

**WASC PROGRESS REPORT**  
**ON**  
**UCLA GENERAL EDUCATION REFORM**

Brian P. Copenhaver, Provost  
Judith L. Smith, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education  
Edward G. Berenson, Chair of General Education  
Lucy Blackmar, Coordinator of Undergraduate Education  
Maryann Gray, Chair of General Education Assessment  
Christopher Campbell, Graduate Student Researcher

May 18, 1998

## A. Introduction

The faculty involved in reforming General Education (GE) at UCLA enjoyed interacting with the WASC team. Their insightful comments during our meetings and President Rawling's March 18 letter to Chancellor Carnesale pinpointed important issues. In this report, we respond to the five issues raised in that letter. We also take the opportunity to address the other two WASC topics, diversity and performance indicators, and to place GE in the broader context that includes those topics. As suggested by the reviewers, our comments here, and many of the materials attached, are works-in-progress. Our intent is to update the WASC team rather than to declare final solutions to each of the issues.

Before addressing the issues, we want to update WASC on significant advances that have occurred since the site visit. First, three new pilot clusters have been approved by the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) of the College of Letters and Science and the Undergraduate Council of the Academic Senate. With these approvals, four clusters will be offered next fall to 500 freshmen (12% of the class). These clusters will be taught by 16 ladder faculty members and 16 Teaching Assistants. The approved course outlines and new catalog descriptions are included in *Attachment A*.

An expanded writing requirement was enthusiastically approved by the College FEC, along the lines suggested in the GE Proposal (see *Attachment B* for details). A faculty ballot is now being prepared because this curricular change alters the graduation requirements specified in the Academic Senate "Regulations", the official document that sets forth graduation requirements for undergraduates in the College and in the Professional Schools with undergraduate curricula. If the College faculty votes to approve the change, the vote will be forwarded by the College FEC to the Undergraduate Council. Council will review the faculty's recommendation, and if approved, Council will submit the Regulation change to the Legislative Assembly for approval. We expect the faculty's vote and Council's action to be completed by the end of the spring term. The Legislative Assembly vote will not occur until fall. The change in the writing requirement, if approved, will be effective fall 1999 for all entering freshmen.

In addition to these internal events and others detailed in the subsequent sections of this report, members of the Workgroup on General Education were heartened by the Boyer Commission Report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities*, released in April. This Report, commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and chaired by Shirley Strom Kenny (President of SUNY, Stony Brook), highlighted many of the issues presented by the Workgroup in *General Education at UCLA: A Proposal for Change* (June 12, 1997). Both focused on the importance of a solid freshmen foundation, in which sequences of courses-taught by teacher-scholars (specifically ladder faculty)-engage entering students in critical thinking, writing, debate, and active learning around interdisciplinary

themes. Also, the importance of freshman seminars was stressed as one way of ensuring an "inquiry-based" freshman year and cultivating a sense of academic community.

The Boyer Commission Report broadly confirms the conclusions reached by faculty who have been at the forefront of our GE reform for the past four years. Members of the Workgroup have been convinced for some time that the introduction of First-Year Clusters would be an important step in improving General Education at UCLA. They share the belief stated in the WASC team's response that "if the General Education proposal is passed, UCLA will be in the forefront of the movement to improve undergraduate education." The Boyer Commission Report was a timely validation of this shared viewpoint.

## B. Progress Report - Five Issues

### *J. Assessment of the First-Year Clusters*

As modifications to General Education are introduced, we have much to learn from systematic and careful assessment. Evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of the new General Education curriculum, and especially the clusters, will provide useful feedback and guidance for improvement. This information will also inform the ongoing campus discussion and decision-making about GE reform.

The College is committed to integrating assessment into the GE reform effort. Thus, despite limited time and resources, it sponsored a small-scale, pilot assessment of the 1997-98 cluster course on *The Global Environment*. This exploratory study included both qualitative (focus groups with students, faculty and teaching assistants) and quantitative (student survey) methods. The results, summarized in Attachment C, provide useful albeit preliminary feedback about issues that need consideration in designing, offering, and managing the cluster courses.

The WASC team underscored the importance of assessment to the GE reform effort and urged us to move forward more aggressively in our planning. Toward this end, Vice Provost Judith Smith established a Workgroup on General Education Assessment, charged with developing a plan to assess the four cluster courses that will be offered in 1998-99; Attachment C contains the charge letter to the Workgroup. Manager Maryann Gray is chairing the Workgroup. In addition to prior experience in higher education assessment, Dr. Gray is well-positioned to link the Workgroup to complementary efforts within UCLA, including the Workgroup on Data Resources for Academic Planning (see *Review of UCLA's Efforts to Develop New Performance Indicators*), the WASC Workgroup on Diversity (See *A Report to the WASC Visiting Team on the Special Topic of Diversity*), and the WASC Accreditation Steering Committee.

Workgroup members include: (a) the four faculty members serving as cluster coordinators for each of the four 1998-99 cluster courses; (b) faculty representatives of

two Senate Committees - the Faculty Executive Committee of the College of Letters and Science and the Undergraduate Council - heavily involved in reviewing the General Education proposal; (c) Professor Helen Astin, a subject matter expert; (d) the Coordinator of Undergraduate Education for the College of Letters and Science; and (e) several graduate students who conducted the 1997-98 assessment of *The Global Environment* cluster. The Workgroup has met once, with two follow-up meetings scheduled. During its first meeting, the group focused on the goals and objectives of the assessment process for 1998-99.

The Visiting Team encouraged UCLA to consider what we want students to learn and how we will determine if these goals have been achieved. The technical and political difficulties of assessing student learning outcomes are well known, however, and the experience of the higher education sector over the last decade has demonstrated that such efforts are often marginalized or disconnected from the academic enterprise. An alternative and more promising approach that the Workgroup is exploring is the assessment of "Good Practices" in undergraduate education (e.g., Gamson and Poulsen, 1989). To identify a core set of "Good Practices" linked to GE, the Workgroup has reviewed both the GE Proposal and recent work by Ewell and Associates (e.g., Ewell and Jones, 1996) and the Boyer Commission. By determining the extent to which the cluster courses are successfully implementing core "Good Practices," we can draw inferences about student learning with a reasonable degree of confidence.

While Workgroup members agree that questions about student outcomes are very important, they have identified a broader set of assessment issues. Many of these issues reflect the formative nature of the GE reform effort and concerns about implementation as well as impact. Supplemental issues include:

*a. Student issues.* Do the cluster courses increase student enthusiasm, engagement, and involvement in their education? To what extent are students thinking in new ways and deepening their analytical skills, as opposed to memorizing facts? Are students able to connect the concepts taught in the cluster courses to current events, their own experiences, and the world around them? Are the themes of the cluster courses clear to students? Do cluster courses increase students' level or types of interaction with one another, including collaborative work?

*b. Graduate student issues.* What incentives are most effective in promoting graduate students to serve as teaching assistants for cluster courses as opposed to traditional courses in their disciplines? How effective is T A training

<sup>1</sup> Gamson, Z.F. & Poulsen, S.J. (1989). "Inventories of Good Practice: The Next Step for the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education." *AAHE Bulletin*, 42, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ewell, P.T. & Jones, D.P. (1996). Indicators of "Good Practice", in: *Undergraduate Education: A Handbook for Development and Implementation*. Boulder, CO: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

and supervision, and what (if any) additional assistance do graduate teaching assistants for cluster courses need?

*c. Faculty issues.* Why do faculty participate in cluster courses? What incentives are most effective in promoting faculty involvement, and what steps can be taken to increase the intellectual and organizational rewards of teaching a cluster course? How do faculty balance the responsibilities of teaching a cluster course with other duties? How do faculty from different disciplines formulate an interdisciplinary course? What services or approaches are most helpful to this process?

*d. Organizational issues.* What factors facilitate versus hinder the development and effectiveness of cluster courses? How does the introduction of cluster courses affect other aspects of UCLA's educational program, including the experiences and opportunities afforded upper division and graduate students? How many clusters are optimal for UCLA?

The next step for the Workgroup is to parse and prioritize these questions. Although the Workgroup has not yet addressed methodological issues in depth, it expects to develop a plan that uses multiple methods and thereby provides opportunities for triangulation, i.e., converging findings from different data sources. A particularly difficult challenge is the selection of appropriate comparison groups. We look forward to discussing this and other methodological issues with the Visiting Team in June.

## *2. Graduate Student Participation in the Clusters*

Graduate students will play an important role in the GE clusters. In addition to regular T A responsibilities, cluster T As will also help develop the course syllabi and assignments, serve as writing instructors, lead field trips, and take on the difficult task of integrating course material from up to four different disciplines. Only the very best TAs will be chosen for these tasks. They will all have had at least six quarters of teaching experience, excellent teaching evaluation scores, and mastery of the course material based on either their own research or prior teaching experience. The GE program will offer the Cluster T As a year of financial support, advanced teacher training, career enhancement, and a stimulating teaching environment with greater autonomy and curricular control than graduate students normally enjoy. Despite our demanding criteria, therefore, we believe that in most cases graduate students for cluster T A positions will be relatively easy to recruit.

*a. How can we encourage graduate students to participate in the clusters?* Our research suggests that there are enough qualified graduate students at UCLA to meet the needs of the cluster program. In the Humanities and Social Sciences, for example, where departments generally do not offer T A positions beyond the fifth year, there is a large pool of highly qualified, eager but underemployed fifth, sixth, and seventh year graduate students. Teaching Fellows from this group will welcome the GE program's promise of a

summer stipend and three quarters of guaranteed employment. In the life and physical sciences, where the pool of graduate student instructors is somewhat smaller, we will offer similar economic incentives to post-docs as well as advanced TAs. Because these positions will be funded by the GE program rather than departments, they will constitute a campus-wide net increase in the number of graduate student T A positions, thereby helping departments support their most senior students who now must typically find alternative forms of employment.

But for graduate students, perhaps the greatest draw to the GE clusters is the opportunity to develop and teach their own seminar, under the mentorship of a senior faculty member. Typically, the seminars will be based on some aspects of the graduate student's dissertation work.

Finally, the skills and course materials developed in the cluster cannot but enhance the graduate student's professional career options. As teaching becomes an increasingly important part of academic job descriptions, even in large research universities, cluster T As will be well positioned to successfully compete on the job market.

*b. What institutional assistance will be given to Teaching Assistants?* We recognize the need to provide preparatory and administrative support above and beyond that which T As normally receive. To this end, we have devised an advanced training program designed to equip the graduate instructors with the tools and skills they need to teach their own seminars and work within an interdisciplinary environment.

Because the GE cluster format will challenge even the most experienced T As, the GE program has developed a rigorous advanced training seminar that all cluster TAs must take the preceding summer. The course is loosely based on the advanced training seminar offered by the Office of Instructional Development for departmental T A Training Coordinators but also contains units developed specifically for the GE cluster program. The training program has three parts:

- **Technology in the classroom.** Despite the recent College-wide initiative to enhance undergraduate teaching through technology, most graduate students remain relatively unskilled at using technology in the classroom and unaware of the many resources the university has to offer. The goal of this four-day unit is to make graduate students better users of technology by teaching them how to operate it as well as how to teach with it. We use the cluster courses themselves as demonstrations, adding virtual office hours, and Website links to the lecture syllabus, while also exploring ways to improve lectures, demonstrations, writing instruction, grading, and student research using various technological tools.

- **Interdisciplinary and General Education teaching.** This week-long unit is the core of the training seminar. Our goal is to prepare graduate students for teaching in an interdisciplinary environment that is intellectually broader and structurally more complex than most of their previous teaching experiences. We also work on advanced pedagogy using videotaped teaching sessions to improve teaching techniques and style. Finally, with the help of faculty from the College Writing Programs, we focus on writing instruction, showing the graduate students how to create better writing assignments, assess student writing, and provide more useful feedback.
- **Spring seminar preparation.** This last four-day unit is held over winter quarter and is designed to help the graduate students improve their seminars and prepare for the additional responsibilities of running one's own course.

In addition to these three formal training events, one faculty member from each cluster team takes on the role of instructional mentor, meeting regularly with the graduate students from his or her cluster to help coordinate their efforts as TAs, solve the various teaching problems that are bound to arise, and develop their spring seminars. In spring quarter, the faculty mentor assumes administrative responsibility for the graduate-taught seminars and remains on hand to advise the graduate students on particular questions or difficulties related to their course. He or she also visits each graduate-taught seminar at least once during the quarter and provides the instructor with constructive feedback.

### *3. Governance of General Education*

The issue of governance of GE at UCLA was raised by the WASC team at the meeting with Academic Senate leaders. Although the Workgroup on General Education had proposed a new governance system for GE at UCLA, this section of the proposal (see pages 19-20 of the GE Proposal, previously provided) had received little attention. The WASC team's focus on this issue was instrumental in facilitating the Academic Senate's action.

In response to the WASC report, the Senate held three meetings focused on its role in governing General Education. Although there was consensus that the GE curriculum had not received a comprehensive review by Senate agencies (other than the approval of individual courses) in over 20 years, there was no consensus on what action should be taken. The primary concern was that any step towards implementing governance system in line with the GE Proposal might be seen as an endorsement of the Proposal before the faculty had considered or voted on elements of the proposed curriculum.

This barrier was finally overcome when Academic Senate leaders accepted the Vice Provost's argument that the GE Proposal could be divided into subunits which could

be voted on independently (such as the new writing requirement). The Chair of the Undergraduate Council, Professor David Rodes (English), took the leadership and introduced four alternative plans for GE governance to the Council on April 24, 1998. Two weeks later, on May 8, Council approved a new governance group. The proposed group, called the GE Taskforce, is similar to that proposed by the Workgroup in that the membership is determined jointly by the Undergraduate Council Chair and the Provost of the College of Letters and Science. The GE Taskforce will be appointed before the end of the spring term; this will be a significant step forward. Details of the Taskforce responsibilities and its membership are included in *Attachment D*.

#### 4. *Resource Allocation*

The impact of the clusters on resource allocation at the departmental level was discussed extensively with the department chairs in a series of meetings during 1996-97, and then again, at department meetings attended by the GE Chair and his staff during the fall of 1997. Five primary issues have been raised in the course of these meetings:

*a. TA resources.* Smaller departments fear losing TA-FTE and the ability to offer financial packages to their new graduate students. Of the 100 T As needed for the proposed clusters, 60 would be *new* TA-FTEs and 40 would be *reallocated* from existing pools. Although the proposed reallocation is modest, TA resources may be diminished in some departments, especially small departments that are unable to participate extensively in the new program. To counter the immediate fear of an abrupt change in resources, the Provost guaranteed that no department would lose T A resources during a five-year transitional period. The guarantee was stated in the proposal (page 24; top paragraph) and in the June 10, 1997 letter the Provost sent to the four Deans of Letters and Science (see *Attachment E*).

*b. Compensating departments for the loss of teaching.* Department Chairs worried about receiving adequate compensation for ladder faculty who participate in the clusters, particularly the cluster coordinators who will do all of their undergraduate teaching in the cluster. The proposed GE budget guarantees that 75% of the coordinator's full salary will be returned instead of the usual teaching reimbursement of \$8,200 per class. Thus, if a cluster coordinator's annual was \$72,000 (@ 9 mo. salary), \$54,000 would be reimbursed rather than \$32,800 (for a presumed 4-course load). This generous reimbursement was designed to facilitate faculty participation and to reward the coordinators' home departments. The reimbursed funds could be used to hire visiting faculty members, lecturers, or teaching assistants.

*c. Insufficient numbers of advanced graduate students who will want to participate.* Some departments, particularly larger science departments, were concerned that they could not recruit Teaching Fellows to work in science clusters for an entire year because their advanced doctoral students are primarily interested in working in the



laboratory. A solution is for departments to hire postdoctoral scholars and lecturers to staff some discussion sections - as done by the Global Environment cluster.

*d No need to create new courses.* Some departments were not convinced that clusters require the design of new courses and argued that clusters might be created by linking existing department courses. One of the new pilot 1998-99 clusters experiments with this concept. The cluster on *Evolution of the Cosmos and Life* was designed essentially by linking two courses taught by Earth and Space faculty, one on the evolution of life and the other on the evolution of the cosmos. Other departments and some of our interdisciplinary programs plan to experiment with this type of cluster in the future. By using this model for developing some of the clusters, we will be able to develop and offer more at less expense than originally envisioned by the GE Workgroup.

*e. Lack of curricular space.* Some science and engineering departments fear that the cluster will occupy too much curricular space during the freshman year, and they are concerned that students will be needlessly delayed in completing the "preparation for the major." In the College, this problem is particularly acute for Biochemistry, a major of 800 students in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

Some of these departments have recently changed their academic plans and shifted courses typically taught in the junior year to the end of the sophomore year. They have done this in an attempt to introduce subject matter related to the major before the junior year. With these "accelerated" pre-major plans, there is virtually no curricular space for General Education-and particularly no time for a First-Year Cluster.

The problem of curricular space, particularly in the sciences and engineering, has been one of the most vexing problems facing the current GE reform. Dialogue continues with faculty and department counselors but solutions are elusive, and some faculty remain skeptical of the value and need for cluster courses, or any GE reform. Such perspectives indicate how marginalized GE has become at UCLA.

Although the Workgroup realizes that all students do not have to take all GE courses in the lower division years, they are firmly committed to the cluster as a cornerstone experience for UCLA freshman. This view is also expressed strongly in the Boyer Commission's Report; they recommended that:

*The freshman program should be carefully constructed as an integrated, interdisciplinary, inquiry based experience by designs such as:*

- A. Combining a group of students with a combination of faculty and graduate assistants for a semester or a year of study of a single complicated subject or problem.*

*B. Block scheduling students into two or three first-semester courses and integrating those courses so that the professors plan together and offer assignments together.*

*c. If possible integrating those courses with the freshman seminar, so that there is a wholeness as well as a freshness to the first year.*

##### *5. Faculty Assistance in Developing and Teaching Clusters*

Faculty assistance will be focused during three principal periods: a) development of the course outline, b) summer academies before the cluster is first taught, and c) first time the cluster is offered.

*a. Course development.* While cluster courses are in development, the GE Chair and members of the GE Taskforce will meet with the faculty teams to review the goals of the First-Year Clusters, and a subcommittee of peers will be appointed to review the outline and objectives for each course. The faculty will also be assigned a librarian and a technology consultant from the Office of Instructional Development (DID). These consultants will help the faculty design assignments and teaching materials that will foster the students' information literacy and information technology skills. The faculty will also meet a consultant from the Writing Programs to discuss how to make the best use of writing assignments in the discussion sections during the fall and winter quarters. Lastly, the faculty will meet with one or more members of cluster teams currently offering cluster classes to discuss barriers to effective interdisciplinary teaching.

*b. Summer academies.* Cluster directors receive summer stipends, and they will meet as a group with the GE Chair, Vice Provost and Provost to discuss the logistic organization of cluster teaching, as well as barriers to interdisciplinary teaching and methods for sustaining effective collaborative teaching. Two weeks before classes begin in September, cluster teams, including the faculty, TAs, librarians, and technological consultants will meet to review the cluster curriculum and other course development.

*c. Assessment.* Results of the cluster course assessments will also provide useful feedback to faculty and thereby help to improve the effectiveness of the courses. Because the Workgroup on GE Assessment includes the coordinators of each cluster course that will be offered in 1998-99, the assessment will address issues relevant to these faculty, using methods that are perceived as valid and credible. In this way, the lessons learned through the assessment will help faculty identify areas in need of improvement as well as strategies that colleagues in their own or other clusters have used with success.

## C. Other W ASC-Related Topics: Diversity and Performance Indicators

### 1. *Diversity and General Education*

The role of General Education in fostering an understanding of cultural and personal diversity was discussed at length by the GE Workgroup members. One view, expressed largely by the student members, was that there should be a cultural diversity requirement in General Education. Another opinion, voiced mainly by faculty, was that diversity should be integrated into the materials presented in all cluster and single quarter GE courses, where appropriate.

The importance of diversity was clearly articulated by the listing of "cultural diversity" as one of the major principles of GE (see page 5 of the Proposal). The Workgroup's majority view on this issue is totally consistent with the faculty's view and vote by the Legislative Assembly that topics of diversity should be integrated across the curriculum rather than segmented into a sequence of specialty courses (see time line of Senate actions on curricular diversity, *Attachment F*). Over the past decade, UCLA faculty have shown a sustained interest in multiculturalism in the curriculum modifying many of our existing General Education courses to include multicultural concepts and content and developing new courses. To accelerate this process, a Multicultural Studies Committee of the Academic Senate supported the development of twenty-three new multicultural courses between 1993-94. Over thirty-five faculty from thirteen programs participated (see *Report on the Joint Advisory Committee on Multicultural Studies*, 1993-94, submitted by Professor Patricia Greenfield, Chair).

In this spirit and in keeping with the development of a new General Education curriculum, one of the new pilot clusters is "Interracial Dynamics in American Literature, Culture, and Society" (see Attachment A) to be taught by faculty from English, History, and Law.

### 2. *Performance Indicators and General Education*

UCLA is committed to improving the quality and quantity of information about institutional performance and to building links between this information and academic planning (see *Review of UCLA's Efforts to Develop New Performance Indicators*). A Workgroup on Data Resources for Academic Planning, chaired by Vice Chancellor Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, is establishing the conceptual and technical foundations for a set of performance indicators that can be used to track institutional effectiveness. The Workgroup has established undergraduate education as a priority area for this work, and Vice Provost Judith Smith has agreed to chair a subgroup charged with developing a "position paper" and conceptual framework for improving data and information about undergraduate education. This paper will focus in part on General Education, although it also will include other aspects of undergraduate education.

By improving the quality, availability, and standardization of information about undergraduate education campus-wide, this effort will extend and enhance the ongoing work on GE Assessment described above. There are strong links between the Data Resources and GE Assessment projects, since Vice Provost Judith Smith and Manager Maryann Gray are involved in both.

#### **D. Concluding Remarks**

During the past two years, General Education reform has made substantial progress; nonetheless, there is still much to do. Of primary importance is the continued development of the First- Year Clusters, as well as the development of single quarter courses in the "Bridge" category. With regard to the former, we plan to develop four new clusters in 1998-99 and four more in 1999-00. Thus by the academic year 2000-2001, when we have the permanent funds (~3.0 million dollars) to pay for the clusters, we will have a sufficient group of clusters developed.

Early in the fall of 1999, we will ask the Academic Senate to consider the proposal that all freshmen be required to enroll in a cluster during their freshman year, effective in the year 2000. Arguments for this proposal will be crafted around our assessments of the value of cluster teaching (see **Attachment C**) and the fact that outstanding faculty have been recruited and that multidisciplinary courses are rigorous and can be mounted. Prior to this term, we plan to hold open meetings that will feature faculty, TAs and students who have been involved in the pilots. We will also continue to hold meetings with faculty and department chairs to consider different types of clusters and to help them gain an understanding of how their departments might be affected by a cluster requirement for all entering students.

Lastly, the release of the Boyer Commission's report gives us an opportunity to evaluate our undergraduate programs (including GE) by an outside yardstick. This summer; the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education has proposed heading a blue-ribbon committee of faculty and administrators that will formulate a "Report Card" for UCLA's undergraduate education based on the Commission's ten recommendations. This Report Card will assess the current state of affairs and offer recommendations. The Report Card will be distributed in the fall 1998 to be discussed by Senate agencies and by the faculty.