

# **General Education at UC Merced: A Campus Program Proposal**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to offer and describe a proposal for a new General Education program for UC Merced. The General Education Subcommittee of Undergraduate Council (GESC) developed the proposal with the involvement of faculty and staff members across campus, including at General Education retreats in 2014 and 2015, as well as with the guidance of the academic program review of GE in 2014-2015.

The GESC will provide many opportunities for campus community members to discuss this proposal in the coming weeks. The final version of the proposed GE program will be presented for comments from Senate entities and UGC approval later this semester. We begin that process with this draft document. A brief synopsis of the proposed GE program is followed by an overview of the background and context for the process by which the proposal has been developed. The document concludes with a detailed description of the proposed new GE program.

## **Background**

The draft proposal for a new General Education program at UC Merced has been developed over two years, a process that includes academic program review of GE at UC Merced, as well as significant engagement of faculty and staff members. A brief overview of the steps in that process are described here. For more details, please see [GE Redesign Website].

### **Key Steps in the Design of a New General Education Program for UC Merced**

GE Program Review, April 2014-March 2015

*GE Self-Study and External Review*

Academic program review of General Education was launched in Spring 2014 as the GESC began a self-study, which was completed in January 2015.

In February 2015, an external review team visited campus. Responding to UC Merced's self-study and results of the site visit, the review team produced a report, "UC Merced General Education Academic Program Review: Report of the Review Team," in March 2015. Key recommendations in the review team's report called for a comprehensive General Education Program that

1. Is based on a clear mission and goals, as well as program learning outcomes to achieve those goals.
2. Includes common academic experiences across all four undergraduate years,
3. Is taught primarily by Senate faculty,
4. Is distinctive to UC Merced and our student body,
5. Is sustainable in terms of UC Merced's financial and human resources, and
6. Includes and integrates curricular and co-curricular experiences.

### *Faculty-Staff Retreat May 2014*

As part of the process of developing the GE self-study and preparing for the GE program review, the GESC organized a campus retreat to envision the framework of a revised general education program, including defining the hallmarks of baccalaureate degrees from UC Merced. Faculty from all three schools and staff members from academic and student affairs participated in the retreat.

### *Hallmarks of the UCM Baccalaureate Degree, AY 2014-2015*

During AY 2014-2015, the GESC distributed a draft copy of the Hallmarks of the UCM Baccalaureate Degree to faculty members in all three schools for the purposes of obtaining feedback about the draft. After this process, a final version of the Hallmarks was shared with, and endorsed by, Undergraduate Council.

### **General Education Mission and Outcomes, June 2015-March 2016**

To begin the process of responding to, and acting on, the recommendations of the external review team, the GESC conducted a second faculty-staff retreat in June 2015. This retreat was devoted to developing (1) guiding principles and a mission for a GE program at UC Merced and (2) program learning outcomes aligned with that mission. Retreat participants advocated that the mission of GE consider a role for coursework in the majors.

The GESC completed a draft of the mission and outcomes in Fall 2015 and, in February 2016, these documents were provided to faculty and staff for commentary and feedback. A final version, based on the feedback received, was completed in March, 2016. That mission states:

UC Merced's General Education program engages students with the values, practices, and contributions of a research university to provide a framework for integrative learning in the context of the culturally and economically diverse Central Valley. In tandem with the major and the co-curriculum, General Education supports student development of the Hallmarks of the Baccalaureate Degree at UC Merced. It nurtures the spirit of inquiry, building students' knowledge of various fields, cultures, and perspectives. General Education fosters collaboration, communication, and ethical action. It empowers students to share their learning and skills to address the local and global challenges of an interconnected, changing world.

### **General Education Program Redesign, September 2015 to Present**

#### *Proposal Development*

The Hallmarks and the GE mission and program learning outcomes served as the framework for drafting a new curriculum for GE at UC Merced. In Fall 2015, the GESC formulated an action plan for GE redesign, including a program proposal template. The plan and template were submitted to Undergraduate Council and the Periodic Review Oversight Committee via memo November 19, 2015. Both PROC and UGC approved the plan. Throughout AY 2015-2016, the GESC worked on multiple drafts of a proposed redesign of the UCM GE program. In addition, a

subcommittee of the GESC worked on a plan for resources for the new program. Although the draft redesign was not to be determined by resources, resources would be essential to implementing the final program.

### *Proposal Review*

On June 24, 2016, the GESC's final draft proposal was circulated to UGC, Deans Council, and all participants in the May 2014 and June 2015 GE retreats. At the start of AY 2016-2017, the GESC will continue the process of obtaining feedback about the draft proposal for the redesigned GE program. Extensive opportunities – both in-person and electronic -- for comments and suggestions will be offered to the campus community, including faculty, staff, and students. The GESC will incorporate feedback into a final proposal for a new GE program for UC Merced. That proposal will be submitted to the Academic Senate for review no later than November 2016. The GESC anticipates finalizing an implementation plan for the new GE program in Spring 2017.

### Overview: Proposed General Education Program

The development of the proposed GE program by the GESC was shaped both by the Hallmarks of the Baccalaureate Degree at UC Merced and the mission of GE at UC Merced.

The GE program proposed here by the General Education Subcommittee of Undergraduate Council (GESC) is shaped by our understanding of our distinctive institutional context as a small research university in the Central Valley with a diverse student body and a small faculty as well as by the Mission of GE at UC Merced. In light of our identity as a research university, curiosity and inquiry, and different disciplinary approaches to them, are at the heart of our proposed General Education (GE) program. This program is developed in a sequence of integrative GE learning experiences that respond to the first GE Program Learning Outcome (PLO): that students take an inquiry-oriented approach to the world.

Furthermore, the GESC sought to ensure that

1. The program could be completed in four years, and
2. The program could be integrated with requirements of all of our undergraduate majors

The proposed GE program is designed to extend over four years, and there is some point of student contact with GE in every year:

*Year One:* Students will take a Spark seminar, which explores the nature of inquiry by through multiple disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives and experiences. The Spark seminar is particularly important for our student population, as it provides both an intellectual focus and an introduction to the work and resources of a research university. In addition, such intellectually rigorous small classes, when properly designed and implemented, have been shown to have a significant positive impact on student success.

*Year Two:* As part of their “jumpstart” meeting with their academic advisor, students will propose a plan for meeting their educational goals, including coursework in GE, their major, minor, as well as co-curricular experiences;

*Year Three:* Students will take an upper division “Crossroads” course, a team-taught course that brings the perspectives of two disciplines to bear on a particular topic, and which will be cross-listed in the relevant programs. The Crossroads course allows students to see how two different disciplines approach a shared issue or problem, from evidence to evaluation; it will also provide a shared experience for transfer students.

*Year Four:* Students have a culminating integrative experience in their major. The culminating experience (which may include, but is not limited to, capstone class, senior seminar, service learning project, portfolio, thesis) in the major provides an opportunity to integrate their studies in GE and in the major.

The common courses in the first and third years provide a foundation for integrative work across the curriculum and for more focused study in the major. These shared courses are supplemented by courses that introduce students to major **Approaches** to knowledge, and a range of intellectual **Experiences** that allow students to engage with a range of topics and analytical methods.

To ensure the sustainability of the program, courses other than the Spark seminar can be met either by existing courses (with slightly modified Course Request Forms (CRFs) and Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), or by new courses that will meet major requirements. Crossroads courses might require additional resources for discussion sections.

While the proposed program has not been defined by resources, we are aware of the resource constraints on the campus. The GESC includes a work group focused on resources, which has assessed the resources that are used for our current GE program, as well as the human and financial resources needed for the proposed GE program.

## **The Program**

### **A. Course Requirements**

#### **I. Lower Division Common Requirements (8-16 credits)**

##### **A. Spark Seminar (4 units)**

1. The Spark seminar has been designed in response to research that demonstrates that rigorous small first-year seminars led by faculty passionate about the topic on which the course is focused have a significant positive impact on student retention.
2. SPARK seminars introduce students to life at a research university. They ask students to focus on the nature of inquiry by exploring a particular topic over the course of the semester, engaging with campus and/or local resources, generating research questions, and presenting original ideas in writing and other forms of communication (visual, oral, and/or numerical).

3. Topics will be broad enough to be viewed from multiple perspectives, but focused enough that students can engage with the issues of the topic in some depth. They should be related to an area of research and/or interest to the instructor: part of the experience of SPARK is engaging with a faculty member who is sharing their expertise and passions with students, thereby sparking their interest in the topic and/or the spirit of inquiry and research more generally.
4. For each theme there will be monthly lectures by UCM faculty and other scholars and/or artists.
5. Sparks seminars will be taught by Senate faculty and Unit 18 lecturers, perhaps with the assistance of advanced graduate students and post-docs. At least 20% of the Spark seminars in any given year must be taught by senate or non-senate faculty from each of the three schools; across the schools 20% must be taught by Senate faculty; and no more than 20% may be taught by faculty from any one program.
6. Enrollment will be capped at 25 students in each seminar.
7. Spark seminars may be taken concurrent with either WRI 1 or WRI 10GE  
PLOs: 1,2, 3

B. Written Communication (4 units) (University Requirement) Writing 10 (perhaps with a link to a Common Read)

- GE PLO: 3

C. Quantitative Reasoning (University Requirement)

- GE PLO 2

D. Language (0 to 8 units)

The study of language exposes students to different ways of structuring thought. Engagement with multiple languages introduces students to a range of ways to structure and express thought.

- GE PLOs 3, 4:

The Language requirement can be met by:

- Coursework: Successful completion of the second semester of a UCM foreign language class OR Successful completion of a computer coding course (CSE 20/21, ME 21), OR
- Campus based test: Passing the campus-administered Foreign Language test demonstrating proficiency equivalent of one year of college foreign language, OR
- AP/IB Exams: Earning a score of 3, 4 or 5 on a College Board AP exam in a foreign language; earning a score of 5, 6 or 7 on a Higher Level IB exam in a foreign language or literature; earning a score of 4 or 5 on the College Board AP Exam in Computer Science A, OR
- High School Coursework: Completing the third year of one language in high school with a course GPA of at least C.

## **II. Upper Division Common Requirements**

### **Crossroads course (4 credits)**

The Crossroads course is an upper division, team-taught course, with enrollments of 90-120 students. Like the Spark seminar, the Crossroads course will focus on a specific topic, but it will be taught by faculty members from two disciplines; it therefore emphasizes different, yet complementary, disciplinary approaches, methods, and assumptions, and provides opportunity for research and analysis. Crossroads also will provide an entry point for transfer students into GE at UC Merced. Given the size of the Crossroad course enrollments, they also will include TA-led discussion sections.

Crossroads will be cross listed in two (or, perhaps, three) programs, and serve students for either GE or major elective requirements (but not both).

- GE PLOs: 1, 2, 3, 4 (others as appropriate)

### **Communication in the Discipline**

An upper division writing course, or writing intensive course in the major, focused on how to write for a particular field.

- GE PLO: 3

### **Integrative Culminating Experience (4 units within major)**

The Integrative Culminating requirement may be fulfilled through traditional capstone courses, senior or advanced seminars, service-learning courses, portfolios, or other methods majors choose to integrate learning in the program.

Regardless of the specific format, the Integrative Culminating Experience should have strong components of:

- Communication, including at least two different methods
- Research
- Engagement with others (team-building components, collaborative work, student leadership of discussion, etc.)
- GE PLOs: 1-5

## **III. Approaches to Knowledge (6 Courses, 22-24 credits)**

Courses in this area introduce students to the different ways disciplines (and broad branches of knowledge) ask questions and think about the world. All courses that meet this requirement will (a) address methodological, theoretical, or epistemological issues relevant to the subject and (b) include a project that can be uploaded to the student's e-portfolio.

All students will take two courses in each of the following three areas. Note: Students may take no more than one course from any academic program.

Science: Courses which take a scientific approach to the study of the world.

Social Science: Courses which take a social scientific approach to the study of individuals and societies.

Arts and Humanities: Courses which take artistic and/or humanistic approaches to understanding the self, societies, and cultural products

- GE PLOs: 1, 2

## **B. Experiences and Activities**

### **I. Intellectual Experiences**

In addition to the broad divisions of knowledge represented by **Approaches** courses, there are general intellectual outcomes UCM students are expected to have as part of the Hallmarks of the UC Merced Baccalaureate Degree. The intellectual knowledge and tools leading to these outcomes are made explicit in the proposed GE program to ensure they are part of all students' curricular and co-curricular experiences. These **Experiences** can be fulfilled in courses, including **Approaches** courses Sparks seminars, Crossroads courses, courses in the major. To emphasize the ways GE is part of the entire curriculum, at least three of courses used to fulfill Intellectual Experiences must be at the upper division. In addition, the Experiences can be fulfilled in the co-curriculum.

These intellectual experiences are:

1. **Literary and Textual Analysis**  
Students learn how language creates meaning and ambiguity.
  - GE PLOs: 2, 3
2. **Media and Visual Analysis**  
Students explore how media and images create, shape, and express meaning.
  - GE PLOs: 2, 3
3. **Quantitative and Numerical Analysis**  
Students evaluate data and develop quantitative reasoning skills.
  - GE PLOs: 2, 3
4. **Societies and Cultures of the Past**  
Students explore the interactions between multiple dimensions of past societies.
  - GE PLO: 4
5. **Diversity and Identity**  
Students consider how multiple kinds of difference – ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual – impact individuals and societies in the past and present.
  - GE PLOs: 4, 5
6. **Global Awareness**  
Students learn about environments, cultures, and issues in nations and regions outside the US.  
This experience may be met by courses about other parts of the world (including intermediate or advanced language study that includes culture), or by study abroad.
  - GE PLOs: 4, 5
7. **Sustainability**  
Students explore the ways in which humans affect and are affected by the natural world.
  - GE PLOs: 4, 5
8. **Practical and Applied Knowledge**

Students carry out field work, laboratory experimentation, or artistic practice.

- GE PLO: 2

### 9. Ethics

Students investigate the ethical implications of research, policy, or behavior. *This requirement can be met by a methods course in the major that makes research ethics a central theme.*

- GE PLOs: 1, 5

### 10. Leadership, Community, and Engaging the World

Students take their work at UC Merced off the campus in one of multiple ways: they may engage in at least one of a range of experiences ranging from study abroad, UCDC, UC Sacramento, leadership in campus organization, community engaged research or service, or off-campus internships.

- GE PLO: 5
  - To ensure breadth and depth, a student cannot use any one course to “count” as more than one GE Intellectual Experiences requirement. For example, a study abroad experience may fulfill the “Global Awareness” requirement or the “Leadership, Community, and Engaging the World” requirement, but not both.
  - Transfer students, like all UCM students, will be required to meet three Experiences at the upper division level.
  - For course review and approvals, an individual course may address no more than two of intellectual experiences. The processes of recording and keeping track of students’ fulfillment of the Intellectual Experiences requirement will include the Degree Audit System, as well as the E-Portfolio described in the next section.

### **II. Activity: E-Portfolio**

To keep track of their learning, students will compile an e-portfolio. The purpose of the e-portfolio (which is part of CatCourses) is to give students a chance to review the development of their education. Every course that meets a GE requirement will have an assignment related to that requirement that will be uploaded into the student’s e-portfolio on Catcourses; students may add other projects as they wish. That portfolio will provide the basis for reflection on learning to be integrated into the culminating experience in the major; it will also be used to help students prepare for life after graduation. Portfolio development and assessment will be coordinated by the Office of Undergraduate Education in collaboration with the GESC and faculty members in the majors.

GE PLO: 1

## GE PROGRAM SUMMARY

<b>Required Courses</b>	
<b>A. Lower Division Common Requirements</b> 1. Spark Seminar 2. Writing 10 3. Quantitative Reasoning 4. Language	12-20 credits 4 4 4 0-8
<b>B. Upper Division Common Requirements</b> 1. Crossroads Course 2. Writing in the Discipline 3. Culminating experience in the major	12 credits 4 4 4
<b>C. Approaches to Knowledge</b> 1. Science 1 2. Science 2 3. Social Science 1 4. Social Science 2 5. Arts and Humanities 1 6. Arts and Humanities 2	24 Credits 4 4 4 4 4 4
<b>Experiences and Activities</b>	
<b>A. Intellectual Experiences</b> 1. Literary and Textual Analysis 2. Media and Visual Analysis 3. Numerical and Quantitative Analysis 4. Societies and Cultures of the Past 5. Diversity and Identity 6. Global Awareness 7. Sustainability 8. Practical and Applied Knowledge 9. Ethics 10. Leadership, Community, and Engaging the World	[10-12 upper division cr.]
<b>B. E-Portfolio</b>	