

COMMISSION ON GENERAL EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY
Meeting Minutes
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University of California, San Diego

Present: Meghana Acharya, Jodi Anderson, Mark Appelbaum, Thomas Carew, Linda Goff, Andrew Grosovsky, Patricia Gumpert, Diane Harley, Greg Herken, Gregory Kendrick, Joseph Kiskis, William Ladusaw, Roger McWilliams, Carolyn Porter, Julie Ruben, Barbara Sawrey, Michael Schudson, Neil Smelser, Steve Weatherford, and Muriel Zimmerman.

Introductory Discussion

- A. *What the Report Seeks to Achieve and What We Know It Cannot Achieve*
- B. *The Predicament of Liberal Education in the Research University: General Knowledge in a Global, Multicultural, Digital Era. At our first meeting, we addressed how general education has been affected by changes inside the university. We paid less attention to changes in the wider world. Is the problem of general education today different from the past because of changes in the wider world? (Setting time aside to discuss this does not presuppose we will have something original to say about it – only that discussing it may help us get our bearings as a group).*

- The Commission is not creating a new general education curriculum, so what value will the report add?
- What should be the report's focus?
 - University systems with multiple campuses?
 - Public universities (per the Hewlett Foundation proposal)
- How does the Commission make faculty responsible for general education within their disciplines?
- Should the Commission build upon existing efforts in general education reform?
- Developing lofty goals may not be appropriate if students are just interested in getting a job.
- The Commission should evaluate UCUES data, as well as listen to students and business leaders.
- Should general education vary based on students' majors? Rather than working around departments, perhaps campuses should make them responsible for general education.
- How will the Commission define "general education" (the liberal arts, non-discipline-specific education, what all students should be expected to know, etc.)?
- There continues to be a tension between the research university and the liberal arts college within a research university.
- Students need to be exposed to various modes of knowledge – creative and analytic thinking; and written and oral communication. Even physics majors say they need more training in analytic thinking. Perhaps departments should see general education as a job specification for educating students in a major rather than a politically correct, "fluffy" notion.
- Students need more capstone courses.
- How does the Commission implement any of the above suggestions? How does one sneak in an analytical thinking component in a course the primary focus of which is some other subject.
- Perhaps general education should bring multiple perspectives to bear on a discipline.
- At UCLA, all students will have a common set of experiences, if not common courses. UCLA Engineering has bought into the new foundational framework model of general education and

within three years, students across all colleges will have the same general education framework.

- There should be some common faculty body that governs general education.
- How do campuses put teeth in general education? All campuses have a vice provost (VP) for undergraduate education as a result of the Smelser report, but these positions need permanent funding and FTE.
- Faculty members need real incentives to participate in general education. At UCLA, 95 percent of the money from freshman clusters goes back to the department for graduate students, individual stipends, etc.
- Developing student outcomes are important. Perhaps it is not appropriate for all professors to teach other areas of knowledge, if their specialty is something else. For example, an ethicist rather than a biologist should teach college-level ethics.

Where Is Institutional Responsibility for Liberal Education Located?

How Can the Faculty Be Held Responsible? Analysis of the Deans/Vice Chancellors of Undergraduate Education Positions

Who is in charge of undergraduate general education?

- The UC System is one of shared governance; undergraduate deans must work closely with the faculty committees and Academic Senate. The Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has plenary authority over the curriculum.
- Administrators are not executives; faculty controls the curriculum and the administration controls the budget.
- The VP does not have much interaction with the faculty senate; the VP mostly has contact with deans.
- Andrew Grosovsky, as the VP (founding) of UC Riverside, found that in his experience, there may be resentment among faculty of an ever-expanding administration. The VP's power comes from access to the Executive Vice Chancellor (EVC). However, the nature of these positions vary by campus.
- How do dollars flow within a university? At UCSD, the money flows from the EVC to departments rather than the VP having its own pot of money; Mark Appelbaum prefers this approach.
- The growing undergraduate administration shows the University's increased commitment to undergraduate education. When freshman seminars were mandated, participation was low, but when the University kicked in a \$2,000 research grant for faculty, participation increased.
- Who is in charge of undergraduate education? At UC Berkeley there are two VPs that oversee undergraduates - one for Undergraduate Education and the other for Undergraduate Experience (student affairs, etc.).
- Too many courses are taught by staff. Students who expect to be taught by faculty are often disappointed. However, it seems that many students are willing to make that tradeoff for a degree from a prestigious university. Students who enroll at UC Berkeley generally do so because of the campus' prestige even rather than the educational experience.

Committees versus task forces

- Initiatives that run through task forces rather than through the faculty senate structure often meet with resistance.

- However, task forces allow for outside voices while the senate does not. In addition, task forces may be better able to push through controversial reports that force conversation.
- Creating a new administrative structure for undergraduate general education might be problematic; Thomas Carew believes that committees are the answer.
- The impact of undergraduate education must be discussed for any initiative.
- It is important to have VPs and Deans discuss their positions and roles, sources of authority, etc.
- Faculty committees over general education are important.
- Freshman seminars should be part of general education.
- It is important not to lose sight of
 1. Incentives for faculty (the department is still the primary unit of undergraduate general education).
 2. What departments care about: money for graduate students, the retention/recruitment of faculty, and FTE. The allocation of teaching credits is also important.
- However, the FTE race may become a new game for departments if there is no accountability system.

Accountability and Evaluation of General Education Programs

What forms of evaluation and review take place on our campuses (and other campuses)? What works and what does not?

- Are students learning what campuses want them to learn?
- At UCSD, there is no hesitation to review graduate education so why is there hesitation to evaluate undergraduate education?
 1. It is hard to find people to review undergraduate education
 2. The time commitment involved is enormous. UCSD is starting an evaluation of undergraduate education, including exit interviews with chancellors, deans, etc
- At UC Berkeley outside auditors are supposed to review both undergraduate and graduate programs, but often focus on graduate programs.

Role of data:

- What is the standard by which general education should be evaluated?
- Clear objectives for programs are necessary. Campuses cannot evaluate the effectiveness of a program without understanding what it is trying to do.
- Proximate versus distal outcomes – evaluating whether general education knowledge is useful to students at the present or ten years down the line.
- UCLA engaged in general education course “pruning” by whittling its general education program down to those courses that meet certain criteria. UCLA also created course evaluations for freshman clusters that are more pedagogy-based.
- Are mechanisms in place for good course evaluation? Outcomes are harder to measure because they require a lot of resources.
- Faculty must start thinking about what it is they actually want to measure.
- Perhaps the emphasis should be on macro outputs. UCSC was often too concerned about what information the president’s office wanted rather than assessing actual educational effectiveness. Assessment does not necessarily have to be so detailed.
- UCLA has required faculty to develop syllabi; this forces faculty to look at and develop course aims and objectives.

- Post-graduation surveys are important. At UCSD, writing comes up time and time again as a skill that students feel they did not learn well. They try to look at student outcomes, but this approach is really expensive.
- Exit surveys are also important for determining how to best serve students' needs because they may not have any idea of what to expect from general education. UCLA is currently developing a mandatory senior survey (as a graduation requirement).
- UCUES is useful, but it does not show department-level data. However, campuses can match data down to individual students.

There is disagreement on the part of Commission members on the role of data collection.

- Joseph Kiskis and Andrew Grosovsky say that it is important to develop some way to quantify student outputs, as well as inputs. Campuses should make the best out of available data even if it is imperfect. Data can show how resources are being wasted, for example, whether or not students are learning Newton's laws in their mechanics course.
- Neil Smelser believes that the process of collecting data may be more important than the data actually collected because it forces colleges to examine their general education programs.
 1. Over-reliance on input
 2. Collecting outputs can be messy
- Patricia Gumport suggest that the Commission offer a bold vision of undergraduate education rather than get bogged down in recommendations dealing with data collection. Otherwise, it may undermine the report's credibility. Instead, let campuses develop their own accountability measures.

Promoting a Culture of Liberal Education

What is being done today on our campuses and what could be done to advocate ideals of liberal education and general education to: our own undergraduates; to the graduate students who teach them; to the faculty (particularly newly hired faculty); to the parents of our students; to donors and other friends of the university; to the regents, legislators, and others?

- At UCSD, UCUES data shows that many students have no appreciation for general education and complain about it (that it detracts from their major work).
- Barbara – Disciplines have the problem of under-appreciation for general education, as well (for example, biology majors wonder why they have to take chemistry).
- Students may not appreciate general education, but alumni do, so it is important to get their views on general education.
- It is troubling that students do not know what the liberal arts are, but still have a negative views of it (Schneider presentation). General education goals and principles need to be articulated early on, perhaps in orientation.

Why might students have negative views of general education?

- Incoming students may need to hear about the importance of general education from faculty, alumni and business leaders, not just from other students.
- The value of liberal education is often couched in terms of multiculturalism, diversity, and affirmative action – which can be divisive and turn students off of general education.

- Undergraduates may not appreciate general education because they are preoccupied with other life changes. General education sends mixed messages – that students are adults, but are not free to take whichever courses they want.
- The term general education or liberal arts creates a dichotomous system of education.

Loose Ends and Agenda for the Next Meeting

What topics that have been short-changed today require more attention? What additional research or reading do we require? What are the most important items for us to take up at our next meeting? Is civic engagement one of them?

- Faculty members do not show students how they use general education, so how will students know why it is important?
- Values of citizenship may be better gained through community service rather than through general education
- What about transfer students? The reality is that most students are not traditional four-year students. Transfer students fulfill general education requirements before they get to a four-year research university; maybe that sends them the wrong message.
- The flipside to offering core courses is that departments may offload their responsibilities (e.g. ethics requirement) to the core course so that it becomes a catch-all.
- It is important not to lose sight of the importance of faculty.
- How do campuses communicate the importance of general education to faculty? Some ladder faculty may think that teaching general education is beneath them.
- It is important to educate graduate student instructors on the importance of general education (helps to break the cycle when these students become professors).
- In the UCSC linguistics department, there is 100 percent job placement because graduate students are trained to teach and not just discuss their dissertations.
- A lot of the teaching is done by lecturers, but they may actually be better teachers than faculty;
- It is also important to integrate temporary faculty into the development of general education programs. However, there may be union issues since curricular development is not in their job contracts. Temporary faculty are only paid for class time and office hours.
- Working with disenfranchised staff is important. Counselors, for example, are not invested in students' general education – they treat guiding students like navigating the tax code – looking for loopholes and shortcuts rather than the path that offers students the best educational experience.
- What is the role of information technology in general education?
- Perhaps the Commission should examine what has and has not worked at other UC campuses.
- Studies show that faculty members take teaching more seriously when they think of themselves as educators rather than practitioners in a field.