for general education; (c) the conspicuous opportunities for innovation at the new tenth campus at Merced; (d) the continuing cognizance and conviction in the UC system that it aspires to be a national and international leader in all aspects of higher education; and (e) the continuing, chronic pressure from the legislature and other agencies of the state of California to give priority to the quality of undergraduate education for the young citizens of the state.

Goals and Activities. Corresponding to the rationale and context below, the proposed 20 member commission will meet five times over two years and will be co-chaired by Professors Neil Smelser (UC Berkeley) and Michael Schudson (UC San Diego). The constitutive principles for forming the commission will be: (a) to secure at least one representative from every campus of the University system; (b) to assure broad representation of academic and professional fields; (c) to attend to issues of diversity along age, gender, and racial-ethnic lines; (d) to appoint several (3-4) eminent national figures in the field of higher education (outside the UC system) in the interests of assuring further diversification and extending the potential influence of the commission's work. The membership of the commission will be determined only after a thorough and systematic survey of the talent available, consulting extensively with the Academic Senate, the Office of the President, and individual campus administrations. It is anticipated that only two or at most three of those on the planning group will continue as members of the commission.

It will be the mission of the proposed commission to bring its collective intelligence to bear in diagnosing the present and in proposing directions for effective reform in the future through the following activities:

- (1) Develop a relevant historical survey of thinking and institutional efforts in general education.

- (2) Assess the traditional philosophy, aims, and implementation of the ideas of general education.
- (3) Identify the ongoing transformations that call out for rethinking, innovative ideas, and invention in the context of this tradition.
- (4) Assess the curricular structures—the major, electives, core requirements, breadth requirements, certain types of integrative courses, and cafeteria-style offerings—through which collegiate education is currently delivered.
- (5) Determine how to adapt the elements of strength in the tradition of general education to the identified changes in the situation of higher education.
- (6) Examine the crucial organizational structures and practices relevant to general education, and fuse our interest in curricular and structural ingredients because both have decisive influences on the effectiveness of general education.
- (7) Address the issues of reform and implementation. What are the best means of delivery—the best structures and practices—that will maximize capacity to develop and mobilize faculty for viable and sustainable programs of general education for their students?
- (8) Produce a major report and implement a dissemination plan that will include on-line and print publications, as well as an aggressive publicity effort. The report will contain description, analysis, diagnosis, and recommendations for improving general education at this phase in the history of the nation’s colleges and universities.

Rationale and Context. We elaborate our rationale for such a commission by asking three questions facing such a project: Why now? Why the focus on public institutions? Why California?

Why Now? In confronting the question of Why Now?, our proposed commission will reflect on, develop diagnoses of, and develop forward-looking recommendations that take into account the following developments:

- (1) The culture of change in American higher education.
- (2) Four trends in the internal environment that have changed the face of undergraduate education: The long-term consolidation of the “culture of research” in academia; fifty years of heavy involvement of the federal government in sponsoring and supporting large-scale research in universities; an increasing vocationalization of undergraduate education; and curricular changes that have challenged received notions of what constituted a general education for the college graduate.
- (3) Changes in the external environment, including: The continuing diversification of students along the lines of age, gender, social class, ethnicity, race, and culture; the continuing interdependence of the world, with increased international flows of ideas, goods, capital, and people, and increased dependence of nations on one another; the uncertain future of the nation-state and political democracy around the world; changing forms of warfare, with the threat of international terrorism extending indefinitely into the future.
- (4) Changes in the nature of citizenship and citizen participation.
- (5) Changes in the delivery of education and the new information and communication technologies (ICTs).
- (6) Structural and organizational impediments to interdisciplinary education and programs of general education in universities and colleges.

Why Public Institutions of Higher Education? The proposed commission will focus more on public universities and colleges than on private ones. The reasons for this choice are three:

- (1) Public institutions are less tilted toward general education than are private ones.
- (2) State institutions have been more at the mercy of budgetary fluctuations.
- (3) Public institutions of higher education have experienced an increase in the number of interested “stakeholders,” which has resulted in more pressure on institutions’ budgets.

Why California? California has institutionalized the largest, richest, and arguably the most successful system of public higher education in the United States. The California higher educational system presents both great strengths for educational innovation and leadership in educational programs, and great complexities and obstacles to the realization of these strengths. The system lends itself well to systematic assessment of its educational missions.

While the specification of concrete strategies and mechanisms for reform is the proper work of the as-yet-unformed commission, the planning phases have produced the conviction that it is of great significance that the commission will give high priority to the structural conditions for the reform of general education—dealing, for example, with fundamental issues of the “tyranny of the academic disciplines” over the undergraduate curriculum, the needed contribution of superordinate offices of deans of schools and colleges to reform, and, above all, constraining budgeting conventions. It is our impression that those interested in reform have succeeded in introducing discrete courses and programs—on globalization, information revolutions, the new international political and military scene, for example—but that the structural bases both for institutionalizing these changes and fostering further change have been little modified.

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1. BACKGROUND

The Center for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE) is devoted to the study of systems, institutions, and processes of higher education. Its mission is to produce and support scholarly perspectives on strategic issues in higher education, conduct policy relevant research, promote the development of a community of scholars and policymakers engaged in policy oriented discussion, and continue the Center's public service role as a resource on higher education.

We propose that the University of California should launch a major new commission on general education in the twenty-first century. Two principal ideas drive the rationale for this proposal: first, that general education for undergraduates—with notable exceptions of some vital and dynamic programs, mainly in private institutions—has undergone a process of fragmentation, weakening, and routinization with reforms occurring only at the margin; and second, that the environments of higher education—as well as their mission and structures—have undergone enormous transformation in the past decades. These changes create profound challenges for institutions that have developing generally educated citizens as a major component of their mission.

The present proposal was initially developed at the invitation of the Carnegie Corporation and follows their rigorous grant guidelines. Subsequently, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation also invited the proposal with the intention of possibly co-funding our activities. We have adapted the original Carnegie proposal to the Hewlett Foundation guidelines in this version, with the exception of the causal model.

2. PROBLEMS

We elaborate a brief rationale by asking three questions facing such a project: **Why now? Why the focus on public institutions? Why California?**

Why Now?

To be candid, a proposal such as ours runs the risk of drawing a skeptical response of a “what’s new?” nature. As we will indicate, the American higher education scene has witnessed periodic spurts of interest and innovation in general education and liberal education. Each of these has stemmed from similar concerns. Each has resulted in some new program that has persisted for a time, but in all cases we have known, impatience over existing arrangements and the desire to improve general education has been a more or less a constant condition. How worthwhile is it, it might be wondered, to add another similar cycle of diagnosis-innovation-routinization, followed by renewed impatience, at this time?

In confronting this question, we have concluded that the beginning of the twenty-first century does pose a qualitatively new challenge for general education and merits a fundamental and searching inquiry. This challenge is a complex one, resulting from many developments affecting higher education. We consider these developments under several headings.

(1) The culture of change in American higher education. It is our impression that a culture of restlessness—a culture of “change for its own sake”—has characterized the outlook of those concerned with reforms. In many respects this a positive asset, endowing the system with a continuous disposition to improve. At the same time it has led to a process of chronic expression of dissatisfaction, a constant search for models throughout the system, but always a falling-back on local pride and local contexts, resulting in both fragmentation and impermanence of efforts to generate reforms. Reactions against this “culture of change,” which yield partial, scattered, and repetitive efforts at reform, also breed the skeptical response referred to above.

It is admittedly difficult to break into this culture of change, representing as it does a residue of a deeply embedded American ethos of progress. We intend to try to do so, first by analyzing the culture explicitly, second by attempting to identify the enduring verities and values of general education, and third by identifying the structural factors in higher education that result in the cycle of enthusiasm-reform-stagnation-starvation. It is hoped that our efforts will point the way toward educational arrangements that will, if of value, have a higher probability of generalizing and enduring.

(2) Four trends in the internal environment—partly independent but partly connected with one another—that have changed the face of undergraduate education, including general education.

The first trend is the long-term consolidation if not intensification of the “culture of research” in academia, not only in the major research universities, but also to a lesser extent in non-doctoral state institutions and liberal arts colleges. This culture of research is intimately tied to institutions’ striving for prestige in the world of higher education, and in the more and more widely dispersed expectation that research and publication are the primary ingredient in the recognition and advancement of individual academics. Most of this research emphasis is linked directly to the department-based academic disciplines. It has long been recognized that this trend has adverse consequences for commitment to teaching—including interdisciplinary and general education teaching—and many institutions have initiated counter-measures, such as revising criteria for advancement and promotion, mandatory consideration of student evaluations in career decisions, but the pervasive role of the culture of research has not, in our estimation, abated.

The second trend, closely associated with the first, has been the fifty years of heavy involvement of the federal government in sponsoring and supporting large-scale research in universities. This trend was stimulated by the post-war vision of Vannevar Bush and accelerated by the continuing competition with the communist bloc during the Cold War. This trend has transformed the major research institutions and affected others as well. Above all the research has focussed on the natural and life sciences, seriously diminishing the place of the humanities in institutions of higher education and affecting the social sciences to a lesser degree. Furthermore, since the natural and life-sciences have not been as much incorporated into programs of general education as the humanities and social science, this diminished effect has been felt in general education as well.

The third trend, evident since the 1970s, is a number of developments that have pushed toward an increasing vocationalization of undergraduate education. The dynamics of this trend are

complex, but it includes a resurgence of private careerism on the part of students after the idealistic 1960s and the undiminished force of commercial and business values. The computer revolution also spawned both interest in and arrangements for practical training that would lead to technical jobs in the economy. In addition, the advances in biological science and its applications, as well as a mounting interest in applied environmentalism, have influenced both curricular arrangements as well as student interests. In this case, too, one of the costs has been at the expense of the general education of undergraduate students.

The fourth trend is curricular and, viewed most broadly, has unfolded in sequence. During the 1960s and 1970s, periods of student activism witnessed a major dismantling of required, structured majors and courses in the interest of student choice and freedom. While there has been some evidence of a minor reversal of some of these developments, the effects of “cafeteria-ization” are still present in institutions of higher education, at the cost of coherence of many aspects of the educational process. Subsequently, the attention of both the women’s movement and various minority movements focused on revamping undergraduate curricula, including general education courses, with an eye to diversifying their content and replacing perceived male-dominated and Eurocentric directions. The net consequences of these developments are not fully understood. Some argue that they politicized the educational process to a greater degree than before while others assert that they only made visible an implicit politics of the educational establishments. In all events, they challenged received notions of what constituted a general education for the college graduate.

(3) The world has witnessed a number of exceptional changes in the external environment of higher education, raising serious questions as to the responsibility of colleges and universities to attend to these changes in the educational process. Among the most dramatic of these changes are:

- The continuing diversification of students along the lines of age, gender, social class, ethnicity, race, and culture.
- The continuing interdependence—in addition to globalization—of the world, with increased international flows of ideas, goods, capital, and people, and increased dependence of nations on one another.
- The uncertain future of the nation-state and political democracy around the world.
- Changing forms of warfare, with the threat of international terrorism extending indefinitely into the future.

Taken together, these forces pose weighty questions for colleges and universities:

What should the educated person know in the radically altered circumstances of the 21st century? What are the obligations of colleges and universities to provide this knowledge through general education?

(4) Changes in the nature of citizenship and citizen participation. Among the traditional goals of general education has been a civic one—the preparation of educated citizens for responsible participation in a democratic polity. The contours of this participation have also changed, and this fact adds still another consideration to be evoked in answering the question “why now.”

The current civic scene presents several novel elements. Arguably the demands of responsible citizenship have grown greater and more complex than ever before, with voters being asked to vote more often, for more elective offices, across more electoral districts, and with fewer guiding cues from political parties than any other democracy in the world. Ballot initiatives are on the increase. Furthermore, the ballot box is supplemented by a number of other sites for political participation—financial contributions, direct participation in social movements, marches and demonstrations, and civil litigation. This is not even to mention that the globalization of the economy, the emergence of an international civil society of transnational advocacy and human rights groups, and the instantaneous information exchange through the news media have swelled the tide and complexity of political information with which a citizen must contend.

Finally, citizens are called upon to evaluate not only more information but also the media that carry it. As of 1970 only 10% of American homes had cable television and there was no CNN, no C-Span, no home delivery of the national edition of the New York Times, no USA Today, no political talk shows, only a handful of non-English broadcasts, and of course no Internet as we know it, no Websites, no bloggers, and no online news. How does a citizen learn in this world? What kinds of critical skills should the citizen possess in order to filter and evaluate the floods of information? Has the complexity of the information world created different expectations and attitudes toward authoritativeness, and less reverence among students? All these questions pose a key issue for collegiate general education: Is it adequate to address the expanded requirements for citizenship or is it falling behind?

(5) Changes in the delivery of education and the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Over the last decade integrating technology into undergraduate education has become a standard feature of the landscape of many institutions. As technology becomes more pervasive, however, there is still uncertainty about its educational efficacy, cost-effectiveness, and ability to serve off-site students. For example, we do not know whether high quality interactions between student and teacher, and among students, the *sine qua non* of a quality educational experience, can be replicated, or even approached, in on-line environments (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). On the "demand" side, we witness a new generation of students weaned on peer-to-peer file swapping, Google searches, and wireless instant messaging. What expectations will these students have about their learning environments and the nature of scholarship, including traditional concepts of time and space?

There are many models emerging for integrating online materials in science and technical courses such as Chemistry, Physics, Biology, and Computer Science (e.g., Twigg, 2003). The application of technical solutions to undergraduate teaching in the humanities and social sciences, however has been more elusive. It has been argued that technical and professional courses, where there is a heavier reliance on codified knowledge, may be more amenable to technological interventions. (Trow, 1997). Given the important place of the humanities and social sciences in general education, there is some doubt about the extent to which new technologies can serve them adequately.

Finally, an emerging issue in the US, particularly in states with large immigrant populations such as California, is how to prepare under-served high school students for productive college careers. Many hopes are being pinned on ICTs to increase access for these students. The areas with most

promise include the provision of advanced placement courses to urban and rural high schools, and/or the enhancement of community college curricula to increase the rate of transfer into the research university milieu. Experiments are underway at the University of California to address this need, including the forging of a unique technology partnership among community colleges, the California State University (CSU) system, and UC campuses, especially the new UC campus at Merced.

(6) Cutting across all the changes identified are some structural and organizational impediments to interdisciplinary education and programs of general education in universities and colleges. These are not exactly new trends, because they have been long-standing features of life in institutions of higher education. They include the continuing organizational dominance of discipline-based departments; the decentralization and devolution of curricular responsibility to these academic departments; the general ineptness of academic senates and related bodies to foster innovations; the structure of faculty incentives relating to research and teaching and to departmental and extra-departmental teaching; the constraints of the mechanism of “annual budgets;” and the budgetary traditions that reinforce competition among departments and often short-change extra-departmental enterprises.

We believe that the cumulative weight of the developments we have mentioned constitute a definitive answer to the question “why now” and call out actively for a fundamental examination of collegiate general education, including a consideration of both continuities of what is historically valuable and changes—perhaps radical—that must be envisioned. It will be in the charge of our proposed commission to reflect on, develop diagnoses of, and develop forward-looking recommendations that take into account all of the facets we have identified.

Why Public Institutions of Higher Education?

As indicated, the proposed commission will focus more on public universities and colleges than on private ones. We believe that the problems facing general education in public education are more severe, even though we acknowledge that the issues affecting the vitality and utility of general education—presented above—are relevant to both types of institutions. The reasons for this choice are three:

(1) As a matter of long-term historical emphasis, public institutions are less tilted toward general education than are private ones. The historical missions of private institutions have given more salience to the cultivation of the person and preparation for leadership. Moreover, the humanities from the beginning occupied a salient role in those institutions. By way of contrast, from the time of the Morrill Act of 1862, a more practical focus—on the mechanical and agricultural arts—was imprinted on state institutions. While state universities and colleges have, as a rule, striven to build themselves into *general* educational institutions, the original historical impetus has not disappeared. State universities and colleges have a strong component of service to the citizens of their state, and this often receives definition primarily in imparting occupational and economically productive skills (that will benefit the respective states) to their student clientele. As a result of these explicit and implicit historical tendencies, liberal and general education has not occupied such a central place in state institutions, though in our judgment they ought to have.

(2) All institutions of higher education have experienced historical ups and downs in their economic circumstances. State institutions, however, have been more at the mercy of budgetary fluctuations, which trace to the responsiveness of state legislatures and executive offices to corresponding cyclical fluctuations in the economy. For reasons outlined above, these institutions have many strong vested academic and interests—mainly in the established colleges, schools and departments. Special general education and interdisciplinary programs have not, as a rule, had the organizational clout of the traditionally established programs, and in consequence have been more vulnerable to pressures to economize.

(3) Similarly, all institutions of higher education have experienced, especially in recent decades, an increase in the number of interested “stakeholders.” These include an increased presence of federal funding agencies and private foundations, as well as many social movements that make demands on the institution—for example, a multiplicity of racial and ethnic movements, the women’s movement, sexual preference movements, the animal rights movement, and the environmentalist movement. Public institutions are likely more vulnerable to these pressures, because groups representing them put pressure not only directly on the institutions themselves but also on the public legislative and executive officials who support these institutions. Not all of these constituencies insists on being represented in the curriculum, but many do. An indirect result is more pressure on institutions’ budgets as they accommodate these demands, and general education programs have experienced this kind of squeeze as well.

Why California?

As indicated, the proposed commission will address general problems facing all of higher education, with a special focus on public institutions. Within that scope we will give greater emphasis to the University of California system, both with respect to the composition of the commission and with respect to the substantive emphases of the report.

One reason for this last focus is that California has institutionalized the largest, richest, and arguably the most successful system of public higher education in the United States. Its institutional arrangements, as embodied in the Master Plan instituted in 1960, have served as a model to be consulted if not completely emulated by other state and national educational systems (Rothblatt, 1992). As a system, the University of California has been remarkable for its level of individual campus experimentation in general education programs, and equally remarkable in the numbers and kinds of obstacles these programs have faced. For these reasons a systematic and thorough report on its unique situation with regard to instruction and programs is likely to have particularly high visibility and influence.

For better or for worse, California represents a dramatic case, one in which the forces affecting higher education—including general programs—are likely to be extreme in the coming decades. We refer to the ongoing crisis occasioned by the explosive increase in college-age students and the state’s apparent incapacity to accommodate these numbers within the framework of its Master Plan. We refer also to the fact that California has been conspicuous in experiencing extreme budgetary ups and downs occasioned by trends in the California economy, and that these fluctuations can be expected in the future. And finally we refer to the fact that California

leads the way—if “leads” is the proper term—in the presence and growth of ethnic and racial minorities and in the political complexities occasioned by this diversity for the University and its educational mission.

In sum, the California higher educational system presents both great strengths for educational innovation and leadership in educational programs, and great complexities and obstacles to the realization of these strengths. The system lends itself well to systematic assessment of its educational missions.

A Few Historical Notes

General History. The proposed commission will include a relevant historical survey of thinking and institutional efforts in general education, but a few preliminary notes are in order in this proposal. Academic administrators, thoughtful faculty, and educational reformers have produced a long history of fretting, reflection, invention, and experimentation in general education. European leaders of higher education have recently manifested an interest in the same subject (Rothblatt, 2003). Consistent with our general analysis, most of the creative activity has been accomplished in private institutions. The older established Eastern universities had as a salient part of their mission the cultivation of leadership through the exposure of students to classic and humanistic learning. The private liberal arts colleges have always been models of addressing liberal and general education problems. The four most notable experiments in twentieth-century American higher education all emanated from private institutions: Robert Hutchins’ “great books” program at the University of Chicago; Harvard’s interdisciplinary general education program following the appearance of the Red Book; Columbia’s Western Civilization program, and a similar program at Stanford University. The Chicago and Harvard experiments have been modified—some would say watered down—by subsequent reforms. The Columbia and Stanford programs both underwent modification under pressures to become more multicultural in emphasis. Public institutions have not been without their interest and innovation in general education, but their programs have, as a rule, been less coherent and to a lesser degree “required” than in private institutions. The historical emphasis in public institutions has stressed breadth and distribution requirements from an array of possibilities, thus being more attentive to student choice.

At the present time there has developed a greatly heightened interest in general education again, with reform initiatives appearing in institutions—to name only a few—such as Harvard, Yale, Pennsylvania State University, Duke, UCLA, and in a special initiative by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. We regard this increased attention as stemming from the same contextual conditions that we identified earlier in the proposal, and see it as further evidence of the ripeness of the time for fundamental evaluation of general education arrangements.

University of California. One of the ingredients that made the University of California an innovator in general education was the development of three new campuses in the early 1960s, to bring the University to its nine-campus status: UC San Diego, UC Irvine, and UC Santa Cruz. Each of these campuses took advantage of its essentially *de novo* status to institute bold interdisciplinary principles in its structure—San Diego mainly through a distinctive college system, Irvine by creating a series of inter-disciplinary schools (for example, Social Sciences,

Management, Social Ecology), and Santa Cruz by giving residential colleges co-equal budgetary and curricular status to academic disciplines (these were called Boards of Studies, not departments). Each of these bold experiments has gone by the wayside in many respects, each the victim—in different ways—of the insistent power of the established academic disciplines, but each marked an important experiment. In the 1960s, the Berkeley campus responded to the general turmoil of the time by initiating a diversity of educational experiments in group tutorials, residential instruction, and disciplinary work. The most notable of these were the Experimental College Program generated by Joseph Tussman (Trow, 1998) and the Strawberry Creek program, both built on reshaping the lower-division years into an interdisciplinary experience. Both programs foundered after a few years from lack of budgetary resources and a flagging of faculty interest.

In the early 1980s there was a surge of criticism of undergraduate education that appeared in major reports, including one by the National Endowment of the Humanities and one by the Association of American Colleges (Bennett, 1984; Association of American Colleges, 1985). Both were highly critical of the condition of the nation's undergraduate education, but each came up with very diverse recommendations for improvement.

In any event, the ferment generated by these reports led to a major initiative on the part of the University of California system, the creation of a Task Force on Lower Division Education, which issued a major report calling for a dozen lines of reform. Issued in 1986, the report of this Task Force (University of California, 1986)—chaired by Neil Smelser, one of the co-chairs for the proposed commission—called for improvements in curricula, improved faculty involvement, and a number of structural changes in the first two years of the collegiate experience. Its recommendations spurred several lines of reform (see below), and generally imparted a self-consciousness to the subject of undergraduate education that has endured ever since. Every campus in the UC system now has an undergraduate vice-chancellor or dean for undergraduate education, and the offices of these administrations have served, within the context of their limited resources, as gadflies and organizational conduits for dozens of discrete reforms in the past 15 years. The net effect of these changes has been unsystematic, however, and does not diminish the need for a general evaluation of general education at the present time, both for the established campuses and especially for the completely new campus of UC at Merced.

3) OUTCOMES AND ACTIVITIES

The Intended Work of the Proposed Commission

Corresponding to the rationale and context developed above, the proposed commission will undertake first to assess the traditional philosophy, aims, and implementation of the ideas of general education, and second to identify the ongoing transformations that call out for rethinking, innovative ideas, and invention in the context of this tradition. A third purpose, as the logical completion of the first two, is both more constructive and more synthetic in character—namely, how to adapt the elements of strength in the tradition of general education to the identified changes in the situation of higher education.

Our conceptualization of general education will encompass as many as possible of the diverse purposes that have characterized the tradition of general education. These include: (a) The scope and content of knowledge desirable for a generally educated person; (b) the integration of that knowledge, an aim that includes interdisciplinary and synthetic principles; (c) the capacity to evaluate and appreciate the human and cultural meanings of that knowledge; (d) the relevance of that knowledge for effective citizenship in a democratic society; and (e) the development of analytic and critical skills in assessing and applying knowledge.

In addition to these substantive purposes, we will also assess the curricular structures—the major, electives, core requirements, breadth requirements, certain types of integrative courses, and cafeteria-style offerings—through which collegiate education is currently delivered. Finally, and this is less often addressed, we will examine the crucial organizational structures and practices relevant to general education. These include the continuing dominance of discipline-based departments, the decentralization and devolution of curricular responsibility to these academic departments, the structure of faculty incentives relating to research and teaching and to departmental and extra-departmental teaching, the constraints of the mechanism of “annual budgets,” and the budgetary traditions that reinforce competition among departments and often short-change extra-departmental enterprises. In a word, we wish to fuse our interest in curricular and structural ingredients because both have decisive influences on the effectiveness of general education.

The second line of analysis will be to identify the relevant changes in the situation of higher education, sketched in the previous section, all of which call for rethinking the purposes and structure of general education efforts.

As the final stage of its work the commission will address the issues of reform and implementation. What are the best means of delivery—the best structures and practices—that will maximize capacity to develop and mobilize faculty for viable and sustainable programs of general education for their students?

It will be the mission of the proposed commission to sharpen all these questions, to assure that they are valid questions, and to bring its collective intelligence to bear in diagnosing the present and in proposing directions for effective reform.

4) INPUTS

Staffing and Management Plan

The organizing unit and venue for the commission will be the Center for Studies of Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, a long-standing institution that has exercised national and international leadership in research on higher education. It has significant experience in the administration of projects such as this and in dissemination of such reports. An Annual Report describing the organization is attached.

Professors Neil Smelser (UC Berkeley) and Michael Schudson (UC San Diego) are the principal initiators of this project and will be the commission’s co-chairs. Dr. Diane Harley, Senior

Researcher at the Center for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE), will be responsible for project direction and will work closely with co-chairs Smelser and Schudson.

The primary activities of this project are:

- Selecting a committee of approximately 20-25 members from throughout the UC system, including UC Merced.
- Convening five meetings of the commission over a two-year period between July 2004 and July 2006.
- Creating a major report and disseminating the findings of the commission through electronic and traditional print outlets.

Timeline

The commission would meet five times over a two-year period. The first meeting would take place in the fall of 2004.

August 2004: Determine membership of committee. Send out invitations for participation.

September 2004 –January 2005: Convene first two meetings of the commission.

April, September 2005, February 2006: Convene last three meetings, determine publisher, catalogue and publish electronically programs of general education at the undergraduate level.

February-April 2006: Write and edit report.

May-July 2006: Publish report on the web and in print form, dissemination.

We have already made significant progress in realizing the idea of a commission. After consultation with the Office of the President (and securing modest seed funds from the Provost for Academic Affairs), in April of 2003 we convened a small planning meeting (approximately 12 invitees) of knowledgeable and committed faculty members and administrators from the UC system.

The purpose of this planning conference was to assure ourselves of the legitimacy of the proposed commission in the eyes of experienced people and to engage in some very preliminary planning. The idea was endorsed with enthusiasm at that meeting, and the purposes of the proposed commission were sharpened. Subsequent to the meeting, the Systemwide Academic Senate of the University of California has formally endorsed the idea and the Office of the President has given continued encouragement and endorsement.

All campuses devote considerable energy and resources to programs of general education at the undergraduate level. One of the activities of the commission will be to catalogue these practices as systematically as possible. We also envision calling on the assistance of and involving Deans and Vice-Provosts in its work. The exact form of that participation remains undetermined, but perhaps one of its activities would be to dedicate one of its meetings to campus efforts, with responsible officials from each campus participating. The work of the commission will be carried out in the spirit of collegiality and with a commitment to a spirit of helpfulness to all of the UC campuses that have general education programs in place or are still developing them.

5) DISSEMINATION AND EVALUATION

The commission will issue a major report that would contain description, analysis, diagnosis, and recommendations for improving general education at this phase in the history of the nation's colleges and universities. We envision that this report would be disseminated in several ways:

- Publishing the report in an attractive format and readable form, and distributing this report to a carefully-identified list of a thousand key administrative leaders in institutions of higher education, influential faculty, leaders in the higher education establishment, including foundation officials the American Council of Education, the American Association of University Professors, and federal agencies.
- Conducting relevant press conferences on the completion and publication of the report.
- Establishing a publicly available website (through the UC e-scholarship site) which would include the commission report, and relevant background materials. We would also carry out a publicity program by e-mail, calling the attention of thousands of potentially interested parties to the website.
- After the publication of the report, dispatching two members of the commission—one from inside and one from outside the targeted campus—to each campus of the University of California to bring the work of the commission to the attention of relevant local administrators and faculty leaders. Leaders of other educational institutions could be targeted as well.

We realize that dissemination is always a problematic and potentially never-ending process, but we have at least one historical reason to be hopeful. In 1986, a university-wide Task Force on Lower-Division Education in the University of California issued a special report on the problems of education in the first two years, along with perhaps a dozen specific recommendations for reform (University of California, 1986). The dissemination included the kind of publication envisioned for the proposed commissioned (though no web distribution at that time) and a series of (usually invited) appearances by the chair and other members of the task force on various UC campuses. Several of the commission's proposals were implemented more or less immediately:

- A series of programs for improving the training of teaching assistants, who carry great responsibilities for instruction at the lower-division level.
- A requirement that non-US teaching assistants take the TOEFL examination as a prerequisite to being appointed, a reform directed at expressed dissatisfaction on the part of some UC students and their parents.
- A reform of the transfer requirements for community-college and state-university students coming to UC, whereby certain core courses taken before transferring would qualify as a matter of routine as meeting UC requirements. This also addressed expressed concern with discouraging bureaucratic obstacles to transferring.
- Perhaps most important, the task force's principal recommendation for small seminars led by faculty for freshman and sophomore students—previously almost unknown—led to a process which, over the years, has established this form of instruction as a widespread practice on all UC campuses.

Other recommendations by the commission—for example, involving eminent faculty in large freshman courses and establishing integrative, capstone courses in the senior year—did not fare so well. Nevertheless, on balance the batting average for the task force was unusually high. We would hope that the proposed commission’s report would have a similar impact on raising the consciousness of campuses and initiating reforms.

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