



MEMORANDUM

To: University Community

From: Elizabeth Garrett
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Date: January 16, 2013

Subject: Next Steps in the Redesign of General Education

As you know, a faculty committee was convened to discuss parameters and principles for a new General Education (GE) program. The committee's recommendations were posted online for comment. We received an impressive number (over 300 pages) of very thoughtful responses from students, staff, faculty and academic units. This remarkable response demonstrates our community's deep commitment to general education – to its form, content and effectiveness in terms of student learning. I am grateful to all who shared their views, and to the faculty on this committee who led our initial effort to rethink GE and set the foundation for our work going forward.

A review of the committee's main recommendations and the feedback reveals that there was consensus, summarized below, about how we should move forward with the GE redesign. There were several important concerns expressed as well. For example, with respect to the first point below, students and some academic units expressed concerns about preserving electives and safeguarding time-to-degree. And with respect to the third point, faculty across our campuses offered thoughtful perspectives on whether the new GE program should include offerings outside the Dornsife College. We will proceed carefully, keeping these two issues in mind as we complete the redesign of GE.

First, the number of requirements will increase from six to eight – one in the arts, two in the humanities, two in the social sciences, one in the life sciences, one in the physical sciences, and one in quantitative reasoning. Given our rapidly changing and interconnected world, and the need for interdisciplinary fluency and integrative thinking by graduates, it is imperative that areas of intellectual exposure through general education expand. But time-to-degree will not be adversely affected because many GE courses may also fulfill other requirements, and some rules currently constraining "double-counting" will be significantly loosened.

Second, as noted above, there will be added flexibility so that applicable GE courses may satisfy major/minor requirements. One of USC's distinctive qualities is our range of degree offerings and the ability of our students to combine multiple programs, epitomized by our interdisciplinary approach to undergraduate education. General education should be more effectively aligned to this important dimension of USC's national profile.

Third, courses outside the Dornsife College will be among the offerings. USC's liberal arts strengths are firmly anchored in our College but also extend across our campuses, intermingled in the health sciences and engineering, the arts, and the professions. Where appropriate, and particularly with regard to USC's

six conservatory-quality arts schools, these strengths will be deployed to enrich our General Education offerings. With effective leadership from the GE Oversight Committee, I am confident the program will retain its liberal arts core while taking full advantage of USC's unique spectrum of outstanding arts and professional programs.

Fourth, there was spirited commentary on subject areas and the desire to make USC's GE program both timely and distinct. Through that analysis and further discussions with key faculty, an idea emerged to design an aspect of the GE curriculum drawing on courses that would examine global perspectives and growing diversity in relation to Western cultural and intellectual legacies. USC's geographic location on the Pacific Rim, in perhaps the most diverse city in the world, provides a unique environment to offer students creative approaches of this type. As these new realities and conversations intermix in Los Angeles, so they should in our classrooms.

Fifth, as part of the GE experience, small courses for students will be offered and taken early during their time at USC. The educational impact of the first year of college is strongest when students have close contact with faculty, share academic experiences with classmates who are similarly situated, and begin to acquire skills and deep knowledge that aid in their educational development (e.g., multimedia and information literacy, written and oral presentation skills, and collaborative learning). Preserving and expanding these features of the GE experience are labor-intensive, but they are the right approaches.

Sixth, writing instruction is a vital part of our undergraduate students' intellectual development. A minimum of two semesters of composition will continue to be required. Presently, one writing course (WRIT 140: Writing and Critical Reasoning) is linked to the Social Issues category. Going forward, in the interest of broadening student choice and increasing flexibility in scheduling, WRIT 140 need not be linked to any particular course or category. Moreover, because the importance of writing to a student's academic and intellectual development cannot be overstated, I will soon announce formation of a committee that will evaluate our current writing offerings and make recommendations to ensure our writing curriculum continues to provide rigorous and valuable learning experiences for our undergraduates.

The work of redesigning General Education is important, and it is not finished. A new committee has been formed to complete the redesign – made up largely of faculty from the Dornsife College to reinforce the program's strong liberal arts focus. Its charge is substantial: to further articulate the academic rationale for the GE program; to propose language and criteria that define the categories; to design a distinct aspect of GE that emphasizes global perspectives, diverse cultural traditions, and longstanding intellectual legacies; and to begin planning the transition to the new program. The committee will also work with the deans and faculty of all schools to ensure that courses approved for the new program meet the primary criteria: academic rigor, intellectual breadth, and liberal arts focus. The committee will be co-chaired by Professors Gene Bickers and Steve Lamy. It will begin meeting this spring. The committee roster is attached.

Although a full transition to the new program will take several years, its implementation will begin in Fall 2013. As was the case with the first stage of the redesign, there will be further opportunities for feedback from faculty, staff, and students as we move our endeavor to fruition. We will continue to assess the curriculum to ensure that it reflects the most rigorous and innovative approaches to general education and that it is refined on the basis of our assessment of how it contributes to our students' educational experience. The committee will update the USC community as to the timing of implementation and avenues for feedback.

The first pathway of the *USC Strategic Vision: Matching Deeds to Ambitions* calls us to transform education for a rapidly changing world. Under the leadership of the new committee, I am confident we will design a GE program that is responsive to changing social and academic contexts, keenly aware of the traditions of the academy, and distinct in terms of USC's core values, institutional identity and location. Every great institution struggles with questions about the form and content of general education. It is an essential and complex challenge but one we should relish, knowing we can marshal the creativity, spirit of innovation and resources that will enable us to realize our vision.

cc: C. L. Max Nikias
Robert Abeles
Al Checcio
Todd Dickey
Thomas Jackiewicz
Thomas S. Sayles
Patricia Riley

General Education Committee, Spring 2013*Chairs*

Gene Bickers, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs
Steve Lamy, Vice Dean for Academic Programs, Dornsife College

Committee

Andrea Armani, Viterbi School of Engineering
Jeb Barnes, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Aimee Bender, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Will Berelson, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Sharon Carnicke, School of Dramatic Arts
Eileen Crimmins, School of Gerontology
Alice Echols, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Amon Emeka, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Larry Green, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Brian Head, Thornton School of Music
Ayse Imrohoroglu, Marshall School of Business
Andrew Lakoff, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Margaret Lazzari, Roski School of Fine Arts
Chi Mak, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Andrei Marmor, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
David McKemy, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Lori Meeks, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
John Monterosso, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Mark Moore, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
John Murray, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Roumyana Pancheva, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Michael Renov, School of Cinematic Arts
Wayne Sandholtz, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Andrew Simpson, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
David Sloane, Price School of Public Policy
Craig Stanford, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Jim Steele, School of Architecture
Greg Thalmann, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Kevin Van Bladel, Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Diane Winston, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

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