

**COMMISSION ON GENERAL EDUCATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**January 24, 2005**  
**University of California, Berkeley**

---

**Changes in the external environment of the university**

- The demographic of the student population is changing as more first-generation students are enrolling. There may be a link between first generation and the vocationalization of education – these students are motivated and career-oriented. Especially if they come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, they have more pragmatic attitudes toward education rather than a liberal ideal of education for the sake of learning.
- There are political pressures on universities to place students in jobs.
- Students may not arrive at the university with the same knowledge base. It is important to ensure that general education is not just remediation.
- What does industry now value? Effective communication, critical thinking skills, technological literacy, etc.?
- Universities have to cater to many different types of students. How does a university develop a general education curriculum that meets these diverse needs? Clark & Trow describe four different types of students:
  1. Academics – interested in pursuing academia
  2. Collegiates – interested in the college experience (partying, etc.)
  3. Radicals – activists that go to college to change the world
  4. Vocational students – pragmatic; job/career-oriented
- Students are going through many developmental changes in college. How does a university meet student needs depending on where they are in life? Maybe there should be greater collaboration between student affairs and faculty.
- Other countries seem to value American liberal education and are trying to emulate it.
- It is important to not only teach students facts and figures, but to also teach them how to think like scientists, historians, economists, etc.
- The role of civic education, one of the common themes in general education, has been the notion of the informed citizen.
  - It may be important to introduce the notion of skepticism into the general education curriculum.
  - Research, internships and other experiences outside the classroom also provide students with a civic education. At UC Davis, there is a leadership minor, which requires students to complete an internship. Students are not graded on the internship itself, but on the discussion piece afterwards.

*Continuities and Changes in the internal environment of the university*

Departments

Departments continue to be the dominant unit of operation within a university and have hindered reforms in general education:

- Their goal has been to churn out more professors and academics rather than show students other professional opportunities available in their respective disciplines.
- Departments reward research rather than teaching. Tenure is not given for great teaching. Thus, it may be important to decouple departments' teaching and research missions.
- Departments may not think that general education is important.
- Department commitments to joint appointments wane over time.
- Departments want to teach more, not less, particularly as knowledge expands.
- Specialization may not be the problem. The problem may be that faculty members do not show students the skills that make them successful as academics – writing skills, communications skills, etc.
- Budget structures – departments must compete for resources.

### Interdisciplinary (ID) courses

Universities have introduced ID programs as a way to expand the general education curriculum and to expose students to multiple epistemologies.

- UCLA and UC Merced have developed interdisciplinary general education courses.
- One issue with interdisciplinary courses, however, is that professors may just tack on their specialty to the course syllabus rather than really integrating their work with that of others teaching the course (sub sandwich model).
- One way to encourage ID programs is through joint appointments. At UCSD, for example, departments bid on academic appointments. Faculty members are selected only with the joint committee's approval and with the guarantee that the new hire will serve in another department. Joint appointments help strengthen inter-departmental relationships. However, departmental commitments to these appointments tend to wane over time and it is difficult for new hires that are jointly appointed to determine where to focus their efforts for the purpose of gaining tenure.

### Structural Issues

#### *Centralized authority over undergraduate education*

- It is important to have some sort of centralized authority over undergraduate education in the form of an undergraduate dean or vice provost. Undergraduate divisions should be modeled after graduate divisions, which do have considerable authority.
- Dr. Porter, when she was the undergraduate dean at UC Berkeley, recommended transforming the position into a vice provost position, because the undergraduate dean did not have enough leverage over deans in other departments.

#### *Structure of the general education curriculum*

- One model involves making all general education courses interdisciplinary and upper-division major courses discipline-specific. At UCLA, the focus is on general education at the lower division level rather than scattered throughout the four years. General education courses have to meet certain requirements and they have to be taught by faculty ("Foundations of Knowledge" report).
- Another model involves integrating general education across the entire undergraduate curriculum. For example, the University of Oregon has developed a "Pathways" program, which packages courses by theme. Students move through the theme track in clusters. The advantage of this approach is that it introduces some coherence in students' general education – otherwise, they tend to sample general education courses at random

or based on convenience. Also, clustering students allows them to develop networks with other students.

- *A la Carte* versus set menu of educational offerings – should students be allowed to select from a menu of general education courses (breadth requirements) or fulfill a common set of core requirements?
- Should general education requirements be college-specific or common across the entire university? At UCSD, each college has its own general education requirements – when students select a college, they are essentially choosing a general education track. This is not the case at UCSC, which also has multiple colleges, but a common set of general requirements across the entire campus.

### Cultural Barriers

- Cultural barriers to general education reform exist even where structural barriers do not. For example, hierarchies on campuses hinder reforms. Student affairs' personnel, temporary faculty, etc. are treated as second-class citizens. Instead, they should be involved in the development and implementation of general education programs.

### Performance Assessment

It is important to evaluate general education courses to determine whether or not they are achieving their goals.

- Duke University, in its *Curriculum 2000* report, recommended assessing courses against similar courses. The benefit of this system is that it takes advantage of the fact that general education courses are “golden eggs” for many departments – they capture more resources, attract students to a discipline, etc. The undergraduate division can take away the general education designation if a course is not meeting its objectives.
- The problem with this approach, however, is that campuses may not have the necessary people or resources to review all general education programs.
- Exit surveys may also be a useful tool for determining how students view the usefulness of their general education. One issue is whether students should take a national survey or one that is campus-specific. National surveys are useful for norming purposes, but campuses may want to capture more relevant information. (Currently, students take NSSE, a national survey, or UCUES, a UC-specific survey that is based on NSSE. There are multiple other institutional and outside surveys, which can result in student survey "overload" on some campuses).

### **What should a Commission Report look like?**

- Should the report discuss general education at the national level or be UC-specific?
- The report should critique the current answer to general education (breadth requirements, institutional inertia).
- Should the report focus on a set of principles that general education should embody or describe specific courses or course areas that students should take?
- What is the goal of general education – to educate students as a whole or to introduce them to a discipline?
- Should the Commission develop a structure for general education?

## *Members' Homework*

- Prepare a page of 2-3 important points that you want to get across to the Commission.
- General changes/reforms on respective campuses over the past 15 years.

## **Audiences and Dissemination Plans**

Members discussed various strategies for developing and disseminating Commission findings, although they acknowledged that many of these ideas require research resources that are not available to the Commission as stated in the original proposal:

- Conduct focus groups that provide input into the report.
- Develop a target audience – Council of Chancellors, UC campuses, UC President's office, politicians, etc.
- Set up a website and invite comments via the Internet.
- The co-chairs should directly solicit feedback from the academic senate and other bodies.
- Solicit student input
  - Piggyback on systemwide student government meetings.
  - Tap into UCOP funds earmarked for cross-campus student collaboration.
- Involve alumni, especially those 3-5 years out of school. The Office of Institutional Research has some of these data.
- Find out what CEOs need. Talk to President Dynes, who has convened a business roundtable.
- Contact CARE – an institute of research directors.
- Collaborate with the CSU and community college systems on general education reforms, especially since new general education policies would affect transfer students. Also, this type of collaboration would make the proposal more politically palpable.

## **AACU Presentation by Dr. Carol Schneider**

- The AACU held focus groups with college-bound students as well as juniors and seniors to get a sense of what they thought about liberal education and the reasons they thought they were in college.
- These students saw civic engagement as the least important goal of a college education. They thought that diversity, globalism, ethics, and technological literacy were unimportant as well.
- Students thought that responsibility for oneself was the most important goal of a college education. They thought that a good work ethic and good time management were also important goals.
- Most college-bound and college students did not know what a liberal education means. However, they had a negative view of general education and did not think that it was providing students with a liberal education.
- Contemporary innovations in general education involve:
  1. Developing intellectual and practical skills “across the curriculum.”
  2. Cultivating social responsibility and civic engagement.
  3. Fostering integrative and culminating learning
- Dr. Schneider provided the commission three reports: *Greater Expectations*, *Taking Responsibility for a Baccalaureate Degree*, and *Students' Best Work*.

- In its report, *Taking Responsibility for a Baccalaureate Degree*, the AACU found that the aspects of general education that all accreditors want are:
  1. Communication skills
  2. Integrative learning
  3. Civic engagement
  4. Critical thinking
  5. Ethics
  6. Global/multiculturalism
  7. Teamwork skills
  8. Breadth of knowledge
  9. Lifelong learning
  10. Math

#### *Historical view of General Education*

- General and liberal education used to be distinct, but the two have tended to become merged.
  - ✓ Liberal education – refers to the aims of the entire educational experience.
  - ✓ General education – emerged in the twentieth century and refers to the part of education that is separate from discipline-specific education. The goals of general education have grown, but the size of the curriculum has not.

#### *Recommendations*

- Dr. Schneider urges the Commission to look at what general education and courses for the major can contribute to the entire educational experience, and not just look at general education separately. This way, students never “get general education out of the way.” Instead, general education is integrated across the entire curriculum.

#### *Commission Concerns*

- Why have general education reforms and AACU reports not addressed the role of science classes?
- Why is quantitative reasoning missing from the list of general education goals?