

Commission on General Education in the 21st Century

Meeting Minutes

October 31, 2005

University of California, Berkeley

ACTION ITEMS:

CSHE needs to interview committee members to find out details about committees/initiatives on various UC campuses. We need 4-5 pages of prose from each campus describing character of GE requirements, governance, evaluation, administrative structure, etc.

Follow-up questions we have for each campus:

- What are the incentive structures for faculty to teach GE courses?
- How are committees structured, constituted and recruited?
- Are there freshman seminars on your campus?
- Is there a two-year or four-year emphasis on GE?
- What have been the costs of GE innovation at your campus?
- How many assessment units, in addition to institutional research?
- How are undergraduate programs evaluated?

Introduction

- Stanley Katz at Princeton is more optimistic in person about the state of general education than his writings might suggest. There is a great deal of interest in the topic, but whether or not it is fruitful interest remains to be seen. (See his piece [America's Top University](#) on Slate.com.) He liked the focus on public universities in the Commission's draft materials, especially since most good histories of higher education focus on private institutions.
- Some major issues Katz flagged regarding the current state of GE: Should undergraduate deans have a budget? What is the role of service education/civic education? One-third of all college students major in business. What can we do about this shift?

GE Updates/Incentive Structures at Various UC Campuses

- How do we create incentives for focus on GE at the departmental level, in addition to the individual faculty level? Many departments are so pre-professional. How do we get them to incorporate new courses and stick with them?
- What incentives can universities provide to encourage faculty to teach undergraduates? money? course relief? cheerleading? resources?

- At UCLA there is a governance committee that was created to oversee matters related to general education. The committee helps departments define and communicate course goals. Students, rather than professors, evaluate whether these goals have been met. Such evaluation is getting buy-in from faculty, who must think about the impact of these evaluations. UCLA is aiming to expand this procedure as a refined instrument for course evaluations for GE broadly.
- At UC Berkeley the closest thing to such a committee is the American Cultures Committee, a faculty committee. The incentive structure of the research university is such that departments' priority is not GE, but rather to meet the needs of majors and graduate students.
- In UCSD's Chemistry Department there is a resource incentive to do GE well. Faculty receive more "teaching credit" to teach lower division courses, and the teaching formula helps determine course load. The formula takes into account the size of a faculty member's research group: a larger group means less teaching obligation.

Review of Commission Draft Materials

- The historical reflections/research culture section could be read as dark. It shows realistic obstacles to GE programs that do not fit comfortably into the dominant research-oriented culture. The report should have some analysis, not just recommendations.
- We need to look at definitions in Section 4 of draft materials. Subsection B will need to be combined with Neil's history section. Can the section on civic education be better connected to a discussion of the original mission of higher education?
- What we write should emphasize the money side. Culture and context need to be part of the report, but it needs to deal with money. Research brings in grants, and accounts for one third of the university's budget. It costs money to have a really good GE program.
- How much is this report going to push the envelope to think differently about GE? Perhaps GE should be dispersed over all 4 years, rather than just a requirement to get out of the way in the 1st year. Sequential learning with a rationale is mostly done by private, liberal arts institutions. Why can't we do a public model?
- We need to look at University of Oregon's Pathways model.
- UC Merced's core courses are split between freshman year and second semester of junior year.
- Should we look at models with research component of GE?

- Some schools (like UT Austin) have created thematically linked courses by “bridging disciplines” and essentially enacting GE reform by stealth. At Oregon, for example, art history and physics linked around the theme of vision.
- Some Commission members expressed discomfort with the operational definition of GE in the draft—e.g., “what’s not offered by departments or disciplines.” Is this a negative definition? Can we do better? Do we need to define GE in the report?
 - We need to know what we are talking about before we make recommendations, or we can define an endpoint and leave it to each campus to decide on the content of GE or what to call it.
 - What are the key elements of GE? critical thinking? breadth?
 - We can focus on the process and implementation rather than worry about what each particular program contains.
 - We can spell out the body of knowledge. It has become so dispersed, but there is a common set of questions.
 - GE can be defined as the non-vocational part of higher education that introduces students to ways of knowing, integrative knowledge, social responsibility/civic (global and local) engagement, and the development of practical skills essential to learning.
 - Is it worth defining the basics? There are risks to being so reductive as to codify GE.
- Is this report meant just for UC, or for state and community colleges as well? How do transfer students fit into the report?
 - Should there be UC-wide courses that are offered at the community colleges too? Should UC think about a scheme to mentor and support faculty at community colleges? Should UC worry about the quality of GE courses at community colleges? Should it have a role in designing those courses?
 - There is an advancement program at UCLA to deal with community college partnerships. Some community colleges feed into particular UCs. Many community colleges are receptive to aligning their course offerings with UC—it is in their institutional interests.
 - Students who come from community colleges often do just fine at UCs; sometimes they seem to have superior preparation than UC underclassmen.
 - Should we develop a system in which community college courses could be accepted for their content at the UC? Team-taught courses, developed across campuses and community colleges? Something system-wide rather than at individual campuses? Would UC faculty trust non-UC institutions to teach these courses properly? (elitism question)
- Should GE include a capstone experience that exists within the major? GE capstone courses could exist within each major, but with the hallmark GE components?

- How do we convince parents that GE is useful/important? Is the idea of civic education too political?
 - It is important to put goals up front, and have a serious discussion with incoming students and their parents to explain why we are doing GE, as opposed to just a checklist of courses to get through.
 - UC has the largest group of students whose parents did not go to college, hence the emphasis on getting a job, and taking “practical” courses. It is important to educate parents about GE, as well as students. These issues can create tensions between students and parents.
 - Employers want students to have a sense of civic responsibility. GE/liberal arts training helps move students through leadership positions, according to executives.
 - Surveys of engineers/executives suggest that many wish they had had more general training for skills such as social/conflict resolution.
 - According to employers, communication skills of graduates are the weakest link in their education. How can GE address this?
- Should freshman seminars contribute to GE?
 - The approval process would have to be tightened up.
 - Why do students take freshman seminars? They take these seminars to get the number of units to qualify for full registration, to explore the major/minor, to be in a small classroom setting, and to feel a connection with faculty.

Looking Forward to Recommendations

I. Curricular Innovations

- New courses in areas like globalization, computer literacy. What is the role of technology in GE?
- Do we move from smorgasbord-style to thematically linked sequences of courses?
- Do we create pathways of knowledge? Look at U of Oregon—it clustered already existing courses into pathways. This does not require new courses, but rather requires the networking of existing courses to make them more related. (This model is, however, labor intensive.) The main point of Pathways is to turn the breadth requirements into something meaningful, creating a pathway between disciplines so it makes sense as a sequence.
- How do we balance breadth with depth? What innovative interdisciplinary models are out there? How do we balance choice with structure?

- To implement these reforms, there needs to be a way to support the faculty, and there needs to be oversight dedicated to GE. There needs to be a vice provost of undergraduate education. There needs to be a budget to provide incentives to faculty. A big part of creating a successful GE program is recruiting faculty to teach it.
- What about sustainability? What can we do to make such programs/reforms last after the few dedicated people move on?
- Civic engagement and service learning: on many campuses, it is linked to student affairs, but we could redefine it to link it to academic programs.
 - UCLA is unique in having a center for community-based learning in its office of undergraduate education. It also has civic engagement as a minor.
 - At UCSD, these types of learning are more tied to student affairs.
 - There is a contemporary leadership minor at UCD. Could we use student affairs people, who have the proper training, for facilitating such programs?
 - Civic knowledge vs. actual engagement. Community-based research is especially important for UCs.
 - Such service/civic curriculum would need an analytic component because some faculty would resist these as non-academic.
 - Could these be used as mechanisms for thematically-linked courses?
- Should GE curriculum have a research component?
 - Research is what distinguishes research universities.
 - A service/research component could be one component of the “path.” But then students would need placements, which is a sizable administrative task. Can universities use student affairs people to make that process happen?
 - Should we dictate the contents of the GE requirements? Campuses should/will come up with their own.

II. Administrative Restructuring /Budgetary Arrangements/The Role of the Academic Senate

- What are the roles of deans/vice-provosts of undergraduate education? What is the role of the executive vice chancellor? How do they all relate to chancellor?
 - The administrative structure would have to be tailored to each campus. The person in this position could be responsible for data collection about undergraduate education.
 - The position for undergraduate education is different for each campus, but seems best ensconced and thought out at UCLA.

- At UC Irvine, there is a dean of undergraduate education and vice-chancellor of student affairs. The dean has tried to be raised to vice-chancellor level, but denied twice.
 - Associate vice-chancellors of undergraduate education at UCR and UCSD are half-time positions with no budget.
 - UCB has a dean and a vice-provost of undergraduate education, but neither have any power. The dean is in charge of interdisciplinary programs that do not fit into departments and the vice-provost brings in grants to support faculty teaching.
 - At UCLA the GE director (Judy Smith) goes directly through the academic senate, and she is talented and very effective. The general education guidance committee is comprised of faculty from all over campus, and works in tandem with the vice-provost. Judy Smith is part of the chancellor's cabinet and has money allocated permanently for undergraduate education. For GE to be successful, the institution needs money, staff, institutional buy-in and faculty buy-in. Also, GE works with student affairs office on first-year orientation to introduce academics into student activities.
- We need to think about the relationship between the position for undergraduate education and other university offices/positions. What type of budget should the person in this position be given? How do faculty and deans feel about creating such a position?
 - GE needs parity and voice built into the institutional decision-making structure. A budget should be recommended, but as a pool rather than a fixed structure. There should be a focus on improving GE's relationship with the budget office. UCLA should be complimented for taking the step of creating these positions, but they are still embryonic. These positions need to be given the status they deserve.
 - What about the reporting lines? We need to equalize the power of the vice-provost of academic affairs and academic education, and we need to recognize that there is a natural tension between these two positions.
 - The relationship between the vice-provost for undergraduate studies and college deans needs to be cleaned up. (At UCLA Judy Smith is also assistant executive dean, which equalizes this somewhat.)
 - When a new unit is created and given a budget, it becomes entrenched/ossified, and we want GE programs to be responsive and continuously innovative. Perhaps there should be a pool of money instead of a clear budget. A pool can be used when appropriate programs get approved.
 - TAS (temporary budgets for temporary teaching staffs) exist, and are used by deans to replace faculty as needed. Is this applicable to GE?

III. Recruiting and Motivating Faculty

- Motivations for faculty include: cheerleading + money + narcissism. But we need to be realistic about the significant barriers to recruiting and motivating faculty.
- The reality is that tenure committees still value research far above teaching. Is it possible to chip away at this reality? (Some committee members were not so pessimistic about this, and argued that there has been some progress.)
- Faculty members need to see GE as part of their professional profile: research, teaching, and service are all important elements. Universities need to create a sense that GE is valued/honored/desirable work. (Some ways of creating such a sense include teaching awards, endowed clusters, and chairs of undergrad education.)
- There needs to be a way to motivate faculty to develop the curriculum. Can this be turned into a research component for faculty (e.g. write books based on their GE courses)?
- Do we need orientation for incoming faculty? Junior faculty are on the cutting edge, and it is imperative that they teach the core courses. There is initial resistance, because they want to work on their own research and teach high-level courses. But it is an expectation now and part of the promotion/tenure process. Would it be possible to perhaps provide junior faculty with a graduate student researcher as a tradeoff, so that they can gain time for teaching (general agreement)?
- What about temporary faculty and lecturers? They play a huge part in undergraduate education, but are not integrated. (There was a general agreement among committee members that there should be much more of an effort to better integrate temporary faculty and lecturers.)
- There needs to be more emphasis on the mentoring and development process for graduate student instructors. There should be required training in teaching for graduate students, and the process should be more directed: these students are the future faculty of universities.

IV. Engaging Students and Parents

- Undergraduate research is a “big hit” among students and parents. Students find it a very valuable experience, and for those students whose grades are just average, it helps them get a job after graduation.
- We need to talk directly to students about what the curriculum is, as well as its value. Current orientations are often more of a pep rally, and should focus more on explanations of GE, and course selection.

- At UCLA students were asked on a senior survey if they were intellectually challenged as undergraduates, and many said no. Advisors need to stress that it is desirable to be stretched intellectually.
- Perhaps require a senior thesis? Call it “research and creative activity” or capstone? This requires hard work on the part of students—would faculty argue that “C” students cannot do it?
- Seek more student input. GE governance committee can liaison with the counseling office and student affairs (join curricular affairs and student affairs).
- We need to educate parents as well. Parents want to know, “How will this help my kid get a job? Why do they have to take these core courses?” Can we also talk to parents at the same time as the students?
- What can we say to staff/administrative personnel to encourage contribution to the intellectual culture?

V. Mobilizing Technology

- Information technology literacy needs to be a taught skill, and technology education needs to be encouraged.
- Are foreign languages still required? In the world where we preach globalization, we are de-emphasizing foreign languages.
- What decade is this report targeted to, what will the world look like then?
- It would be unwise for the report to promote something that is temporal and changing since that would date it. It should focus on the fundamentals and avoid being too specific by mentioning technologies that are prevalent today.
- We need technology training, both for faculty and graduate students.
- Perhaps we could present technology as something that should not be an end in itself, but can be used to enhance the desired outcomes for GE.
- GE should be providing students with basic critical literacy, and technology is an extension of that.
- There is room for innovation and creativity in applying technology. Does this commission have something to say on this issue? How do the humanities and social sciences figure in this online distributed learning world. Will they be left in the cold? How does the institution adapt to these pressures.
- Commission members request that Diane give a presentation on these issues at the next meeting. Diane should draft a part of the report on this area.

Review of Background Materials

- CSHE is conducting interviews with vice-chancellors at other institutions to survey GE initiatives.
- We should create a checklist of questions to ask from the discussion here. What's the point of this data gathering on other institutions? It is useful to see versions of thematically linked courses, and to see obstacles that other institutions have faced with GE reforms.
- We need to be more systematic about the changes that are going on in UC system. We could research directly via interviews of representatives from each campus. This need not be in final public report.
 - Include statement as appendices from each campus?
- Our report cannot be a survey of higher education with detailed data. On the other hand, we need to make some empirical assertions.
- A piece of the report should be on evaluation. Some faculty believe that there is no way to really evaluate undergraduate teaching. Can we rely entirely on student evaluations?
- Can we find successful models of course evaluation? These are usually found in institutions that do not resemble UC campuses very much.
 - Can we use examples of student work? Can we create better surveys? (Cost of surveys is a problem.)
 - Can we set up a technology where students could keep portfolios of their entire undergraduate years online? UCD does this in the leadership minor. (Students could be asked to assess what was most useful/productive for them).
- Universities do have to evaluate their outcomes for WASC. Legislators are interested in how much people teach, on performance and evaluation.
 - Link our recommendations to WASC requirements?

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Report should include 4-5 pages of prose from each campus describing character of GE requirements, governance, evaluation, administrative structure, etc.. (Neil will forward the one he just received from Santa Barbara.)
- Diane will come up with template for the questions that each campus should address.
- Next meeting: April/May 2006 in San Diego.