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ACADEMIC SENATE, MERCED DIVISION
GENERAL EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE
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September 24, 2010

To: Gregg Camfield, Chair, WASC Steering Committee

From: Jack Vevea, Chair, General Education Subcommittee of the UGC

Re: Response to General Education Goal Established in WASC Capacity and Preparatory Review

Dear Gregg:

In the conclusion of the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report, UC Merced set the following goal: "By Fall 2010 and pending recommendations of the GE Ad-Hoc Committee, revise Core 100 or identify some other form of general education." Since the time of that statement, one detail has changed: The Ad Hoc committee is now a standing subcommittee of the UGC. The subcommittee was constituted at the beginning of Summer 2010, and is charged with oversight of general education at UC Merced. The charge includes several points, of which the most relevant to the topic at hand is:

> Reviews and periodically updates general education principles and policies, and determines strategies and best practices for program delivery, making recommendations to UGC for final approval.

When the subcommittee was formed, we were informally told that the most urgent task was to apply such review and update to "the Core 100 problem."

Core 100 was developed to provide an innovative approach to upper division general education. Part of what was most special about it was that it was deliberately aligned with UC Merced's "Guiding Principles." Key components of the course provided a shared interdisciplinary intellectual experience. Students engaged in a group cooperative project to which persons from various disciplines brought an array of skills. The projects focused on developing plans to solve real-world problems, involved high-level communication and application of quantitative tools, required group cooperation, and closely mimicked the process of group work on problems in the world outside the University. Anecdotal reports indicate that many students considered it to be a highlight of their undergraduate experience; among those with less happy memories of the class, it has not been unusual for them to realize its value after leaving the University.

It is necessary to use the past tense in discussing Core 100's attributes and benefits because it has not been offered since 2007. The reasons for this, and plans for what to do about it, have been discussed in various contexts, culminating in a study conducted by the Ad Hoc Committee on General Education in

Spring 2009. The document produced by that committee considered various other approaches to upper division general education, but ultimately recommended continuing Core 100 at least for the present. The report included a detailed analysis of likely costs (in dollars and FTEs), and recommended that responsibility for the Core be consolidated under the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. No discernable action was taken by UC Merced's administration as a result of the report.

That led to the current situation. Since Spring 2007, students have been asked to select from among 12 classes that have been approved as substitutes for Core 100. Six of these classes are offered by the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, five are offered by the School of Natural Sciences, and one is offered by the School of Engineering. All of these are writing courses and, with the exception of WRI 100, they all focus on discipline-specific communication. (WRI 100 maintains an interdisciplinary emphasis.) This short term solution has at least provided students with upper division writing instruction, but it lacks Core 100's alignment to the principles that define UC Merced.

The General Education Subcommittee has met twice now to discuss these problems, and we are coming to a consensus on how to approach a solution. Our efforts have focused on three areas:

1. Finding an emergency solution for the short term;
2. analyzing the causes of the current problems; and
3. developing a model by which a long term solution can be achieved.

Finding an emergency solution for the short term

The emergency solution has been the simplest issue for the subcommittee to address. We see no reasonable option but to continue the current policy of substituting approved courses for Core 100 through the 2010-2011 academic year (and possibly for another year beyond that).

Analyzing the causes of the current problems

The subcommittee has spent considerable effort trying to identify the causes that underlie the current situation. These can be divided into causes involving high level administration, causes at the school/dean level, causes at the faculty level, and to some degree causes at the student level. Let us consider each of those categories in turn.

High level administration. The report of the Ad Hoc committee that was issued two years ago made specific, detailed recommendations that required action at the Vice Provost level and above. As far has we have been able to determine, no action was taken. It is, of course, likely that this lack of action was due in part to constrained resources, a perennial problem that hampers many endeavors at UC Merced.

School/dean level. Many faculty have described lack of support on the part of their deans for Core 100 teaching. This is complicated by the fact that Core 100 involves team teaching, and the deans vary in their approaches to credit for team teaching, which they tend to see as less than a full course equivalent. The deans have no particular incentive to support Core 100, as participation on the part of their faculty draws directly from their own instructional resources.

Faculty level. Core 100 has historically been offered by a small handful of ladder faculty who share a strong devotion to the ideals of the course. The original idea was that Core 100 would ultimately involve more than these few individuals; however, other faculty have not exhibited overwhelming enthusiasm for the task. Faculty have little incentive to participate in Core 100 in an environment where the effort is not appreciated by their schools. The Committee on Academic Personnel has made it clear that they do not consider teaching in the Core to be recognizable University service, and has discouraged junior faculty from participating. Finally, many faculty members are simply not interested in teaching classes that serve general education.

Student level. Student reaction to Core 100 has been mixed. Many students abhor group work, and thus welcome the discipline-specific writing emphasis of the approved substitute classes. While they cannot be blamed for the UC Merced's seeming inability to provide Core 100, it is worth noting that if there were a groundswell of student support for the approach, it would be more difficult for the current inaction to

persist. A case in point is UC Santa Cruz's recent passage of an upper division disciplinary communication requirement. The idea drew mixed responses from faculty, but passed the senate vote primarily because of an impassioned plea on the part of students.

Developing a model by which a long term solution can be achieved

A common theme unites all components of the causes just discussed: lack of buy-in on the part of the stakeholders. Hence, while the Subcommittee has identified some approaches that may provide a long term solution (discussed below), we realize that such solutions have little chance of success unless they are developed in such a way that all stakeholders feel at least some sense of ownership. With that in mind, we plan to develop our own ideas a little more fully, and then begin a process in which we seek input from all interested parties. This process will involve focus groups or forums with students, discussions with the individual curriculum committees, discussions with Bylaw 55 units or other appropriately grouped administrative units of faculty, and discussion with UGC. When information from those levels of inquiry has been synthesized, we will seek input from the deans, with the emphasis on how the plans that have emerged from this process can be implemented in the Schools. Ultimately, we will request that DIVCO sponsor legislation to implement the approach that emerges and seek a commitment from higher level administration to provide necessary resources.

We present now a brief snapshot of the current thinking of the Subcommittee. We believe that the alignment of Core 100 to the Guiding Principles is a key component that makes the design of general education at UC Merced unique; we consider it important to preserve that approach in some form. We have discussed the most crucial components of Core 100 that provide this alignment, and the following themes have emerged: Interdisciplinary work, involvement of writing and quantitative analysis, group work, a focus on real-world problems that are relevant to our students, and an integrative project that involves research. While those themes do not align one-to-one with the Guiding Principles, they closely involve most of the Principles. We have discussed the possibility of preserving that structure; we would allow classes to achieve an approval for upper division general education by demonstrating in modified CRFs that they involve some threshold number of those elements. Our idea is that students could choose an appropriate class from among the approved options. While this may seem similar on the surface to the current emergency solution, it adds back some elements of Core 100's alignment to the Principles, rather than focusing entirely on writing. One advantage of such a model is that faculty would have strong incentives to participate, as having the general education seal of approval would bolster enrollments, making it possible to teach some classes that would otherwise be marginally viable. We also envision the possibility of a smaller scale Core 100 class being one of the options, available for those students who strongly desire the full integrative experience that Core 100 was able to provide. The presentation with which we begin our focus groups and discussions with faculty will be based around such a structure.

An approximate timeline for the development of a Core 100 solution follows.

September-October 2010: continue discussion in the Subcommittee; develop model for focus groups and faculty discussions.

Late October-November 2010: conduct focus groups / forums with students and discussions with faculty groups.

December 2010-January 2011: assimilate the information that emerges from the group discussions. Integrate suggestions and develop a draft plan for upper division general education.

February 2010: present the plan to UGC, seek their input, and make appropriate modifications.

March 2010: present the plan to Deans, seek their input, and make appropriate modifications.

April 2010: present the plan to DIVCO, request that they discuss it with higher administration, move toward final legislation.

Spring 2010 or early Fall 2011: take legislation to a vote in the faculty senate.

Concluding Remarks
We believe that this plan will serve three important goals. First, it will develop an approach to upper division general education that preserves some of the most important aspects of Core 100, aspects that distinguish our approach to general education from those of other universities. Second, it will provide a plan that has a greater chance of success than the historic attempts to preserve Core 100 because of greater stakeholder ownership of the ideas. Third, it will produce demonstrable progress toward a solution in a timeframe that will help with our upcoming accreditation hurdles.

Sincerely,

Jack L. Vevea
Chair, General Education Subcommittee of the UGC

Virginia Adan-Lifante
Benoit Dayrat
Henry Jay Forman
Holley Moyes

Cc: Undergraduate Council
Senate Chair Heit
Senate Office

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From: Gregg Camfield, Professor and Chair WASC Steering Committee
Date: 25 August 2010

To: Jack Vevea, Chair, General Education Subcommittee of the UGC

CC: Susan Amussen, Chair, Undergraduate Council

RE: Response to GE Goal Established in WASC Capacity and Preparatory Review

Dear Jack:

In the conclusion of our Capacity and Preparatory Review Report, UC Merced noted that we would achieve the following goal: "By Fall 2010 and pending recommendations of the GE Ad-Hoc Committee, revise Core 100 or identify some other form of general education."

In our Educational Effectiveness Review Report, UC Merced must describe the status of our response to this goal. On behalf of the WASC Steering Committee, I am writing to ask that the General Education Subcommittee submit **a written response for inclusion in UC Merced's Educational Effectiveness Review Report by Friday, September 24**. This submission date supports the report drafting and review process. Needless to say, if the committee has gained greater clarity by mid-November, we can update the EER as appropriate.

If a resolution has not been achieved, it would be important to provide a timeline for identifying the solution. To be most convincing to our WASC reviewers, it would be helpful if the timeline included at least one milestone to be reached in time for the EER Site Visit scheduled for March 8-10, 2011.

Finally, as always with WASC, it would be important to provide supporting evidence for any assertions made in this response.

If you have any questions, please contact me or Laura Martin, lmartin@ucmerced.edu.

Thank you very much for supporting our Initial Accreditation effort.

Sincerely,
Gregg Camfield