

**2022-23 Academic Senate Program Review of  
Undergraduate General Education**

**Internal Reviewers**

Dorothy Wiley, Review Team Chair, Undergraduate Council, Nursing

Romyar Sharifi, Undergraduate Council, Mathematics

**External Reviewers**

Sarah Kucenas, University of Virginia, Department of Biology

Andrew Perrin, Johns Hopkins University, Department of Sociology

**Date of Site Visit:** November 3 & 4, 2022

**Approved by Undergraduate Council:** June 2, 2023

**Appendix I:** External Reviewers' Reports

**Appendix II:** Site Visit Schedule

Note: The Self-Review Report has been previously distributed. If you would like a copy, please contact [programreview@senate.ucla.edu](mailto:programreview@senate.ucla.edu).

## **INTRODUCTION**

The review committee reviewed the General Education (GE) Program at UCLA on Thursday and Friday, November 3 and 4, 2022. The review team included two internal reviewers, Dr. Dorothy Wiley of the UCLA School of Nursing and Dr. Romyar Sharifi of the Department of Mathematics, as representatives of the Undergraduate Council. The external reviewers were Dr. Sarah Kucenas of the University of Virginia and Dr. Andrew Perrin of Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Kucenas led the implementation of a faculty-led general education curriculum revision at U. Virginia, and Dr. Perrin led an extensive *reimagining* of General Education at the University of North Carolina before accepting his current appointment.

Dr. Wiley chaired the review. All participants collaborated with the study team in person or via ZOOM private meetings. A copy of the site visit schedule, including preliminary discussions between the internal review committee and key stakeholders, is enclosed (Appendix I).

The Academic Senate adopted and implemented the GE Program in 2002-03. A joint committee between the administration and the Academic Senate was adopted in 2008 by then Dean Judith Smith. The most recent program reviews of the Foundation areas were conducted successively across three academic years beginning in 2014: Scientific Inquiry (2014-15), Society and Culture (2016-17), and Arts and Humanities (2018-19). Additionally, the GE Clusters program was reviewed in 2011-12.

### **Recent GE Academic Senate Reviews:**

Across three reviews, some unifying themes were present. Repeatedly participants identify weaknesses in the new-course evaluation and periodic course reevaluation processes for GE courses as a problem. Over the period, the GE Governance Committee (GEGC) designed and implemented a new proposal form (2016-17). The form to approve new or revised courses was most recently updated in 2022, and the new-course submission guidelines are posted on a [public-facing university website](#). Learning goals and outcomes for each foundation area are published as appendices.

Across 2 of 3 prior reviews, training for Teaching Assistants (TAs) was underscored. For example, the 2016-17 review reported an absence of required TA training, that structured opportunities were limited, and that training provided was delegated to departments. Following these reviews, the Center for Advancement of Teaching (CAT) was charged with improving TA training in the GE curriculum and throughout the University. TA training by CAT was required beginning in 2022-23; TA training concerns for GE curriculum deserve follow-up by administrative and Academic Senate leadership.

The 2014-15 review of the Foundations in Scientific Inquiry (SI) program identified curricular needs, especially for developing new courses for non-science majors. Following the review, an *ad hoc* committee was formed to assess the impact of the GE-SI curriculum. Committee members specified essential features of any GE-SI course: introductory knowledge of scientific inquiry, including epistemology, relevance, and information literacy. Members outlined the importance of teaching release, summer salary support, or FTE allocations to underwrite course creation and implementation. The Undergraduate Council (UgC) closed the program review in 2018.

The 2016-17 Foundations in Society and Culture (SC) program review identified poor communication of the purpose and aims of GE to students. The GEGC and the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education were asked to develop a method of conveying the mission and vision of general education to first-year students during *New Student Orientation* and in course syllabi. Inservice education programs were proposed as a forum for communication with course faculty members. Nonetheless, communication between stakeholders may be ongoing for departments, course faculty members, and other academic leaders. In addition, class sizes were often cited as a problem. However, large classes might be unavoidable due to budgetary constraints. The report notes the critical contribution of GE-SC courses in helping students fulfill the University's diversity requirement. The review was closed by the UgC in 2019.

The 2018-19 Foundations in Arts and Humanities (AH) program review again identified communication problems between key stakeholders as a problem. The Assistant Vice Provost of New Student and Transition Programs was asked to develop new modes of communication between departments, faculty members, staff, and students. The review team identified curriculum drift as a problem associated with course transitions between faculty members. GEGC created learning goals for the Arts and Humanities Foundation area that were communicated to faculty members. Most GE courses are managed at the department level, except for the Cluster Program. Faculty orientation is delegated to the departments, and curriculum may drift when departments inconsistently manage the transition from one GE-course faculty member to another. The need for one faculty member to teach course objectives developed by another may cause incoherence in the curriculum.

### **The General Education Program Self-Review.**

A consolidated self-review was recommended in 2018 by Dean and Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education Patricia Turner, approximately 15 years after the current model of distributive General Education was implemented. An *ad hoc* faculty committee was appointed and reviewed the history of the curriculum, the consecutive 8-year review reports of the Foundations, and information about the general education curriculum taught by peer institutions.

The faculty *ad hoc* committee identified responsibility *and* governance, mission and vision, communication, budget, department relationships with the Cluster Program, and the space and financial support for laboratory-based (GE) courses as problems in the General Education program. The report praises the Cluster Program for acclimating first-year students to the University. The Cluster Program supports systematic, rapid completion of required courses during the first year using a coherent narrative over three consecutive quarters. Overall, the Committee expressed positive regard for the variety of courses, student exposure to new disciplines, and the foundational learning that supports majors at UCLA. Nonetheless, some mismatch exists between the many GE courses appearing in the university catalog and student perceptions that their selection of courses is limited. In addition, outside of the Cluster Program, colleagues characterized the GE curriculum as having no beginning, middle, or end to the experience. The role of writing within GE appears unclear, and the purpose and importance of GE in the university experience need to be better communicated to students.

The self-review expands on difficulties with GE governance that might be resolved with curriculum revisions. For example, the GE Governance Committee (GEGC) is jointly appointed by the Academic Senate and the administration at UCLA. GEGC reviews applications for new and renewing courses and advises the Undergraduate Council leadership and members.

While the self-review team agreed that the GE Foundations seem well delineated, they noted that departments often disagree with one another, as well as with the GEGC, about the Foundation(s) assigned to GE-designated courses. *Foundations* only appear in the General Education curriculum at UCLA, possibly leading to the perception by students that courses are classified arbitrarily into these *bins*.

The final recommendations of the *ad hoc* committee report propose that the University appoint a GE Taskforce to develop a curriculum focused on contemporary societal challenges by fall 2023. The report stresses the importance of improving the structure and governance of General Education at UCLA by charging a Dean or Provost with responsibility for oversight and execution of the curriculum. While the Committee identified programmatic strengths of the current curriculum, they emphasize the significance of developing new goals, a clear mission, and a more vertical, integrative structure over the introductory, distributive model that is now in place\*. In addition, the Committee endorsed an expanded Cluster Program and advised integrating the current writing and diversity requirements for the College and Schools into the GE. Nonetheless, the report does not address other *GE-like* required courses at UCLA (i.e., American History and Institutions, quantitative reasoning, foreign language).

### **UCLA General Education: Individual student elective courses and the *Cluster Program***

Several areas were central to this review by the Academic Senate members and external reviewers. Traditional GE was described by many as a series of courses in three foundational areas that were taught by departments and selected by students to fulfill the number and content areas set out by the faculty. Some faculty colleagues advised that the traditional approach supports large, introductory courses that familiarize students with ideas and disciplines they might not have otherwise considered.

Some GE requirements vary across Schools and discipline-specific programs. While the University provides digital tools to assist students in making their choices, the number of options and skills required for success may be daunting for some students. This mix-and-match approach may appeal to students who favor choice over all other characteristics.

Elimination of the traditional choice-based GE curriculum causes great concern for some departments. Without this service teaching, enrollment in smaller departments may plummet, and graduate student support may dwindle significantly.

**The UCLA (GE) Cluster Program** has rooted in several GE Foundation areas. The program coordinates a series of interdisciplinary three-course sequences that suffice up to three GE requirements and the Writing 2 requisite at UCLA. GE governance of the *Cluster Program* was identified as an important area of concern in the review, and participants promoted no single solution. Most suggested that the current budgeting and course teaching approaches in the Cluster Program do not match their need. For example, centralized administration and budget control by the Dean of Undergraduate Education might support faculty teaching assignments better than budget allocations distributed directly to departments for GE teaching. Careful planning and stakeholder engagement are essential to the GE Program's success, irrespective of the curricular design, administrative structure, or budgeting model employed.

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\* Kathy J. Wolfe (2015) Curriculum Reform as Adaptive Leadership Challenge, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 47:3, 62-65, DOI: [10.1080/00091383.2015.1040713](https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2015.1040713)

External reviewers pointed to the Cluster Program's advantages to some students: an intensive first-year experience that might enhance opportunities for connection with peers and faculty members. For example, programming implemented at the University of Virginia provides for small seminars where students interact repeatedly with a single faculty member. Cluster courses may be most helpful for students transitioning to an R1 university. In addition, the *Cluster Program* may provide coordinated interdisciplinary experiences that broaden a student's horizons, pique their interest in unanticipated areas, and affect their major course of study.

**Many review participants highly valued individual courses selected by students.**

Individual departments provide a large number of GE courses for undergraduate education. The University provides students with a [list of eligible courses](#) for each Foundation area (e.g., Arts and Humanities), subclassified by categories (e.g., Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Analysis and Practice), and (further) by all GE courses vs. specific subject areas (e.g., African American Studies). Students also have the opportunity to limit their search to classes that might meet multiple undergraduate-study requirements, such as Writing II or Diversity requirements. Although graduation rates suggest students navigate this system successfully, outside reviewers underscored the cumbersome nature of the listings, classifications, and guidance needed to meet all minimum requirements for an undergraduate degree that extend beyond General Education courses ([UC Graduation Requirements](#)). These requirements include *entry-level writing*, *American History and Institutions*, and *Language other than English*. Departments, Schools, and the College may modify particular features of these requirements.

**Numerous loosely-linked, GE-like academic courses required** for graduation are complicated and appear fractionalized. *University Requirements* include entry-level writing that can be fulfilled by examination or coursework and at least one *American History and Institutions* course. The *College Requirements* include

- Writing I and II,
- quantitative reasoning,
- foreign language,
- a diversity requirement, and
- a series of classes that fulfill three General Education Foundations.

Most Professional Schools at UCLA have adopted the College Requirements. The logic of this approach is poorly conveyed to students, and the requirements more closely resemble a series of checklists than thematically-linked courses. The review team discussed including required writing, history/institutions, and language courses in their reconceptualization of *General Education*, especially for those with limited experience navigating complex systems.

## **STRENGTHS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

The GE program is supported by the Academic Senate's GE Governance (Chair, Dr. Victor Bascara), the Undergraduate Dean, Dr. Adriana Galvan, and their staff members. In addition, an Ad-hoc Self Review Committee, chaired by Dr. Troy Carter, collaborated with colleagues to synthesize the self-review report. Overall, the three Foundations of GE are well described in the [University catalog](#) and course master list [website](#).

Interviews with faculty members and their leadership showed broad support for the Cluster Program and individual department-based GE courses. Faculty members teaching in the Cluster Program articulated the many strengths of offering a multidisciplinary 3-course series that may fulfill three Foundation and a Writing 2 requirement. Other faculty members strongly supported a mix-and-match approach that allows students to achieve their General Education requirements through various courses offered by departments. Faculty members and students spoke positively about both types of GE offerings.

## **GOALS AND PLANS**

Interviews with the Dean of Undergraduate Education and their staff, the GE Governance Chair and Committee members, the GE faculty committee, and the faculty's self-review strongly supported revising the General Education curriculum. Nonetheless, our external reviewers advised that the University administration and the Academic Senate evaluate resource availability, commitment to a multi-year process, and a procedure that could empower faculty members to re-envision General Education and other curricular requirements at UCLA.

## **AREAS IN NEED OF ATTENTION**

- An administrative structure and *home* for General Education at UCLA seems essential to its curricular coherence, especially if UCLA reimagines the program. Currently, departments and an administrator for the Cluster Program administer the GE program in collaboration with the faculty, the Undergraduate Dean, and their staff.
- A coherent structure for General Education might best include required courses not housed currently within the program: writing, diversity, and *GE-like* required courses that fulfill American History and Institutions, quantitative reasoning, and foreign language requirements.
- The oversight of the development and approval of the Education *curriculum* appears inconsistent to faculty members, departments, and students.
- Resource availability, institutional commitment, and procedures to revise GE and other curricular *requirements* are still under discussion.
- Departments with a significant stake in the service teaching in the current GE curriculum may need clarification about their continued well-being.

## **CONCLUSION**

We applaud the GE faculty committee, the Dean of Undergraduate Education and their staff, the GE Governance Chair, and Committee members for their thoughtful self-review and eagerness to embark on the General Education redesign. We look forward to their collaboration with faculty members to solve this challenge.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are organized by category. Recommendations are prioritized within each category.

### **To the Executive Vice Chancellor/Provost (EVCP):**

1. Facilitate collaborative planning between leadership and faculty members to sustain GE excellence at UCLA.
2. Collaborate with the Dean of Undergraduate Education to develop a plan to home General Education within a sustainable administrative structure that supports excellence and transparency

### **To the Dean of Undergraduate Education:**

1. Continue collaborating with faculty members at all levels across campus to support reform for General Education and other curricular requirements (Writing, Diversity, etc.) Facilitate collaboration among colleagues and students to design a contemporary approach to General Education at UCLA.
2. Collaborate with the EVCP to develop a unified and sustainable administrative structure to support excellence and transparency for GE and related curricular requirements.
3. Consider formation of a GE Development Task Force to evaluate the potential benefits and risks of engaging an experienced GE curriculum facilitator as an initial step. Consider the timing and the role of an external expert as an advisor to those coordinating General Education reforms.
4. Facilitate collaboration and coalition-building across campus to construct a unified General Education curriculum that advances academic excellence at UCLA.

**FINAL RECOMMENDATION:** The Council recommends that the Dean of Undergraduate Education submit progress report on decisions and actions resulting from the 2022-23 review in Spring, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,

Dorothy Wiley, Review Team Chair, Undergraduate Council, Nursing

Romyar Sharifi, Undergraduate Council, Mathematics

**Appendix I: External Reviewers' Reports**

*Andrew Perrin, Johns Hopkins University, Sociology*

*Sarah Kucenas, University of Virginia, Biology*





November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Professor Dorothy Wiley  
Chair, Academic Senate Program Review of General Education  
Undergraduate Council  
School of Nursing  
c/o UCLA Academic Senate Office

Dear Dottie,

It was a pleasure and honor to serve with you, Dr. Romyar Sharifi (UCLA, Undergraduate Council, Mathematics), and Dr. Andrew Perrin (Johns Hopkin University, External Reviewer, Sociology) as the team to review UCLA's Undergraduate General Education (GE) Program. I greatly enjoyed the two days we spent together meeting with faculty, students, and staff affiliated with the program. You have a very special community. Below, I will provide my input with regards to some major issues/themes raised in the review and offer some feedback based on my experience here at UVA when we went through a similar process when we reimagined our undergraduate GE programming. I hope it goes without saying that these are my own thoughts that were collected in a short visit from a distance. The Academic Senate, Deans, Provost, and faculty who run these programs should view them as an outsider's perspective, not directives. There are many ways to do GE well, and I have no doubt UCLA will continue to build its program in a way that makes it uniquely UCLA and uniquely suited to build your students into citizen leaders for the future. Feel free to reach out if you'd like more detail or clarification in any area I describe below.

**Definition of GE at UCLA:**

Before arriving to UCLA for my visit, the Academic Senate shared with me resources about your GE requirements and affiliated programs. What first struck me was the diffuse nature of your GE into various bins: GE (which includes Foundations in Arts and Humanities, Society and Culture, and Scientific Inquiry), a Diversity Requirement, a Foreign Language Requirement, and a Writing II Requirement. Just from the description of these elements, it was easy to see how GE is viewed not as a singular element in a student's educational trajectory, but several distributed elements that appear unconnected. This perception was reenforced when the committee met with various stakeholders throughout the visit. When asked what GE was at UCLA, no one was able to clearly articulate what it was conceptually, its purpose, or why it was described by a series of elements where one was formally called GE and the rest were described separately. From the perspective of an institution (UVA) who recently undertook reimagination of our GE experience, spending time to answer these fundamental questions will make the subsequent discussions of how to achieve the goals of this curriculum easier. Additionally, once GE is defined by your community, then it can be evolved to create a curricular experience that sets UCLA apart from other institutions that students may consider attending. Finally, I know from conversations with several leaders at your institution that UCLA is also deeply investing in inclusive pedagogy and becoming a Hispanic serving institution. These initiatives align perfectly with a deep reimagination of GE at UCLA and have the potential to be an agent of change for your institution and your students.

From my perspective, aligning all of the various requirements under a single umbrella called GE would go a long way with helping students and faculty understand the purpose of these requirements and make it easier to tell a narrative as to why UCLA views these components as essential for successful students. Right now, these

disparate requirements don't feel integrated, and the students interpret them as boxes to check as opposed to a cohesive experience that enhances their disciplinary studies.

### **The Cluster Program at UCLA:**

One of the most exciting parts of UCLA's GE is the Cluster Program. Currently, as I understand it, this program is elective, and students can choose to participate from any of 10 Clusters. By doing so, they not only join a year-long learning community based on a shared interest with other students and faculty, they also receive 4 GE credits towards their requirements. During the visit, we heard nearly unanimous support for the Cluster Program. So much support in fact, that several students and faculty went as far to say that all incoming first-year students should be required to take a Cluster. As someone from UVA, I see the benefit in this. We recently reimagined our first-year GE experience and in Fall 2023 (we're up to 75% participation right now – we did a gradual scale-up), all incoming students will take a year-long set of Engagements courses that serve a similar purpose to your Clusters. The benefits are many, but an important one which is lacking for students who don't participate, is an integration of some of the GE requirements into a theme that is visible and accessible to them. We heard feedback about how the students appreciated the obvious and intentional weaving of GE elements through the course as well as the community they felt by being with the same students for a year. The faculty in these courses echoed these sentiments, resoundingly conveying how much they enjoy team teaching and being in an educational community with faculty outside of their disciplines.

Despite these strengths, there are some structural issues that make expansion of this program challenging. Importantly, I don't think they are insurmountable, but we heard from some faculty challenges that arise from departments supporting teaching in the Clusters. The main concern is that by teaching in Cluster, those faculty often have a teaching load reduction in their home departments which can cause issues if the faculty member usually covers a large course. If those large GE courses are then missing from the curriculum because the faculty cannot teach them, then the department does not get compensated for the number of seats of lost instruction, which can negatively affect small departments whose GE classes financially support them. Interestingly, even if a department does not have a faculty member teaching in a Cluster they can still be negatively affected. This is because Cluster courses give students 4 GE credits which means they don't have to take additional disciplinary GE classes. Therefore, departments may actually see fewer students enroll because they are satisfying their credits elsewhere.

From these perspectives we heard during our visit, there are actually roadblocks to participation in GE and an unexpected incentive placed on departments to NOT participate in the Cluster program in order to financially sustain themselves. I can't speak for the resources of the university or if there is an appetite to financially support departments in different and unique ways. However, GE and by proxy, your students, will flourish if there are structural and equitable incentives for participation.

### **GE Leadership:**

Much like the diffuse nature of the definition, purpose, and requirements of GE at UCLA, the leadership and "ownership" of GE is also diffuse. It appears as if there are several, independent heads of portions of the GE that make unification and integration cumbersome. In my opinion, in order to move to an integrated model of GE that is dynamic and responsive to an ever-changing world landscape, a single leadership structure is needed. After meeting and speaking with Deans Harris and Galvan, a structure that places a reimagined and integrated GE under Dean Galvan's auspices makes sense. In this scenario, there can still be a Clusters Program Director(s) that are faculty (tenure-track or general) that guide the programming with support and resources from the Dean. Additionally, after speaking with the GEAC, I think this committee, while doing an important service of vetting and approving new GE courses, could be have its role expanded and given more autonomy to work with the Dean and Clusters Program to assess, guide, and continue to innovate within the GE programming. Speaking with the Chair of the GEAC, Dr. Bascara, there seemed to be an appetite for a deeper and more meaningful engagement of this committee beyond course approvals (but I agree this is a very important role in of itself). Creating a united and integrated leadership model that puts faculty at the center of GE programming, but with sustained and appropriate resources and support from a centralized office would not only create a real integration of GE programming into a single unit but would also likely allow for a simplified flow of financial support and

resources to these programs and departments. And importantly, I don't think a whole new structure needs to be created. Dean Galvan's office, in collaboration with Dean Harris are obvious places to begin this consolidation.

### **Task Force for GE:**

From reading the last external review report in conjunction with the internal review committee's assessment of GE at UCLA, there appears to be a deep and profound engagement of the faculty with GE and a desire to do things even better. Importantly, GE at UCLA isn't broken. And that is what we found at UVA when we began reimagining our curriculum. Our students graduated, got great jobs, enjoyed being alumni, and everything worked. UCLA is very much in the same position. However, what we realized, and what your internal committee sees, is an opportunity to do even better by your students. Higher education hasn't changed dramatically, at least the GE portion of it, for decades across this country. Interestingly, we innovate in our disciplinary labs and classrooms, create new interdisciplinary programs to break down silos and create new fields for our students and ourselves, yet we often leave GE alone because it isn't broken. I encourage you to empower and support a task force of students (undergrad and grad), faculty (general and tenure-track), and staff to do a deep dive on what GE is to UCLA. Back to my first points – Charge this group to define what it is at UCLA. What it's purpose is for your students. And create something that is uniquely UCLA. The timing seems perfect from my perspective given the current Bruin Budget Model discussions, the impending designation as a Hispanic serving institution, and your continued work on inclusive pedagogy. GE is something every single student that passes through your institution will touch. Now is the opportunity to harness the innovation and creativity of your community to enhance your programming to create a learning experience that changes not only your students, but your faculty and staff as well. Realistically, this kind of work can take years. So I encourage you to be mindful of that timeline and allow the students and faculty the time to do this work necessary to set GE up for continued success at UCLA.

### **Challenges:**

I'm not naïve to imagine that this kind of work is easy or is free. We went through a similar process here at UVA and it included years of discussion before the first changes were made, a multi-year pilot program, intense assessment, and the lucky recruitment of a donor to financially support faculty and departments as we made our transition from a check-box, distributed model to something more student-centered, intentionally-designed, and integrated. Ultimately, there is a finite budget and resources must be distributed. But I think if creative incentive structures and adequate support are provided, departments will be more willing to support a change in structure like requiring all students to take a Cluster. Most of the resistance we heard to this notion, and the idea of changing GE at all, revolved around how it would financially hurt departments. While I appreciate this (we all ultimately live in departments) that is not a pedagogical reason to not continue to evolve GE. That is where centralized leadership and resources can come in to uniquely support units. Here at UVA each department negotiates individually with the Dean when discussing participation in our Engagements programming in our GE curriculum. The resources are there, but each department needs different things at different times and there is flexibility built into the system while at the same time, at least a 3-year plan so projections can be made. Additionally, it is important to consider graduate education at the same time as you consider your GE. They contribute significantly as TAs and any growth or change in your GE will ultimately affect the graduate students and will likely require more TAs. However, with this challenge, I'm sure unique solutions can be found, and you're already doing that by having TAs teach their own quarter in the Clusters, which is a unique and exciting opportunity for them. Finally, I applaud UCLA for creating a Diversity requirement as part of the GE. I understand it was not an easy process and it appears less specific than I imagine many wish it was. A challenge will be to enhance this component and weave it through every aspect of GE. As a standalone requirement, it is getting highlighted which is important. However, by standing alone, it is also being siloed out as something that can exist outside of other work, which I think we all agree is not how diversity should be viewed. I appreciate we are all still working to conceive of systems that weave DEI into all that we do. I look forward to watching how you take this requirement forward, if you choose to, during your GE work.

### **Final Thoughts:**

I truly enjoyed my visit to UCLA, and I loved learning about your GE and meeting you students, faculty, and staff. You have an excellent program with innovative programming already started (Clusters). Continual evolution of

this programming will allow UCLA to create something truly exceptional. I see GE as a way to set the stage for creating citizen leaders of the future. As a public institution, UCLA, like UVA, has a unique mission to serve the public of our states. Using GE as a change agent for UCLA and California is a powerful thought. GE also tightly aligns with inclusive pedagogy and with UCLA becoming a Hispanic serving institution, allows for a model of higher education that enhances and embraces diversity and will serve as a model for other state institutions on how to best serve our communities. Finally, although GE is sometimes seen as the only tool to recruit students into disciplines (and this thought was shared with us by faculty during our visit), I encourage you to view GE as a way to show bridges and connections between disciplines. Students now don't just want degrees in Biology or Anthropology. They want skillsets that cut across disciplines and allow them to imagine new fields, new career trajectories, and new challenges to solve. GE is the way to help students see (and create on their own) these connections which ultimately are not only important for their own futures but allow the faculty and staff of the institution to grow and innovate as well.

With the battle over the worth and importance of higher education raging across the country, it is imperative that we innovate and craft curricula in our institutions that combats those who speak out against the importance of a liberal arts and sciences education. I'm proud to be part of that change here at UVA, and I'm honored to have spent two days with you seeing how you are in the fight with us. I look forward to seeing all of the new ways you innovate your GE programming and hope to see many of your again in the future.

If there is anything else I can provide, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Best,



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Academic Senate  
University of California, Los Angeles

November 18, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

On November 3-4, 2022, I participated in a site visit at UCLA for the Senate's review of undergraduate General Education at UCLA. I appreciated the opportunity to speak with administrators, faculty, staff, graduate workers, and undergraduate students about their experiences and understandings of the current General Education curriculum and the proposal(s) for future reform.

In this letter I will address the current set of requirements for undergraduates at UCLA; feedback we heard from stakeholders about the current requirements as well as the proposal(s) for reform; a framework for a possible redesign; and process advice for such a redesign. To foreshadow: while the current general education curriculum has some strong elements – specifically, the cluster program and the disciplinary spread it provides – it is not conceptually integrated and it is not centrally funded or administered. These problems deserve to be fixed even if no large-scale redesign is undertaken. However, there is significant pedagogical opportunity for such a large-scale redesign, and I think UCLA may find long-term benefit from beginning a redesign process.

### **Current General Education and Other Undergraduate Requirements**

The current UCLA General Education curriculum branches into two parts: a traditional “cafeteria” style general education track and the UCLA Clusters program. In either program, students encounter a range of different disciplinary perspectives. In addition,



though not formally called General Education, students must complete a two-semester writing requirement, a requirement for quantitative literacy, and a requirement for diversity. An ad hoc committee has recommended that UCLA require all students to take clusters and that the traditional general education requirements be jettisoned in favor of the clusters.

The more traditional route is for students to take several courses from a menu of departmentally-organized courses identified as meeting general education requirements. Generally, students must take one course in the humanities and the social sciences and two courses in sciences, though these requirements differ for students in different schools.

The UCLA Clusters is a widely-respected program that allows students to take a coordinated series of courses taught by teams that bring several (usually three) disciplines to bear on a common topic: the 1960s, for example, or Evolution, or Food. Students earn a full complement of general education requirements as well as credit for one of the two writing requirements.

Support for the cluster program was widespread and robust. Most stakeholders said they appreciated the interdisciplinary opportunities both for instructors and for students, and the themes allowed students to explore new ideas and directions they otherwise might not have. Particularly for low-income and first generation students, an intensive first-year experience such as the clusters may help with adjustment to college and with broadening intellectual aspirations.

### **Feedback from Stakeholders**

While there was no general sense that the curriculum was in terrible shape, there were many concerns raised about the traditional general education courses and some concerns about the clusters.

Concerns raised about the cluster program focused mostly on its implementation. Financial support for clusters has apparently dropped substantially in recent years, making it a burden on departments to provide instructors for clusters. An instructor who can teach a regular, departmental large course can bring in much more enrollment-based funding than the same instructor teaching in a cluster. For related reasons, fewer Senate faculty teach in the clusters than would be desirable, particularly for a program aimed in part at introducing new students to intellectual and academic

life. Other stakeholders noted that it is difficult for students to schedule around the three-term cluster requirement, and that some student groups (e.g., student athletes) find it particularly difficult.

The traditional general education courses also were supported by several stakeholders, particularly faculty from humanities departments. These courses are typically (though not always) large, introductory courses that serve at once to introduce students to areas they might not otherwise have explored and, at the same time, to provide instructional revenue to departments that might not otherwise attract large numbers of students. Several faculty members expressed the concern that revising these general education requirements could be disastrous for their enrollments and therefore graduate student support.

Faculty involved in the GEGC, which considers new and revised general education courses for inclusion in the curriculum, felt they understood what made a course eligible for inclusion. However, some faculty said they had experienced inconsistent and confusing responses from the committee. Moreover, the published guidelines for inclusion do not seem directly related to the committee's judgment on course reviews. Those guidelines themselves are also vague, multifaceted, and in several cases quite unrealistic, which probably leads to the confusion over which courses to include. The science guidelines, for one example, include a full page of goals and sub-goals, some of which are essentially about attitudes toward science, while others are about scientific process or content. Meanwhile, the diversity requirement offers nearly no guidelines as to what constitutes learning about diversity. Finally, the sheer number of course offerings that meet one or more general education requirements is very large, which makes it difficult to determine the extent to which each actually meets general education requirements.

Even if UCLA elects not to pursue a comprehensive redesign of its general education curriculum, I would recommend a few changes to make the curriculum more transparent and focused:

- (1) bring all undergraduate requirements (including those for writing, quantitative reasoning, and diversity) under the organizational umbrella of general education
- (2) systematically revise the learning goals for each of the requirements, focusing on outcomes that are measurable, realistic, and intellectually ambitious



(3) place general education under a specific administrative office and a specific faculty committee responsible for overseeing, measuring, and potentially revising the curriculum

(4) transparently identify a funding stream for general education and use this stream to incentivize departments and instructors to teach clusters and/or general education courses without losing funding

### **A Substantive Framework for General Education Redesign**

I do think, though, that UCLA has an opportunity to be bold and innovative by redesigning general education to meet intellectual ambitions and interdisciplinary challenges for current students. My advice, therefore, is that UCLA build on the ad hoc committee's recommendations to undertake a thorough redesign of its general education curriculum. In what follows I will offer some substantive considerations, followed by process considerations for achieving that outcome. The four recommendations above are necessary components of a broader redesign, so I will not repeat them here.

The most important question for a redesign is: *what should general education do for UCLA students?* Focusing the question in that way encourages an emphasis on students' needs, not the needs of faculty or departments. It also raises the possibility that general education need not be organized along disciplinary lines, since those lines are more about how faculty think than about what students need.

Every university is different, both in the composition and needs of its student body and in the resources (faculty, staff, physical, and traditional) it has at its disposal. While UCLA should strive to learn from other universities' curricular innovations (including those at UNC Chapel Hill, the University of Virginia, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, BU, Purdue, and the University of Illinois at Chicago), its curriculum will ultimately differ from those others for many good reasons.

UCLA is an extraordinarily large and diverse university, with more avenues of study than any new student can possibly comprehend – even very well prepared students are likely to gravitate toward fields they experienced in high school or have at least heard of before college. Students with less cultural capital will be even more likely to stick to areas they believe they understand or that they expect to yield high post-graduation salaries. Thus I recommend that any new curriculum seriously and thoughtfully





introduce first-year students to the university, help them explore new ideas within it, and reassure them that they will be employable upon graduation regardless of the major they choose. There are different models for doing this, and the existing cluster program serves some of these functions admirably, so a thoughtful expansion of the cluster program could play that role. Other approaches include a dedicated “college thriving” or “University 101” course; required first-year seminars; and other specially-designed experiences. These can also provide a small-course experience that allows students to get to know a faculty member well and to build connections with other incoming students.

While most faculty are well-versed in the disciplinary differences that organize their work and lives, most students are not. Furthermore, the things they need to know and be able to do are not generally neatly organized into such disciplines. UCLA’s College of Arts & Sciences alone houses 46 separate departments and programs – not to mention the departments housed in the several professional schools. While each of these units presumably offers world-class courses taught by world-class faculty, you need some additional process to determine which of these many courses students should take and why they should take them. Asking what students need from their curriculum provides that additional focus. It should be noted, by the way, that what students need is different from what they *want*. A curriculum necessarily requires work of students that they are independently looking for.

Finally, consider additional requirements that might help students synthesize what they’ve learned in general education, the major, and any minors. Writing is an existing strength at UCLA; do students need instruction in other forms of communication (e.g., digital, visual, oral)? Should they encounter practical skills like basic financial literacy, health, or creativity? Do they need to experience on-campus events like lectures, political discussions, arts performances, etc.? How about community-based learning? Questions like these can only be answered based on the faculty, students, and resources at UCLA in specific, but they should be considered systematically.

Regardless of these design decisions, curricula will change over time as students, resources, and the environment change. Maintaining quality will require consistent oversight, and ensuring access to the curriculum will require both administrative attention and a consistent funding stream dedicated to general education specifically.

Overall I am impressed with the clusters program, and I see the advantage in expanding it to be the main focus of general education. It has a distinguished history at UCLA, and most of those participating in it find it excellent. However, it would be important:

- to determine how much of the overall ambition of general education the clusters can actually achieve;
- to fund the clusters adequately to allow Senate faculty to teach in them and departments to participate;
- to expand the number of clusters available to accommodate the full incoming class.

I recommend considering the expansion of clusters as one part of a more general redesign process for general education.

### **Process Considerations for General Education Redesign**

Redesigning a general education curriculum is an exciting, intellectually ambitious goal. It is also threatening to groups (faculty, student, alumni, etc.) who are committed for one reason or another to the existing curriculum. And it is vulnerable to the cynicism expressed by many faculty toward *any* administrative process.

Most importantly, every possible stakeholder must have an opportunity to participate meaningfully in the redesign process. That includes current and former faculty and students; alumni; staff; employers; graduate and professional schools; governing bodies; and more. But they should be encouraged to focus their input on the collective goal of an excellent curriculum, not on the specific needs of their group or unit. In other words: ask participants to act as citizens of the university, not of their own specific discipline, area, or group. Expect, at a minimum, a three-year process of consultation, design, and deliberation before a new curriculum can be adopted.

Beyond the need to fund general education transparently and directly, it's also important for the administration to "hold harmless" departments that made investments in the prior system as they work to adapt to the new one. Consider a budget process that will guarantee departments stable funding over the first three years of the curriculum as they work to design courses and provide instructors to populate the new curriculum.



An important, understudied question for curricula is to understand if they are working – if the students they graduate use their experiences and skills in the workplace, the public square, and their families – and what revisions they may periodically need. Empowering a faculty committee and an administrative office to manage and consider revisions can make sure the curriculum is consistent with current evidence, and can save the headache of a complete redesign in the near future.

### **Conclusion**

I think UCLA is in excellent position for an ambitious redesign of its general education curriculum; I've provided some recommendations both for content and for process above. I think such a project can be a real point of intellectual connection. Even if UCLA decides not to embark on such a process, though, there are some more immediate things I recommend doing to address specific shortcomings in the current curriculum.

Thank you for the opportunity to review UCLA's general education curriculum and offer recommendations. I have enjoyed learning about UCLA and the dedicated faculty who work on the curriculum.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew J. Perrin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew J. Perrin

## **Appendix II: Site Visit Schedule**

**Academic Senate Program Review**  
**General Education**  
**Site Visit Dates: November 3-4, 2022**

**Review Team Members:**

**Dorothy Wiley**, Review Team Chair, Undergraduate Council, Nursing  
**Romyar Sharifi**, Undergraduate Council, Mathematics  
**Sarah Kucenas**, Biology, University of Virginia  
**Andrew Perrin**, Sociology, Johns Hopkins University

**November 3, 2022:**

- 10:45-11:00 Check-in and review orientation with Academic Senate staff
- 11:00-11:50 Meeting with Academic Dean **Adriana Galván**
- 11:50-12:00 Break
- 12:00-1:50 Lunch meeting with the General Education Governance Committee Chair **Victor Bascara** and Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education Initiatives **Leigh Harris**
- 1:50-2:00 Break
- 2:00-3:00 Meeting with the Chair of the Ad-hoc Self Review Committee **Troy Carter** and members of the committee
- [Robert Fink](#), Assoc Dean Academic Affairs, HASoM
  - [Abel Valenzuela](#), Interim Dean of Social Sciences (attending from 2:30-3:00)
- 3:00-4:00 Meetings with representative groups of faculty
- 3:00-3:15
- [Monica L. Smith](#), Professor of Anthropology, Navin and Pratima Doshi Chair in Indian Studies
    - ANTH 2 Introduction to Archeology (*Society and Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
  - [Sander Goldberg](#), Distinguished Research Professor of Classics
    - Cluster 30 Neverending Stories (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Philosophical and Linguistic Analysis, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
    - Classics 10 Discovering Greeks (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis*)
- 3:15-3:30
- [Professor Kavner](#), Professor of Earth, Planetary, and Space Sciences
    - EPSS 9 Solar System and Planets (*Scientific Inquiry: Physical Sciences*)
  - [Amy Rowat](#), Associate Professor of Integrative Biology & Physiology, Vice Chair of Master's Program, Marcie H. Rothman Presidential Chair in Food Studies
    - PHYSI7 Science and Food (*Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences*)
  - [David Blank](#), Professor of Classics
    - Cluster 48 Political Violence in Modern World (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
    - Classics 148 Early Greek Medicine and Thought (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Philosophical and Linguistic Analysis*)

3:30-3:45

- [Michelle Rensel](#), Professor of Society and Genetics
  - Cluster 71 Biotechnology and Society (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
- [Kathleen McHugh](#), Professor of English
  - FTV 4 Introduction to Art and Technique of Filmmaking (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice*)
  - FTV 50 Introduction to Visual Culture (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice*)
- [Zrinka Stahuljak](#), Professor of European Languages and Transcultural Studies
  - Cluster 21 History of Modern Thought (*Arts & Humanities: Philosophical and Linguistic Analysis, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)

3:45-4:00

- [Amy Ruth Catlin](#), Adjunct Professor, Ethnomusicology
  - Ethnomusicology 45 Music of Bollywood and Beyond (*Arts & Humanities: Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice*)
- [Kirsten Turlo](#), Continuing Lecturer, Biomedical Research
  - Biomedical Research 1A *Science in Your Time (Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences)*
- [Jay Phelan](#), Academic Administrator, Professor of Life Science
  - Life Science 15 *Life: Concepts and Issues (Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences)*

4:00-4:15

Break

4:15-5:00

Meeting with representative groups of TAs

4:15-4:35

- Alexandra James Salichs
  - Cluster 60A America in Sixties (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
- Bawei Hu, Teaching Fellow
  - Sociology 1 Introduction to Sociology (*Society & Culture: Social Analysis*)

4:35-5:00

- Megan Imundo, CPhil
  - Cluster 73 Mind Over Matter (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Philosophical and Linguistic Analysis, Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Society & Culture: Social Analysis*)
- Rhonda Sharrah, PhD student
  - English 10A Literatures in English to 1700 (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis*)

5:00-6:00

Closed session for review team only

6:15-7:15

Dinner with GE Administrative team at [Plateia](#)

- Leigh Harris, Assistant Dean for UEI
- Jen Hirashiki, Academic Coordinator for Shared Governance, UEI
- Charlotte Vo, Admin Assistant, UEI
- Brooke Wilkinson, UEI

- Roxanne Neal, Assistant Dean for Strategic Course Planning
- Allison Bendetti, UCLA Librarian

**November 4, 2022:**

- 8:15-8:30 Check-in and closed session (review team members only)
- 8:30-10:00 Open individual meetings with faculty and students who want them
- 10:00-10:45 Meeting with representative undergraduate students (*GE courses taken are in parentheses*)
- 10:00-10:15
- Sasha Kononova, Math/Physics (3rd year)
    - Scandinavian 50 Introduction to Scandinavian Literatures and Cultures (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis*)
  - Edmund Leong, Physics (1st year)
    - Cluster 27A Global Islam (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
  - Elizabeth Brady, Political Science/Business Economics (2nd year)
    - Cluster 70 Evolution of Cosmos and Life (*Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences*)
    - Classic 42 Cinema and Ancient World (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice*)
- 10:15-10:30
- Nikki Zivkov, Astrophysics (4th year)
    - Astro 5 Life in Universe (*Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences*)
    - Cluster 70 Evolution of Cosmos and Life (*Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences*)
  - Olivia Hughes, Classical Civilization (4th year)
    - Geography 5 People and Earth's Ecosystems (*Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences*)
  - Rahaf Abumansour, Anthropology (2nd year)
    - Comm 10 Introduction to Communication (*Society & Culture: Social Analysis*)
    - Cluster 27 Global Islam (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
- 10:30-10:45
- Kaycee Stiemke, Cognitive Science (3rd year)
    - African American Studies Introduction to Black Studies (*Arts & Humanities: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
  - Sage Frock, Political Science (3rd year)
    - Political Science 40 Introduction to American Politics (*Society & Culture: Social Analysis*)
    - Cluster M1 Food (*Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Society & Culture: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis*)
  - Zoe Day, Neuroscience (4th year)
    - Cluster 70: Evolution of the Cosmos and Life (*Scientific Inquiry: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences*)
- 10:45-11:00 Break

- 11:00-11:45 Meeting with Director of UCLA Cluster Program **Tony Friscia** and faculty from Cluster teaching teams (remote)
- [Rachel Lee](#), Professor
    - Cluster 71 Biotechnology & Society (*Arts & Humanities*: Literary and Cultural Analysis, *Scientific Inquiry*: Life Sciences, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis)
    - Cluster 66 Los Angeles Cluster (*Arts & Humanities*: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis)
  - [Anne Gilliland](#), Professor
    - Cluster 48A Political Violence in Modern World (*Arts & Humanities*: Literary and Cultural Analysis, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis)
    - Information Studies 10 Information and Power (*Society and Culture*: Social Analysis)
  - [Erik Petigura](#), Professor
    - Cluster 70 Evolution of Cosmos and Life (*Scientific Inquiry*: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences)
  - [Shanna Shaked](#), Adj. Assist. Prof in IoES, Senior Associate Director at CEILS
    - Cluster M1 Food (*Scientific Inquiry*: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis)
  - [Jared McBride](#), Assistant Adjunct/Academic Admin
    - Cluster 48 Ancient Roman and Greek Medicine (*Arts & Humanities*: Literary and Cultural Analysis, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis)
  - [Jay \(Janet\) O'Shea](#), Professor, Department Chair of World Arts and Cultures/Dance
    - Cluster M1 Food (*Scientific Inquiry*: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis)
  - [Vilma Ortiz](#), Professor
    - Cluster 20 Race and Indigeneity (*Arts & Humanities*: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis)
  - Jeff Decker, Adj Assoc Professor of English
    - Cluster 60 America in Sixties (*Arts & Humanities*: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis)
    - Cluster 20 Race and Indigeneity (*Arts & Humanities*: Literary and Cultural Analysis, Visual and Performance Arts Analysis and Practice, *Society & Culture*: Historical Analysis, Social Analysis)

11:45-1200 Break

12:00-12:45 Lunch meeting with the General Education Governance Committee  
**Room 2121 or [Zoom](#)**, Meeting ID: 981 7113 4629 Passcode: 826721  
 (Lunch from Clementine)

- [Victor Bascara](#), GEGC Chair, Asian American Studies (campus)

*Foundations of the Arts and Humanities*

- [Torquil Duthie](#), Associate Professor, Asian Languages and Cultures
- [Tamara Levitz](#), Professor, Musicology & Comparative Literature
- [Sylvan Oswald](#), Associate Professor, Theater



*Foundations of Society and Culture*

- [Rosina Becerra](#), Professor and Department Chair, Social Welfare/Spanish & Portuguese
- [Purnima Mankekar](#), Professor, Anthropology/Asian American Studies (campus)
- Bemmy Maharramli, Undergraduate Education Initiatives, Resource

*Foundations of Scientific Inquiry*

- [Hilary Coller](#), Professor, Molecular, Cell and Developmental Biology
- [Ohyun Kwon](#), Professor, Chemistry & Biochemistry
- [James Larkin](#), Professor, Physics & Astronomy

*Undergraduate Student Representative*

- Anusha Entezari, World Arts & Culture/Dance, Sociology

*Staff*

- Brooke Wilkinson, Director, Academic Initiatives (campus)
- Jen Hirashiki, Academic Coordinator for Shared Governance (campus)
- Charlotte Vo, Administrative Assistant (campus)

12:45-1:30	Break
1:30-2:30	Closed session (review team members only)
3:30-3:50	Final review team meeting with General Education Governance Committee Chair <b>Victor Bascara</b> and Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education Initiatives <b>Leigh Harris</b>
4:00-5:00	EXIT MEETING. ( <b>Room 2121</b> ) The meeting includes Review Team Members, GEGC Chair <b>Victor Bascara</b> , Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education Initiatives <b>Leigh Harris</b> , Executive Vice Chancellor & Provost <b>Darnell Hunt</b> , Dean for Undergraduate Education <b>Adriana Galván</b> , Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion <b>Anna Spain Bradley</b> , Undergraduate Council Chair <b>Kathleen Bawn</b> .

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