

REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON GENERAL EDUCATION

University of Illinois at Chicago

November 1999

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Report of the Task Force on General Education

BACKGROUND

A. Events Leading Up to This Report

On April 3-4, 1997, a group of approximately forty faculty members and several UIC staff met in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, to discuss the present shape of general education at UIC and to debate possibilities for curricular change. Out of that came a report (September 1997) which was endorsed by the LAS Educational Policy Committee, forwarded to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP), and distributed to the deans of the various Colleges as well as the participants and any others expressing an interest). The report was also published (without the supporting footnotes) in the *UIC News*.

Rather than coming up with a series of proposed reforms, the retreat group made several broader recommendations about what ought to constitute further study of the issue, and areas that should be earmarked for revision or reconsideration by a subsequent Task Force with formal campus recognition. Recommendation #3 of the report was crucial: “General education must be conceived and carried out as a campus-wide responsibility. The present decision-making structure regarding the approval of courses for CDC [course distribution credit], and any current obstacles to the cooperation of faculty in the teaching of CDC courses across departmental and college lines, should be reviewed and addressed by a task force convened jointly by the Provost and Senate Executive Committee for this purpose, inviting nominations from the Colleges with teaching responsibilities in general education.”

The spring of 1997 also marked the tenth-year accreditation review of UIC by the North Central Association. In the course of that review, the visiting team expressed concern over the “cafeteria” nature of the general education requirements and the apparent absence of any mechanisms for assessing student outcomes in general education courses. The retreat group acknowledged these concerns, though they were not the sole driving force in its own deliberations. During the 1997-98 academic year, however, the Provost also established a separate Task Force on Assessment in General Education.

On December 18, 1997, Eric Gislason, Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, recommended the establishment of this Task Force on General Education to the new Provost, Elizabeth Hoffman. On the spring of 1998, the Provost sent a letter of charge to the nineteen persons who had been nominated by their Deans, by SCEP, and by other sources. Subsequently a representative from her office was added.¹ In the final composition of the Task Force on General Education, four members also

¹ Representatives came from all Colleges with undergraduate degree programs, regardless of whether those Colleges offered courses satisfying the general education requirement of UIC. In addition, the College of Medicine provided two representatives because the recently-established GPPA program had arguably increased the College’s direct stake in the quality of undergraduate education on campus. Though drawn mostly from the faculty ranks, the Task Force included an academic professional serving as a senior representative of the LAS advising staff. Members of the Task Force are listed at the end of this report.

served on the Task Force on Assessment and served collectively as a liaison between the two groups to keep each informed of the other's deliberations. In her letter of appointment, Dr. Hoffman asked that the Task Force on General Education undertake to

- (1) "examine the present catalogue descriptions of the scope and purpose of general education to see if these adequately convey what we want to do and are doing through that program,"
- (2) "examine general education requirements at a variety of institutions, with particular attention to those most comparable to our own," and
- (3) "identify the principles and procedures that would govern the revision of general education."

The Task Force was also encouraged to propose any desirable changes or modifications in the existing program. The resulting report would be addressed to the Provost and brought before appropriate standing faculty committees for whatever action was required.

The Task Force had an organizational meeting in May, 1998, and during the next academic year met a total of thirteen times. A final meeting was held in early fall of 1999. The Task Force publicized its work through three postings to Academy, and maintained its own listserv for internal discussion. Members received copies of the 1997 retreat report, relevant sections of the 1997 NCA Accreditation Team report, a number of secondary readings on core curricula and general education including the Boyer Commission report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education* (1998), synopses of several approaches to general education at comparable urban and/or state flagship institutions, and the full report on the subject issued by Illinois State University in 1997. They reviewed the Illinois Articulation Initiative Agreement and the Illinois High School Pattern Requirements as part of the Task Force's consideration of the relationship between general education requirements and students entering either from a community college or from a high school in the state.

Early in its work, the Task Force set about to develop fuller rationales for general education and fuller descriptions of the three areas generally taken to represent its major foci -- the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences (including mathematics) -- than currently exist in the Undergraduate Catalog. It also drafted a statement of learning objectives, and for this purpose reviewed catalog copy from several other institutions.

The Task Force reviewed existing University-wide course distribution requirements, studied enrollment patterns in CDC courses, and (with the cooperation of various LAS departments) reviewed sample syllabi from recent CDC offerings. It discussed at length the cultural diversity requirement (which had been highlighted as an area of concern in the 1997 retreat report) and developed a number of proposals for course approval and oversight in the general education curriculum, as well as recommendations pertaining to interdisciplinary courses. It began the formulation of

these recommendations at the end of the 1998-99 academic year, and met again at the beginning of the fall 1999 semester to discuss its findings and this report in draft form. The report was submitted to the Provost, who, on November 11, 1999, authorized its distribution to the appropriate parties on campus.

B. What This Report Is and Is Not

This report does not propose a sweeping reform of general education. Nor does it recommend specific course deletions or additions to the general education or cultural diversity curricula except where an apposite example for inclusion can be made.² It provides instead a framework, or template, for future change.

Our reasons for this self-restraint were two. First, we found it necessary to clarify our underlying expectations for general education. Second, we believed that the procedures for the approval of new CDC courses and the review of existing CDC courses were entirely inadequate to the purpose of monitoring this or any other general education curriculum.

The Task Force devoted considerable effort to questions of definition, purpose, and learning objectives because its members believed that a discussion of the actual or implicit rationale of any general education system must precede attempts at revision. The underlying premise of the discussion was that the form of general education at UIC ought to acknowledge the particularities of UIC as an institution. What works at a St. John's is not necessarily what works here, given the nature of the student body and a faculty heavily involved in research and public service. A new system brought into being without attention to student needs and faculty support has no chance of succeeding. In effect, the Task Force accepted the following paragraph from the 1997 retreat report as a way of framing its own discussions:

...[W]e do feel that there is some consensus on what general education should do at UIC: it should lead from our strengths as a research campus, it should provide undergraduates with a chance to encounter both subject matter and methodology in the disciplines, it should recognize a commitment to breadth of preparation for citizens entering a global economy and a multi-ethnic society. General education at UIC should not, however, be based on an abstract model that inhibits experimentation and student choice or on a model that, by expanding the general education requirements, further protracts the student's time to the baccalaureate degree. Finally, general education at UIC should give our graduates the tools for lifelong learning in a society that is changing more rapidly than can be immediately reflected in the curriculum.

To some, this line of argument may seem scarcely more than a veiled defense of the status quo, or at best a case for gradual and incremental change. It was not intended by the 1997 retreat group, however, nor did the Task Force construe it to be, an argument for complacency or for unthinking acquiescence in the present system. While the Task Force was nearly unanimous in agreeing that the mere dismissal of the UIC system as a "cafeteria" is far from self-justifying, it was also nearly unanimous in believing that the

² See, for example, p. 11, n. 10.

UIC Undergraduate Catalog does a remarkably bad job of explaining what the faculty thinks it is doing.³

In the last third of its work the Task Force focused on the problems inherent in the present system, both for CDC courses and courses (which we regard as part of general education) fulfilling the cultural diversity requirement. Any catalog tends to resemble a series of geological strata, with new courses introduced in layers on previous courses and reflecting sometimes transient faculty interests. The concluding section of this report accordingly offers a recommendation addressing the problem of sheer accumulation of new courses. Although proposals for CDC courses are required to manifest certain common features, most notably the presence of a substantial writing requirement, no curriculum committee that responds to general education course proposals as they come in can fully examine how a new course contributes to the whole program. (The imperative for doing so with a departmental major is, of course, much clearer to everyone concerned, as well as a matter of more direct professional interest to most faculty.) Nor, by its nature, does a curriculum committee as presently constituted have the time actually to monitor subsequent offerings of a course. The result is a phenomenon that one member of the Task Force has labeled “curricular drift,” in which a course originally instituted for one purpose may over time come to fulfil quite a different one, or perhaps none at all relevant to its original intents for CDC purposes.

Thus we felt our task fell into two parts: to provide a better articulation of the purposes and outcomes of general education at UIC, and to provide a mechanism for the review of general education. These steps were regarded as essential preludes to any change.

C. How to Read This Report

Section I of this report, “The Major Issues,” sets forth “Definitions” in bold-face type. The typeface indicates that we regard the language here as legislative. We are recommending it for catalog copy and for use in any special handouts given to entering students on the subject of general education. Following each subsection we provide, under the heading “Commentary,” some rationale for the preceding language. Section II identifies needs for data that would, if met, greatly assist any group considering changing the actual general education program. This Section also raises some other contextual issues not specifically considered in Section I. The third and final section of the report provides in summary form our recommendations, some drawn from the prior text and some, *de novo*, on the future governance of general education. The minority report is self-explanatory.⁴

³ The report from the 1977 retreat points to the catalog’s almost exclusive emphasis on skills, the inadequacy of area definitions, and (in the LAS section) the lack of rationale for the distribution requirement.

⁴ Although the Minority Report and the Chair’s reply were formulated after the review of the body of this document by the Task Force, the issues raised by Dean France (pp. 28-29) were discussed at considerable length. The Chair believes that his reply essentially represents the view of the majority of the Task Force’s members in its major points.

I. THE MAJOR ISSUES

A. The Scope and Aims of General Education

1. Definition

The term “general education” refers to those courses that an undergraduate student takes outside his or her major, designed to broaden his or her intellectual horizons and to provide a context in which the more specialized work of a discipline can be carried out. Such courses are drawn from the natural sciences and mathematics, social sciences, and humanities, and in some curricula (such as LAS) may involve a foreign language requirement. They may be divided into two different kinds:

- (a) broadly-constituted courses, some of which may be interdisciplinary, that provide an overview of a subject or interrelated subjects (e.g. Western Civilization or a cross-listed course on great texts in the eastern and western traditions) or that serve as a comprehensive introduction to a discipline (e.g. Introduction to Sociology);
- (b) courses designed to open a window on a specific discipline by providing the non-specialist with a closer view of the methods of that discipline; such a course may focus on a particular topic if that topic lends itself to a form of inquiry that can be applied in other areas of the discipline (e.g. Understanding the Holocaust, the Physics of Weather).

Students should experience both kinds of courses in their general education curriculum. The first draws on the wide-ranging experience and training of faculty members as representatives of a learned profession teaching a diverse student body in an urban setting. Such courses stress breadth and the persistence of certain broad cultural questions or central scientific insights. The second capitalizes on the research strengths of UIC as a Research I institution and provides students with an opportunity to witness first-hand the modes of intellectual inquiry practiced by faculty members in their own disciplines.

All courses taken toward fulfillment of the general education requirement are expected to contribute to one or more of the following competencies, to the extent that they are relevant to the course:

Writing: the ability to conceptualize, draft, revise, and redraft written projects.

Quantitative reasoning: the ability to manipulate logical, mathematical, and statistical concepts.

Oral fluency: the ability to present ideas and concepts with clarity in spoken form.

2. Commentary

The foregoing language offers a more expansive definition of general education than exists in the Catalog. It is a definition consistent with existing policy and practice at UIC.

This Task Force believes that general education is properly viewed as a continuum of courses extending from the freshman through the senior year that accompanies and supports the work a student undertakes in the major. We therefore disagree with the injunction of the current Undergraduate Catalog (and its predecessors) that “normally, general education courses should be completed by students before they begin to concentrate on their majors in the junior year.”⁵ First, this perpetuates the unfortunate view, already taken by many students of a more vocational bent and perhaps some advisors, that general education is something to be “gotten out of the way” as early as possible in an academic career rather than a vehicle for exploration and discovery. Second, because of the demographics of UIC’s student population, with a large number of students transferring in and out or struggling to mesh work commitments with part-time attendance, such a clause has never really been enforceable in any case. We do, however, believe that such an injunction is appropriate to courses in basic competencies such as freshman English or one of the gateway mathematics courses.

From the concept of general education as a continuum rather than as a prerequisite to the major, it follows that not all courses fulfilling the general education requirement are necessarily appropriate at the freshman or sophomore levels. It also follows that even in courses taken for the major, certain “general education” concerns may have an important place. Furthermore, given the diversity of backgrounds and learning styles among UIC’s undergraduates, there is no strong case for postulating an ideal order in which general education courses should be taken. Some students, in effect, begin with specialist instincts by first responding to a particular topic that leads them deeper into a field of study; others may be more comfortable with an overview of a field. Either kind of course may be appropriate at any stage of an undergraduate career; our principal task is to be institutionally sensitive to the individuality of the student. We do believe, however, that the Catalog ought to carry some formal recognition of the distinction between the two kinds of courses listed above, and that standing curricular bodies ought to consider the possibility of numbering them at different levels. (See Section III. A.4). We further believe, as will be suggested below, that they need to be treated differently for purposes of periodic course review.

Some students may indeed wish to structure their educational experience so that they fulfill most or all of their general education requirements in the first two years. To adopt the view that general education is a continuum need not commit us to a new kind of straitjacket. It does, however, suggest that faculty members need to weigh the connections of their discipline-specific discourse to questions and concerns outside their field, and that students where possible ought to be asked to assess how any particular course has met the goals of learning described below.

⁵ *UIC Undergraduate Catalog 1999-2001*, p. 48.

The Task Force has reviewed the question of whether or not the University-wide general education requirement of twenty-four hours (6 in the humanities, 6 in the social sciences, 6 in the natural sciences, and 6 in one or more of these three areas) should be raised to something more closely approaching the floor in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. It does not recommend such a change, on the grounds that curricula in some professional colleges are very tightly prescribed and allow relatively little flexibility over the four years (or more) of an undergraduate's career at UIC. On the other hand, where an individual college believed that it could set a higher floor, the Task Force would certainly endorse and encourage the change. A minor liberalization in the existing requirement is proposed under Section III, A.8.

B. The Areas of General Education

1. Definitions

General education involves coursework in three broad areas: the natural sciences (sometimes subdivided into life sciences and physical sciences, but also including mathematics), the social sciences (sometimes subdivided into social and behavioral sciences), and the humanities. The method of investigation varies greatly among these three, but increasingly their concerns have tended to merge and overlap. All attempt to describe underlying and longstanding questions about the physical universe, about human nature, and about the human potential for enduring expression. Quantitative reasoning, mathematics, statistics, and computer science are particularly significant in the natural and social sciences but may also have a role in humanistic studies; the study of texts, other human artifacts, and the records of the past is common to disciplines in both the humanities and social sciences. Essays, statistical analyses, and case studies may be appropriate forms for conveying results in any of the three areas; laboratory experience and the modeling and write-up of experiments are features of much work in the social as well as the natural sciences.

Despite these overlaps, useful distinctions can still be drawn among the three areas. An acquaintance, however selective, with the subject matter and investigative modes of all three is essential as part of a general education.

Natural Sciences

Human beings have always sought an increased understanding of the mechanisms that govern the natural world. The natural science portion of the general education requirements is designed to give each student an experience with the emerging picture of that world. The ultimate goal of such study is to stimulate each student's ability to appreciate the wonder and complexity of nature, and to acquaint students with some of the tools employed in science and mathematics.

Social Sciences

Through study in the social and behavioral sciences, students learn to analyze the past, develop insight into contemporary social life, and explore the implications of individual and social actions for the future. Individual and social behavior, political and economic institutions, and historical change both within and across cultural boundaries, are all the objects of study in the social sciences, and prepare students for understanding their own individual lives in the context of society.

Humanities

Studies in the humanities develop an understanding of the struggles and aspirations, the comedies and tragedies, and the achievements and failures of human beings engaged with such questions as identity, beauty, courage, love, good and evil, truth, justice, and ethics. In examining the dreams, traditions, and values of people throughout time, students focus on examples of individual human self-expression in philosophy, historical agency, and the arts over many centuries.⁶

2. Commentary

Again, the foregoing language offers a somewhat more expansive definition of the areas of general education than is available in the Undergraduate Catalog. The existing catalog language also is misleading in its implication that a certain model of inquiry and form of student activity is specific to each of the three areas. The Task Force has felt the need for a more porous set of descriptions emphasizing the interrelationship of those areas: for example, the fact that statistical methods may on occasion be appropriate to inquiry in the humanities.

Some colleges and universities have addressed the question of course proliferation in general education not by reducing the total number of courses on the list (a response to the frequently-cited “cafeteria” criticism) but by subdividing the areas so as to narrow the student’s choices (e.g., requiring courses in both social and behavioral sciences, or both biological and physical sciences). The Task Force considered this option but rejected it. Given the wide range of preparedness and the varying needs of incoming undergraduates at UIC, we do not support the addition of further constraints of this nature on their academic careers. As with the acknowledgment of the two basic forms of general education above, however, we do support the provision of such guidance in the Catalog and/or any special supplement on general education distributed to students, either in the form of subdivided lists or “for instances” that would enable an individual student to see more clearly what kinds of approaches to learning exist within each of the three areas.

⁶ Language in these last two paragraphs has been drawn in part from that of the Illinois Articulation Initiative.

C. Cultural Awareness and Citizenship as Themes in General Education

1. Definitions

A general education requires, and inevitably involves, exposure to cultures and institutions around the world as well as within one's own society. Such an exposure contributes to intellectual flexibility, breadth of mind, and cultural understanding as well as to a growth in historical awareness and informed citizenship at home and abroad. While the encouragement of such development is already implicit in many general education courses, it is specifically embodied in the requirement that the students take two courses in cultural awareness and citizenship. Some of these courses may also satisfy the CDC requirement.

Courses fulfilling the cultural awareness and citizenship requirement fall into one of three categories. Students must take at least one course from each of two of these three categories:

- (a) The study of a non-western culture (e.g. African or Asian), a culture itself rich in diversity of race, ethnicity, and national origin (e.g. Latin American), or a course dealing with more than one of these cultures from a comparative perspective;
- (b) The study of issues pertaining to race, ethnicity, or gender in the context of U.S. culture;
- (c) The study of political, social, economic, and/or cultural institutions in the United States.

Courses on specific cultures (e.g. African) may be classified in either (a) or (b) depending on whether the purpose of the course is to study the origins of that culture in its homeland, or its expression in the context of the United States or Latin America.

Upon consultation with his or her College advisor, a student may wholly or in part fulfill this requirement through the Study Abroad program.

2. Commentary

This portion of our report proposes a change in the cultural diversity requirement that will require formal action by the Senate. Under the existing system, this requirement can be satisfied by taking one course in "the culture, social, and political institutions and value systems of social groups, regions, or nations different from those present in the dominant American culture."⁷ The foregoing section would replace this language. It would also amend the sentence that now reads, "Students may also fulfill the Cultural Diversity requirement by completing an academic year abroad in a non-Western

⁷ *UIC Undergraduate Catalog 1999-2001*, p. 49.

country,” and it would eliminate any direct reference to the exemption of “foreign nationals and students who have received their high school education (or its equivalent) in a non-Western country.” The word “awareness” would be substituted for “diversity” where it appears.⁸

The present cultural diversity requirement essentially blends two distinct areas of concern that have been identified by state agencies. State legislation has mandated the need for “coursework on improving human relations to include race, ethnicity, gender, and other issues,” and the Illinois General Education Core Curriculum and State Teacher Certification Board have both identified courses in “non-western” or “Third World” cultures as part of the certification requirement. The third category – the study of political, economic, and/or cultural institutions within the United States – is a proposed Task Force innovation.

The Task Force finds that a year’s immersion in any unfamiliar culture, western or non-western, is sufficiently challenging to the student to warrant its acceptance as the equivalent of a course in cultural awareness. The Task Force proposes the deletion of any reference to the foreign nationals’ exemption on two grounds. First, its premise may not apply equally to all such students – for example, those who began their experience in this country but continued it overseas in the land of parental origin. Second, even if on a case-by-case basis it may be adjudged unnecessary for such students to study a culture other than that of the U.S., it may be desirable for them to substitute one or more courses in American institutions or American diversity.

This last point brings us to the addition of an option in American institutions under the cultural awareness rubric. At the present time, no UIC student is required to take either American history or a course in American government. Nor does our proposed expansion of cultural awareness options introduce such a requirement. But in addition to recognizing that awareness of diversity applies both to foreign nationals and U.S.-born citizens in our student body, we also find that a better knowledge of one’s own institutions heightens one’s awareness of the distinction between the culture into which one is born and other cultures whose histories have been built on quite different presuppositions from one’s own. Especially in light of the fact that no one single racial or ethnic group commands a majority among UIC students, the use of “diversity” as a

⁸ The full text in the current (1997-99) Undergraduate Catalog reads as follows:

“All students at UIC are required to fulfill the Cultural Diversity requirement by studying the culture, social, and political institutions and value systems of social groups, regions, or nations different from those present in the dominant American culture.

“To fulfill this requirement, students must choose one course from the list of approved Cultural Diversity courses (refer to the Cultural Diversity List in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences section of this catalog). Some of the courses on the Cultural Diversity list may also satisfy program major requirements or other University general education requirements in the humanities or social sciences, or may count as an elective.

“Students also may fulfill the Cultural Diversity requirement by completing an academic year abroad in a non-Western country.

“Foreign nationals and students who have received their high school education (or its equivalent) in a non-Western country are exempt from this requirement.” (p 47)

gauge means something quite different from what it would mean on a campus with a predominantly white Anglo-Saxon student body.

The Task Force considered the concern of some that the cultural diversity as it stands does not make allowance for the fact that some minority students take cultural diversity courses to strengthen their own cultural identification rather than to expand their studies to include groups previously unfamiliar to them.⁹ The Task Force was on the whole untroubled by this concern. Some pointed out that the entire UIC experience, dominated as many parts of the curriculum are by an essentially U.S. and Eurocentric focus, is itself an immersion in contrasting cultural assumptions for many minority as for many foreign-born students, though for different reasons. What did trouble us was the prospect that cultural diversity credit might be denied simply on the basis of one's racial or ethnic background, as well as the fact that such denial might be predicated on an unwarranted intrusion into an individual student's motivations for taking a particular course. One could, of course, also argue that prior to coming to UIC, many such students may have had very little opportunity to study and understand their own non-majority culture.

The Task Force also considered, and rejected, the view expressed by representatives of some UIC support programs and a few of its own members that the "cultural diversity" requirement should be met exclusively by courses having to do with the status of minority groups within the United States. Aside from the nature of various state mandates that have not been so limited, it is neither easy nor desirable to maintain a clear distinction between categories A and B in the light of worldwide racial and ethnic dispersion. The present curricula of the Department of African-American Studies and the Program in Latin American Studies show a natural and inevitable continuity between the study of African or Latin American cultures and the infusion of those cultures into the life of the United States through population movements and emigration trends still observable today.¹⁰ Were Asian Studies similarly to come into its own as a full-fledged program, it is more than probable given the nature of UIC's student body that it would likewise have to come to terms with the Asian-American experience as a component of yet another diaspora from the countries of origin. To substitute for such possibilities a purely insular and nativist conception of minority groups, focusing only on their role in the United States, is to adopt a potentially reductive view of a rich and multifaceted heritage.

⁹ For example, a survey of enrollments in cultural diversity courses offered by African American Studies and Latin American Studies in the fall of 1996 and spring of 1997 showed that just over 50% of the enrollment in Latin American Studies 101 in both semesters was Hispanic, and that in the African American Studies sequence 247-248 the African American enrollment was 70% and 88.1% respectively.. The Hispanic count in Latin American Studies 106, 107, 275, and 295 ranged from 54.5% to 68.8%. The exception to the rule, Latin American Studies 269, in which identified African Americans comprised 9 out of a total of 19 student registrations, is a course in Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹⁰ We note, however, that although courses in African-American History figure in the list of approved cultural diversity courses, Latin American Studies 103 (Introduction to the Barrio) and 104 (Introduction to Puerto Rican Culture and Society) do not, whereas LASt 295 (Latino Literary Studies) does. This kind of anomaly, under our present theory, would require correction.

It has been argued – though not by any member of this Task Force -- that UIC no longer needs a formal cultural diversity (or, as we call it here, cultural awareness) requirement because UIC itself is such a diverse place. Setting aside the question of whether the requirement could be legally dropped, the Task Force rejects the view that an understanding of different cultures can be achieved simply (and passively) through the happenstance of rubbing shoulders with persons of different cultural backgrounds in a classroom, lounge, or cafeteria. Mere proximity to the “alien other” does not necessarily enhance understanding; in fact, it may merely exacerbate preexisting misunderstandings and prejudices. The proper study of cultural diversity is a rigorous intellectual activity in its own right. It is indispensable in developing an ability to look at the world from perspectives different from one’s own.

Finally, no amount of fine-tuning of definitions can eliminate the occasional borderline case. It is more than possible, for example, to construct an entirely “Eurocentric” course in Latin-American fiction. The current inclusion of Slavic and Baltic cultural courses under the requirement seems to stem more from the presence of those cultures as part of the fabric of ethnic life in Chicago than from considerations of historical exclusion from the mainstream of American life, though arguably some of those cultures are not entirely western in light of their historical origins or their problematic status on the borderlands of eastern and southeastern Europe.¹¹ A review of such courses, however, like a review of courses currently receiving CDC credit, falls properly within the purview of a regularly-constituted faculty committee rather than an *ad hoc* Task Force like ours. Partly because of objections raised in the minority report (p. 28 below), but also as a matter of principle, the Task Force believes that the definition of courses receiving credit for cultural awareness and citizenship should be generous, and that to the maximum extent possible such courses be approved that would also carry CDC credit.

D. Learning Objectives or Goals in Both General Education and the Major

The task force endorses the following learning objectives for all UIC undergraduates. General education will make an important contribution to the fulfillment of these objectives, but it is our hope that the sum of all work taken toward the baccalaureate degree, including work in the major, will help satisfy these objectives. We do not wish to attach specific courses to specific goals because we hope that any course satisfying the general education requirement will fulfill as many of the following goals as is consistent with the particular subject matter and focus of the course. It is not just English composition courses that contribute to writing skills, or just history courses that inculcate a sense of the past.¹²

¹¹ Recent events in Kosovo dramatize the point. Sona Hoisington has argued that such courses constitute “the primary way in which we reach out to students...and create in them cultural awareness and appreciation for the cultural history of the Slavic and Baltic communities which play an important role in Europe. While these communities are prominent, they are not well understood. Moreover, they are at best only marginally European” (memorandum of 22 August 1997, quoted in the Lake Geneva retreat report at p. 24, n. 22).

¹² Material incorporated in this section is the result of scrutiny of several documents, most notably the statement of learning goals and objectives developed by the College of Arts and Sciences and Indiana

1. Definitions

1. BASIC COMPETENCIES

- A. *Written and Oral Communication.*** Students should learn to speak and write clearly and persuasively. Speaking and writing clearly and persuasively require not just precision in the mechanics of writing and in grammatical speech but also the ability to gather evidence and to construct an argument coherently, whether in written or in oral discourse, and to understand what a particular rhetorical occasion demands. In short, students must learn to shape speech and writing to the nature of the audience.¹³
- B. *Reading and Listening Abilities.*** Reading and listening so as to understand the ideas of another involve the ability not only to comprehend what is said in writing or orally, but to engage with the ideas of another writer or speaker, and to weigh evidence and points of view critically. Effective reading and listening also require one to exercise habits of critical and independent thought to evaluate what is said in both traditional forms of written discourse and in the mass media.
- C. *Logical and Critical Thinking.*** The development of writing, speaking, and listening ability requires higher-order skills of logical and critical thinking. Students must learn to ask questions to discover meaning, to differentiate between objective information and subjective points of view, and to identify ways of making provisional judgments in the absence of definitive evidence.
- D. *Quantitative Reasoning and Computer Literacy.*** The development of quantitative reasoning, in mathematics or statistics, is an essential skill in today's technological world. Quantitative and related skills also include, though they are neither confined to nor congruent with, computer literacy.

2. INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

- A. *Intellectual Flexibility, Breadth of Mind, and Cultural Awareness.*** Literacy and critical thinking should be supplemented by an openness to new ideas and information, a sensitivity to others' views and feelings, and an ability to look beyond one's own background, upbringing, and experience to understand culturally-different values and perspectives. This means not just becoming informed about cultures different from one's own, or the perspectives of

University, and the Illinois Articulation Initiative. Though rephrased by the Task Force in its discussion, some of the language of this section derives from those documents.

¹³ In setting forth this goal, we acknowledge that written and oral fluency are in no way addressed on a par in the existing course structure at UIC. English 160 and 161 are a University requirement; Communication 100 is not, nor as structured does it apparently allow for intensive individual student practice and drill. We confine ourselves here to noting that practice in oral delivery as well as discussion-centered learning ought conceivably to be at least one applicable (and not necessarily exclusionary) standard for whether or not a course should be accepted for CDC credit.

different groups within American society, but acquiring the ability to cooperate with others of differing perspectives in the accomplishment of common tasks.

- B. *Ethical Reasoning.* Students should be able to engage in reflective reasoning on the nature of moral choice. It is not the task of UIC as a public institution to inculcate particular ethical doctrines but to contribute to the making of an informed citizenry aware of the ethical dimensions of public and private decision-making. This includes the ability to recognize the authenticity of well-considered ethical values that may differ from one's own, and to weigh the implications of moral choice in both the public and private spheres.
- C. *Aesthetic Appreciation.* The intelligent appreciation and evaluation of works of literature and the arts, and the cultivation of aesthetic awareness, are inherently liberating traits that contribute to the quality of life.
- D. *An Understanding of Scientific Method.* UIC's graduates should understand scientific method and how it guides the formation, testing, and acceptance of theories. They should be able to develop and test hypotheses, and to distinguish those conclusions that rest on unsupported assertion from those verified by sound scientific reasoning.
- E. *An Appreciation of the Natural World and Technology.* In addition to an understanding of the scientific method, education in the sciences develops an appreciation of the natural world and the weighing of moral and ethical issues in the light of the findings of science and vice versa. Understanding something of the content of the sciences contributes to informed choice and decision-making in such areas as health, technology, and public policy.
- F. *Historical Awareness and Citizenship for Today and Tomorrow.* UIC's graduates should be able to view the present within the context of the past, appreciate both the liberating and the constraining features of tradition, and understand what historical forces have affected their own lives as well as those of peoples in different cultures. In addition to understanding American traditions and institutions, graduates should understand their futures as citizens of an increasingly interdependent global order.
- G. *Acquisition of Knowledge of a Subject in Depth.* The context provided by the foregoing goals should enable a UIC graduate not only to acquire and employ a coherent, sophisticated understanding of a major subject matter, but to see its relationship to other fields of study and to grasp its limitations as well as its range.

2. Commentary

The Task Force discussed at length the goals listed above. One of its concerns was that the list might be misused by future accrediting bodies to demand that each be

accompanied by a specific “outcomes” measure. In affirming these goals, therefore, we also underline the following cautionary points:

- a. Meaningful assessment of how well such goals have been met may be difficult to carry out at the time of graduation. Not only are they likely to resist quantification or standardized testing, but they also represent only the initiation of a process. The purpose of a liberal education is to open the door on life-long learning and to give the student the tools to transcend his or her education at a later date. To suggest that something has been completed at the end of a series of courses is to miss the point of liberal learning, since the effect of a university education often cannot be gauged for years following the receipt of a degree.
- b. None of these goals are products of the general education curriculum only; rather, both general education courses and coursework in the major may contribute to the realization of any number of them. But we do affirm that the student’s involvement in a particular major is enriched by a clearer understanding of how his or her field relates to other fields of endeavor and forms of knowledge.
- c. Adherence to these goals does not by itself guarantee a particular “kind” of graduating senior. Aesthetic appreciation is not always accompanied by humane values; knowledge of the political structure of the United States does not automatically produce a committed citizen. We find only that the development of these competencies and exposure to these intellectual goals provide a groundwork that will benefit both student and society. The lack of such enabling and liberalizing features of education almost certainly imposes limits on the development of both.
- d. At an institution like ours, such “end-results” assessment as does occur should take place not at the level of general education but upon receipt of the UIC degree. This argument follows from the nature of UIC’s student body (many of whom may take courses at more than one institution) and from the underlying philosophy of this report, namely that general and specialized education continue through much of a student’s career here and cannot always be readily separated. Departments should be free to develop assessment measures most suitable to their goals and the nature of their disciplines. In our Section III recommendations (A. 6 below) we suggest a specific form of encouragement to departments to examine their majors in the light of general education objectives.

From our point of view, the importance of UIC accepting commitments like these – and a subsequent body may wish to reformulate them – is that they provide a basis for curricular self-examination, a basis which we will discuss when we turn to the governance of general education in Section III below.

II. WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

The history of general education reviews at UIC is treated fully in the report of the Lake Geneva retreat, and we do not recapitulate it here. But a recurring pattern does seem to develop in such reviews. After several years of living with a system, some members of the faculty (and, it might be argued, some administrators looking for something to do) begin to get restive. Over time, they complain, the list of courses approved for CDC has gotten long and ungainly. The student has too much choice, too little guidance. It is time to restore some order in the curriculum, to reduce the laundry list (or, in a more common metaphor, the cafeteria offerings), to provide more guidance to students (or, in less friendly eyes, more limitations on student choice). Some proposed reforms are in the direction of greater liberality, others in the direction of greater conservatism. Some changes may be dictated by external mandates affecting admission standards. At no point, however, have these discussions been translated into anything like a “core” curriculum in the narrow sense; such faculty support as exists for that possibility has never mustered a voting majority. In 1988, however, the LAS faculty did tighten the requirements for the approval of CDC courses and for their subsequent review. The CDC list, argued the authors of the relevant report, “should be no longer than it needs to be...and should offer a realistic picture of what specific courses a student can take to fulfill the distribution requirement.” Monitoring, however, was left in the hands of an overworked LAS staff, and the list of CDC courses continued to grow. The same may be said for the list of courses that now fulfill the cultural diversity requirement.

The prevailing ethos of the faculty at UIC has never been supportive of a *narrow* base of *broad* courses that may form part of a curricular core. In part, this is because such courses are often best taught across departmental boundaries and, except in the Honors College (where the incentive is presumably the prospect of dealing with exceptionally promising undergraduate students), it has been difficult to banish such bureaucratic obstacles to team-taught courses as what department should receive the credit. In part, the situation may reflect the presence of countervailing demands on faculty for whom such teaching tends to represent a diversion from, or a threat to, the concentration on research that the campus most visibly rewards. More importantly, many UIC faculty members genuinely believe that diversity of our student body militates against a core of the sort envisioned. They point to the presence of a large number of students who either start here but do not graduate or who start elsewhere but graduate from UIC. Our undergraduates vary widely not only in their state of preparedness but their age, their prior experiences either in K-12 or higher education, and their experience in the workforce. According to this line of reasoning, UIC as an institution simply cannot make assumptions either about the homogeneity of its entering students or about the continuity or overall length of their enrollment here. If these students have had most of their general education elsewhere, what do we have to say about it, other than to accept as much of it as we can for transfer purposes and encourage them toward the degree? And if they take such courses here but transfer out, how can we possibly measure the outcomes of their general education experience?

Criticisms of the “cafeteria” system, including those from the most recent North Central reaccreditation report, tend to speak of such a system as if its evils were self-evident. Indeed, if a general education system is conceived entirely in terms of serving faculty and student convenience, there may be more serious problems than those of curricular [in]coherence. As it is, even the best and most tightly-designed system, given the nature of our student body and the demands on its time, can hardly ignore the fact that many curricular choices are driven as much, if not more, by course availability (“what’s open at 10:00 a.m.?”) as by even the most inchoate student interest (“that sounds like it might be interesting”).

Given these observations, which may seem either cynical or overly despairing, it should be noted that relatively large numbers of students beat a path to relatively few CDC courses. A study of enrollments for the summer of 1996 through the spring of 1997 showed, for example, that a small group of courses in each of the three divisions of general education and in the cultural diversity course list attracted by far the largest number of students. Using an enrollment of 100 as the floor figure, and confining the study to the humanities and social sciences (where complaints about incoherence tend to be concentrated), the following lists the high-demand courses:

Humanities

English 101	432 students	Understanding Literature
Philosophy 100	347 students	Introduction to Philosophy
History 100	342 students	Western Civilization to 1648
History 101	270 students	Western Civilization since 1648
*Latin American Studies 101	251 students	Intro to Latin America in a World Context
English 105	208 students	English and American Fiction
Philosophy 103	194 students	Introduction to Ethics
Philosophy 104	187 students	Intro to Social and Political Philosophy
English 103	108 students	English and American Poetry
Spanish 210	107 students	Intro to the Reading of Hispanic Texts

Social Sciences

Communication 100	1467 students	Effective Public Communication
Psychology 100	1332 students	Introduction to Psychology
Sociology 100	905 students	Introduction to Sociology
Psychology 270	885 students	Abnormal Psychology
Political Science 101	783 students	Intro to American Government and Politics
Psychology 210	669 students	Theories of Personality
Criminal Justice 101	538 students	Introduction to the Justice System
Psychology 231	433 students	Community Psychology
Geography 100	389 students	Concepts in Geography
History 103	388 students	American Civ in the Late 19 th Century
History 104	328 students	American Civ since the Late 19 th Century
*Geography 101	290 students	World Regional Geography
Sociology 105	235 students	Social Problems
*Anthropology 101	202 students	World Cultures: Intro to Social Anthro
Sociology 224	172 students	Gender and Society
*Women’s Studies 102	144 students	Women in International Perspective
Political Science 184	127 students	Introduction to International Relations
Criminal Justice 200	124 students	Law in Society

Anthropology 102	112 students	Introduction to Archaeology
*Sociology 225	111 students	Racial and Ethnic Groups
Linguistics 150	106 students	Introduction to the Study of Language

The five asterisked courses, which also receive cultural diversity credit, were the top five courses in the cultural diversity listing, followed closely by Geography 151, Introduction to Cultural Geography (96 students) and Polish 115, Introduction to Polish Culture (90 students).¹⁴

Interpreters of these figures, however, cannot draw the comfortable conclusion that students, left to themselves, have a fine instinct on where to head for their general education. One reason for high enrollments may be simply the available number of seats in a particular course. Another reason may be a tendency to prefer 100- to 200-level courses as less threatening, or courses with the word “Introduction” in the title as more reassuring. Some may like the sound of the topic itself. When, as in English, there are several points of entry, the numbers may reflect some underlying reality. It is not unreasonable to assume that students shy of reading may get their feet wet in something advertised as an introduction to literature; those who go on are in turn more likely to feel comfortable with a course labeled “fiction” than one labeled “poetry.” Add the fact that most students in LAS who complete most or all of their program at UIC are likely to take more general education courses than the minimum and to use them as electives rather than in specific fulfillment of the general education requirement. None of these remarks are intended as adverse commentary on the student body. If anything, they raise the question of whether we as faculty have been willing to spell out what we want to see happen in general education. Some advisors may encourage students to get such courses out of the way, and many students have no option other than to head for the largest rooms and to submit to a regimen which in many cases may be administered largely by TA’s.

One could, of course, submit to the counsel of despair and simply designate the popular courses (by whatever definition) as the core general education courses. The CDC list could undeniably be shortened by this expedient, though experience suggests that however shortened a list may be, eventually the new courses would start clamoring for admission and after a few years we would be back where we started. Also at stake is an important practical consideration intimately bound up with educational quality. If, in fact, a very few courses are designated for general education, and if we regard the effectiveness of general education as depending on the extent of faculty involvement as well as the improvement of student writing (as called for in the most recently-enacted reforms), then it is doubtful that large lecture sections are the best way to maximize faculty-student interaction and the development of student competencies.

Enrollment figures alone tell us little about student motivations or interests. Our report has perhaps already hinted our opinion that much registration in general education courses is adventitious: that it is dictated as much by the happenstance of what happens to be open as student desire or need. But in fact we do not have much data to support this view either; it derives from anecdote and observation. Data-gathering is rendered

¹⁴ We have not extended this survey to courses fulfilling the Natural Science requirement, where the number of available options is relatively small.

complex by the fact, as we have said, that LAS students have a fairly wide range of election options and therefore may be enrolled in a course like Sociology 100 even if they have already satisfied the general education requirement.

A student survey could help answer these questions. The threshold questions are whether the student has intentionally registered in the course to fulfil a general education requirement, and if not, what the other reasons for his or her enrollment are. One member of the Task Force asked precisely those questions in a course he taught in his department for CDC credit at the 200 level. The course had a healthy enrollment, but only one student stated that she had registered in it to fulfil her general education requirement. If this were a recurrent pattern in a particular course, would there be any reason to retain that course on the CDC list? In this kind of case, a decision based on how students “vote” through their registration properly should be germane to whether a course is retained on the CDC list, since it is not likely that anyone would strenuously argue for keeping a course on the general education list that attracts students almost entirely for reasons unrelated to general education. Likewise, departments who submit CDC course proposals because of fears of low enrollments might be willing to reconsider whether CDC credit was really necessary when a course was attracting students for other reasons.

Whether or not a student was enrolled in a CDC course specifically to fulfil a general education requirement, a follow-up question might still yield useful results. The survey could restate briefly the aims of general education at UIC and the aims of this particular course, and ask the student how well he or she felt the course met those aims. This at the very least would invite the student to reflect both on the nature of general education and his or her own learning.

Although we need to know much more than we do about student reactions, the Task Force also finds it even more important to get a better sense of how general education courses are actually delivered. It should not be difficult, on a periodic basis, to compile information as to what CDC courses are large lecture sections, with much of the discretionary work of student evaluation being handled by TA's, what CDC courses are taught by T.A.'s or Lecturers with relatively little day-to-day faculty oversight (i.e., as essentially independent sections that may not even have common reading lists), and what CDC courses are taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty. The correlation of this information with student evaluations would provide some basis for future decisions on the mounting of CDC courses. For example, should UIC make a major budgetary investment in guaranteeing more small, faculty-taught sections of CDC courses, and where would such an investment be best placed? While it is common to decry CDC courses that seem to be based primarily on faculty interests, it should also be pointed out that this plurality of options may in fact help guarantee a wide variety of smaller sections for students. We have already acknowledged that some general education courses may provide a “window” on a discipline by showing how the professor works with a particular topic. The evaluation of such a course ought to rest in part on how well the faculty member related that particular topic to a larger discipline. *If* that demonstration can be made, and *if* the faculty member is teaching something that is close to his or her heart,

and *if* the student is attracted to the topic for positive reasons, is this not a description of a potentially fruitful and engaging learning experience? Indeed, might it not be said that it is the kind of learning experience that a research university is uniquely qualified to offer to its undergraduates?

Out of the compilation of such data ought to come a better-articulated sense of general education as a community enterprise. At present, to the extent that full-time tenured and non-tenure track faculty members are involved in teaching courses in the general education curriculum, they are often doing so piecemeal as a result of decisions made, perhaps hurriedly and under the pressure of dire necessity, at the departmental level. Nothing in the present system guarantees either that faculty members talk about general education across departmental boundaries, or that within a department the faculty member teaching a CDC course knows exactly what it is, or how it is part of a broader graduation requirement. The Task Force heard repeated stories of junior faculty in particular who, new to UIC and its curricula, were given a required general education course to teach but with absolutely no orientation on the purposes of general education or university expectations as to what it required (e.g. assignments to develop writing competency).

The compilation of a roster of faculty involved in general education could, however, with the right leadership, lead to more open and continuous faculty discussion than now takes place (and discussion of a sort that the Task Force was able to enjoy).¹⁵ Of course, such discussion cannot be legislated into existence. Our sole concern here is that we provide a structure of support and encouragement for faculty members who want to avail themselves of it. Over the next several years tenured and tenure-track faculty with a special interest in and concern for general education would be identified (or self-identified), and a more formal structure, analogous to the Honors Council, might then be implemented. See Section III, B.8 below.

If general education is ultimately a campus-wide responsibility, we cannot expect departments to take up the information slack. Pending the development of some sort of body engaged in the oversight of general education, a matter which we defer to the recommendations section of this report, provision needs to be made for the distribution of information about general education to all members of the faculty involved in its delivery. Among the possibilities discussed by the Task Force was that once an appropriate administrative structure was in place at the campus level, letters be sent to departmental executive officers and directors of undergraduate studies at the time general education courses are scheduled. These letters would contain a set of reminders about what general education courses are intended to accomplish and urging the inclusion of

¹⁵ It should be noted that we do not endorse the concept of a lower-division “college” or an identifiable general education faculty, both of which structures tend to institutionalize a distinction between faculty who are rewarded for their research and those (often less rewarded and less prestigious) whose primary dedication is to undergraduates. Such arrangements are less rather than more common across the spectrum of higher education than was the case twenty or thirty years ago, and for good reason. Such a division is also inconsistent with the Task Force’s support for the concept of general education as something that continues apace with education in the major, the juncture of the two marking what we would call liberal education.

learning goals in the syllabi. As soon as the timetable is known, such a mailing could also go to those who had been identified as teaching CDC courses.¹⁶ The campus would also request syllabi of CDC courses each semester for monitoring purposes. Such requirements would also apply, *pari passu*, to new courses at the time they are submitted to curricular bodies for CDC. That is, the campus would have a right to expect that any CDC course would set forth the ways in which it would contribute to the learning goals or objectives that the faculty chooses to prescribe.

Thus far this section of our report has moved from data needs, that is to say the lacunae in our own knowledge about how the system is working, to oversight, which addresses the question of how expectations and standards for general education can be better disseminated. But the question of what constitutes adequate information – to students, to faculty members – needs also to be addressed on a more fundamental intellectual level. That is, can we somehow manage to accommodate faculty and student diversity of interest – which the present general education system at UIC addresses well – within a system that gives more direction to all parties? How might we identify principles of coherence *within* curricular diversity?

The present Undergraduate Catalog, particularly in the long list of courses meeting the CDC requirements in the LAS section, gives very little guidance to the student. The Task Force has spent much time on this issue and has concluded that, whether in the Catalog or, perhaps more appropriately, in a supplementary booklet devoted to general education, students should be given sample “road maps” of how they might work their way through the general education requirements. The purpose of such information would be to identify ways in which CDC courses might be clustered with respect to content and style of inquiry (for example, courses in the humanities that focus on literary texts or artistic artifacts). Where a more specific linkage within or across departmental boundaries between two or three CDC courses might be identified, these could be instanced for the guidance of students as well, indeed, as for faculty reflection. Though it does not support the idea of formally requiring two or three specific kinds of courses within the three broad groupings of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, the Task Force concludes that the provision of information like this would enable a student to make a more informed choice, or at least a more reflective one. We recommend exploring this possibility. In particular, we suggest that a general education section on the UIC website could offer an interactive tool for a student who wanted to explore certain topics by use of a keyword that would speed the process of identifying courses relevant to his or her interests.

Another way of encouraging the student to make connections is through the provision of interdisciplinary or cross-divisional courses on a broad topic or theme. In our recommendations we offer some proposals on that subject. Here we would observe that while such courses are relatively easy to offer on a trial basis in the Honors College, a number of factors have inhibited their development elsewhere in the undergraduate

¹⁶ A member of the Task Force writes that while this doesn’t address the “information gap” problem for late hires and part-timers, it at least provides a basis for the department (or, in the case of a multi-section course, the supervisor) to give persons in those categories some guidance in designing the course.

curriculum. Interdisciplinary rubrics (Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences) could identify team taught courses in those areas; cross-divisional courses might trace a common theme across two or more of them (e.g. technology). It should not be a humanly impossible task to simplify bureaucratic procedures for course approval on the Honors College model, to assign credit-hour distributions to the appropriate departments, and to develop incentives for faculty to propose joint teaching ventures. We would urge, however, that rather than contributing to the accretion of yet more courses in the Undergraduate Catalog, such rubrics be held open for different topics and for trial runs of a particular topic before any decision is made to institutionalize them.

Finally, we need some reflection by departments (at a level already undertaken by our professional colleges) on what kind of general education they seek for their own majors and how they expect their majors to contribute to the world beyond their discipline. A specific proposal for upper-division work appears in Section III, A.6. below.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Programmatic

1. The Task Force recommends the adoption of the statement on the scope and aims of general education (p. 5 in this report) and the statement on the areas of general education (pp. 7-8 in this report) for inclusion in the Undergraduate Catalog. We believe that such statements should be carried in a prominent place in the Catalog, perhaps immediately following the Scope and Mission Statement (p. 8 of the 1999-2001 Catalog) or in the section on Undergraduate Curricula (pp. 10-11).
2. The Task Force recommends the revision of the cultural diversity requirement, under the title of Cultural Awareness and Citizenship, as stated on page 9 of this report, this statement (beginning with the second paragraph) to appear in the Undergraduate Catalog in place of that currently appearing on page 49 of the 1999-2001 edition.¹⁷
3. The Task Force recommends the inclusion of the statement on basic competencies and intellectual development (pp. 13-14 of this report) as part of the section, “Graduation Requirements and Academic Regulations” in the Undergraduate Catalog (pp. 48-53 of the 1999-2001 edition).
4. The Task Force recommends that the Undergraduate Catalog formally acknowledge the distinction between courses in general education designed to provide a broad approach to a particular discipline, and those that, through a more focused topical approach, provide an introduction to a methodology employed by the discipline. We recommend that the Senate Committee on Educational Policy consider distinguishing these courses by different numbering systems (for example, the first at the 100 level, the second at the 200 level).
5. The Task Force recommends that in each course submitted for course distribution credit in general education, the sponsoring department be obliged to provide a clear statement of how the course contributes to the development of one or more basic competencies. In varying degrees, depending on the content and purposes of the course, these competencies include *quantitative reasoning*, the ability to manipulate logical, mathematical, and statistical concepts; *writing*, the ability to conceptualize, draft, revise, and redraft written projects; and *oral fluency*, the ability to present ideas and concepts with clarity in a spoken form.
6. The Task Force recommends that departments be encouraged to develop upper-division seminars in the student’s major that would require the student to draw on that major in order to address a larger theme appropriate to general education. Topics could be variable and determined by departments, which would report them to the Oversight Committee (see below, B 1) but without requiring that Committee’s

¹⁷ The Task Force is not unanimous on this point. For a dissenting opinion, see the remarks of David France immediately following the main text, and a response from the Chair.

approval. A test of the foregoing competencies could be part of such a course,¹⁸ but its primary importance would be to test the student's ability to relate his or her specialty to broader intellectual and public concerns.

7. The Task Force recommends that rubrics for Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences be institutionalized for the purpose of designating those interdisciplinary and cross-college courses involving team teaching or sequential teaching by two or more faculty over two semesters, and that such courses be approved on a one-time or fixed-period (e.g. two to three year) basis to encourage maximum flexibility and creative experimentation.¹⁹
8. While the Task Force does not recommend any change in the campus-wide 6-6-6-6 requirement in general education (see page 7 of this report), it does suggest that the last six hours need not be necessarily confined to CDC courses. Acceptable courses in this category may be determined by the individual colleges, the sole stipulation being that they not fulfil the requirements in the major.

B. Structural

1. The Task Force recommends that to provide an informed basis for all proposed changes in the general education program, the Office of Academic Affairs and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, during the 1999-2000 academic year, survey students in all courses carrying CDC credit to establish (a) whether they are taking those courses specifically to fulfil the general education requirement, (b) if not, what other reasons weighed in their choice.
2. The Task Force recommends that no later than September, 2000, the electorate of the Senate elect representatives to a faculty Committee on the Oversight of General Education (hereafter the Oversight Committee). The Provost should also have the power of appointment. The composition of the Oversight Committee and terms of service should be determined by the Senate but should include at least one representative from each of the three areas of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, one representative from every college offering an undergraduate degree program, and one each from the College of Medicine and the University Library. The Oversight Committee may wish to establish subcommittees to oversee specific areas of the general education curriculum (humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, or courses fulfilling the cultural awareness and citizenship requirement), and likewise to review how specific competencies (writing, quantitative reasoning, oral fluency, etc.) are incorporated as objectives in such courses.
3. The Task Force recommends that the functions of the Oversight Committee include the following:

¹⁸ In the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, upper-division writing-in-the-disciplines courses also serve this function.

¹⁹ The reinstatement of the Humanities rubric took place while this report was in progress, and the Natural Sciences rubric already exists. The sole additional step needed is the creation of a Social Science rubric.

- (a) the review of proposals for new courses fulfilling CDC requirements at UIC, as these are forwarded by the Educational Policy Committee of the various Colleges;
 - (b) the approval, on a specific-term basis, of proposals for interdisciplinary and cross-college courses;
 - (c) the periodic review of the objectives and basic methods of courses already receiving the course distribution credit for general education purposes;
 - (d) the forwarding of recommendations for the approval of all CDC courses, other than those envisioned in subparagraph (b) above, to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy, along with recommendations to terminate any existing courses (see 5 and 6 below);
 - (e) the development of guidelines reflecting campus-wide expectations in the teaching of courses satisfying the general education requirement, and of new course proposal forms that would ask the submitting department to indicate how the course would meet those expectations;
 - (f) the provision of a comprehensive report to the campus at regular intervals (e.g. 5-7 years) assessing the general education program.²⁰
4. The Task Force recommends that the first task of the Oversight Committee during the academic year 2000-2001 be a review of all courses in the existing general education curriculum in which few or no students have indicated that they are taking those courses for CDC credit. Departments should be asked to justify the continuance of these courses on the CDC list. After concluding its task, the Oversight Committee may recommend discontinuance of one or more courses to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy.
 5. The Task Force recommends that the Oversight Committee next develop a review cycle for other existing CDC courses. At any time the Oversight Committee shall have the right to recommend termination of such credit to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy, upon appropriate notice to the sponsoring department allowing for appeal.
 6. The Task Force recommends that the Oversight Committee approve all courses proposed for CDC credit for a specific term, to be coordinated with the biennial publication of the Undergraduate Catalog, which may be for two years or for two or more increments of two years.²¹ At the end of the term, the sponsoring department

²⁰ “Assessment” in this context refers to program assessment, on the model of IBHE reviews, not the assessment of student outcomes.

²¹ This “sunset clause” means that the Oversight Committee should determine the appropriate term of approval, which may vary by type of CDC course. It does not mean that every new course receiving CDC

should provide specific justification for continuing CDC credit for a new term; otherwise CDC credit would automatically lapse.

7. The Task Force recommends that the Oversight Committee report its actions to the Provost and the Senate Committee on Educational Policy. The decisions of the Oversight Committee should normally be dispositive except where a department wishes to appeal a decision affecting a specific CDC course to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy.
8. The Task Force recommends the establishment of a Council for the Teaching of General Education, whose main purpose shall be to provide communication among tenured and tenure-track faculty regarding the goals and delivery of the program, as well as the development of proposals for the consideration of the Oversight Committee, the Senate Committee on Educational Policy, and the Office of Academic Affairs.

C. Information and Publicity

1. The Task Force recommends that for purposes of advising and publicity of general education courses, UIC formally acknowledge two categories of CDC courses, those conceived of as general and introductory and offered at the 100 level, and those which, while more specialized, nonetheless offer an appropriate general education experience at the 200 level.
2. The Task Force recommends that the Office of Academic Affairs, in consultation with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, develop a handbook for UIC students that gives practical guidance to students navigating the general education requirements; and/or that the campus develop an interactive website on general education which would serve the same purpose.
3. The Task Force recommends that any department offering courses satisfying CDC distribute guidelines for the teaching of such courses annually to all academic staff, including lecturers and teaching assistants.

D. Budgetary

1. The Task Force recommends that the Office of Academic Affairs continue to study the cost implications of decreasing the size of CDC courses to allow for more faculty-student interaction, and take steps to improve faculty-student ratios in the beginning courses.
2. Assuming that the foregoing recommendations are favorably acted upon, the Task Force recommends that the Office of Academic Affairs provide a full-time academic professional to provide staff service in the area of general education.

credit must be reviewed every two years. No change is intended in current UIC procedures under which a course at any level may cycle out of the Catalog if it is not offered within a specific time period.

3. The Task Force recommends that seed money for interdisciplinary courses in the general education program be provided by the Office of Academic Affairs in support of team teaching, including summer course preparation and the buy-out of faculty time from the contributing departments.

Mary V. Ashley, Biological Science

Faith Johnson Bonecutter, Social Work

Steven Fanning, History

June D. Ferguson, Assistant to the Dean for Student Affairs, LAS

Joan B. Fiscella, Library

David M. France, Mechanical Engineering

Wade A. Freeman, Chemistry

Neal Grossman, Philosophy

Peter B. Hales, Art History

Richard M. Johnson, Political Science

Richard F. Kosobud, Economics

Warren K. Palmer, Kinesiology

Lawrence Poston, English and LAS, Chair

Mrinalini C. Rao, Physiology and Biophysics

Brenda Russell, Academic Affairs

Leslie J. Sandlow, Medical Education

Celina Sima, Education

John P. Walsh, Sociology

Stephen E. Wiberley, Jr., Library

Curtis R. Winkle, Urban Planning and Policy

Members of the Task Force

MINORITY REPORT

I endorse the recommendations of the Task Force with the exception of the points related to expanding cultural diversity requirements for all UIC students. I believe that such changes would be a major disservice to students in the College of Engineering and, as an extension, to the University. The same disservice may occur in other colleges or programs where the curricula are predominantly fixed with little flexibility.

The cultural diversity requirement now in place at UIC derived from a mandate of the State of Illinois legislature. In many instances, it imposes a hidden three credit hour requirement for Engineering students beyond the 128 semester hours officially required for a B.S. degree in engineering. The recommendation of this Task Force to increase the cultural diversity requirement from one to two courses would increase the hidden requirement from three to six hours for many Engineering students.

The reason that the current cultural diversity requirement often becomes a hidden three hour requirement for Engineering students is related to the curricula of the ten Engineering B.S. programs, much of which come from the national engineering accreditation bodies. As a result, there are almost no free electives in the Engineering B.S. programs. Engineering students are required to take a prescribed number of humanities and social science courses, but the way to satisfy the current cultural diversity requirement without adding hours to the curriculum is to enroll in one of the few courses that satisfy the cultural diversity requirement and also carry CDC credit. This condition is a challenge for students entering UIC Engineering as freshmen, and it is often impossible for transfer students who make up a large portion of the graduating class each year. In order to service our students well, we need more courses that satisfy both requirements and not an exacerbation of the problem with an increase in the number of cultural diversity requirements required.

A second objection to the two-course cultural diversity recommendation of the Task Force is related to students' choice of subjects in the humanities and social sciences. Because there are very few courses that satisfy the current cultural diversity requirement and carry CDC credit, our students are very limited in the choice of subjects in these areas, and that is not the intent of general education at UIC. Increasing the cultural diversity requirement from one to two courses further restricts this choice for Engineering students. Under pending curricular revisions in the College of Engineering, the Task Force recommendation would focus as much as 50% of the humanities and social science courses taken by Engineering students in the area of cultural diversity, albeit the recommendation extends the definition of cultural diversity. Taking only a few courses in the humanities and social sciences, Engineering students should be allowed to choose subjects that most interest them; they achieve better and retain more.

I believe that the recommendation of the Task Force to extend the cultural diversity requirement from one to two courses is a bad one for Engineering students (and perhaps others), and should not be applied to the entire University. Many of the members of the Task Force were from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Task Force recommendation may serve better as a College requirement than a University requirement.

David M. France

REPLY

The Task Force considered Dean France's arguments seriously and at length. Elsewhere in the report (p. 7) we took notice of the fact that we did not wish to change the University floor requirement for general education, in part because we were aware of the restraints imposed on some professional colleges by their accreditation agencies. It was, however, the considered view of the majority of the Task Force members that the addition of "citizenship" courses would enlarge the pool of what the report now calls "cultural awareness" courses in no minor way: e.g., the addition, at least prospectively, of widely-subscribed courses like History 103-104 or Political Science 101, which provide an introduction to American institutions. We have also urged that the criteria for the addition of new courses to the cultural awareness and citizenship category be defined as generously as possible (p. 12). Furthermore, individual Colleges could propose courses or Study Abroad alternatives involving the internationalization of their own curriculum and speaking to the needs and interests of their own students. Finally, not all such courses need be taken within the CDC framework; they can also count as electives, depending on individual College requirements.

It is, of course, up to standing bodies of the faculty to determine whether or not to accept the recommendations of the Task Force enlarging the present cultural diversity requirement to include both "cultural awareness" (e.g. of cultures other than one's own) and "citizenship." But the Task Force recommendation is an attempt to reframe the debate in the context of a campus in which no single ethnic or racial group is dominant, and in which "diversity" means very different things depending on one's point of origin, geographical or otherwise. We believe that this is a debate worth having.

Lawrence Poston

