

Overview and Results: Retreat on General Education at UC Merced, May 22-23, 2014

Retreat Process: Overview

General Purpose: This retreat is designed to engage faculty and staff in redefining and reimagining UC Merced's General Education program in light of the institution's mission.

Specific Goals:

- Re-imagine UC Merced's GE program in light of our institutional mission
- Explore and define GE experiences specific to UC Merced
- Establish priorities for fall planning and the GE program review self-study

Participants (Based on assumption that GE is an institutional program):

- 32 faculty and staff members (see appendix for list of names)
- Faculty from about 80% of undergraduate majors
- Staff members representing academic advising, career services, housing, student life
- U Librarian, Dean of Students, Provost
- GE Subcommittee

Process:

Team-based and plenary discussions focused on addressing the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of a baccalaureate degree at UC Merced? Identify goals, aims, aspirations, expectations and hallmarks of our baccalaureate graduates in the context of our institutional mission.
2. Given those hallmarks, what should General Education contribute to the baccalaureate degree of every UC Merced student?
3. Given the role of GE in UC Merced baccalaureate degrees, what should GE "look like"? What experiences should it include?

Retreat Results: Summary

1. What is the meaning of a baccalaureate degree at UC Merced? Identify goals, aims, aspirations, expectations and hallmarks of our baccalaureate graduates in the context of our institutional mission.

Distinctive Institutional Context:

A Small Research University

An ethos of discovery, creativity, and rigorous questioning of extant knowledge permeates all aspects of UC Merced. The skills, knowledge and attitudes of a researcher are synonymous with attributes essential for post-graduate success.

In Merced, California

Merced is at a crossroads – culturally, socioeconomically, environmentally, geographically, historically -- for addressing problems of local, regional, and global significance.

With An Undergraduate Student Body Unique in the UC System

UCM undergraduates are predominantly first generation students from groups under-represented in higher education (e.g., race, ethnicity, family income).

Therefore, the Hallmarks of Baccalaureate Degrees at UC Merced are:

1. *Depth and breadth in academic and intellectual preparation, consistent with the values of UCM as a small research university, such that UC Merced graduates*

- Demonstrate a strong disciplinary foundation
- Engage in interdisciplinary thinking which could include appreciating different approaches to problem solving, informed by an understanding of humanities, arts, STEM, social sciences
- Bring a critical, evaluative lens to problems, questions, situations
- Employ effective problem-solving skills in multiple settings
- Evaluate facts, knowledge and information, applying the varied aspects of information literacy
- Know what they know, as well as *how* they know it, and monitor and guide their own learning
- Describe the origins of knowledge, informed by cultural and disciplinary epistemological and ontological assumptions
- Take an inquiry-oriented approach to the world; possess curiosity, employ inquiry, and take appropriate and creative action in response to ambiguity

2. *Cultural awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness, such that UC Merced graduates*

- Respect and value diversity
- Seek and recognize new cultures; join a new community anticipating and engaging in potential cultural differences or intersections.

3. *Community engagement and citizenship -- local and global--, such that UC Merced graduates*

- Understand what it means to be a member of a community, including an academic community
- Contribute to the communities of which they members
- Possess a sense of place, and the ability to determine own place within local community and global context, and affect own community through giving back
- Act ethically, including in the realm of environmental stewardship and sustainability
- Are responsive to the needs of society – through application of knowledge and research to address problems, challenges, and opportunities

4. *Self-awareness and intrapersonal skills, such that UC Merced graduates*

- Demonstrate initiative, including an entrepreneurial, innovative, pioneering spirit
- Respond with resiliency to obstacles and challenges, and learn from failure
- Assume responsibility for their own education and develop the skills and attitudes of lifelong learners.

5. *Interpersonal skills necessary to the outcomes identified above, as well as to lead productive lives after graduation, such that UC Merced graduates*

- Are proficient in collaboration and teamwork
- Possess strong communication skills, oral, written, and visual, academic and professional
- Are leaders in their professional and civic lives
- Are ethically aware and proficient in ethical reasoning

2. Given those hallmarks, what should General Education contribute to the baccalaureate degree of every UC Merced student?

General Education at UC Merced:

- Supports, enhances, and prepares students to engage in the research mission of the university.
- Provides broad exposure to, and understanding of, multiple disciplines and fields of study, including multiple approaches to knowledge, inquiry, meaning-making, and problem-solving.
- Provides interdisciplinary and integrated learning experiences inside and outside the classroom.
- Facilitates discovery through intellectual risk-taking and creativity.
- Engages students, faculty, and staff in communities of scholarship and service, both on campus and off.
- Transcends and contextualizes the major, affording opportunities to forge connections among educational experiences.
- Facilitates development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for lives of engaged learning and citizenship beyond college. Examples include: critical thinking, effective written and oral communication, problem-solving, teamwork, cross- and inter-cultural understanding and experience, ethical practice, and responsibility for one's own learning.
- Is assessed regularly. Assessment foci include, but are not limited to: whether desired outcomes are achieved (including what outcomes are achieved and by whom, what outcomes are not achieved, etc.), what aspects of the program are effective and what aspects are in need of improvement, and how the GE program should be improved.

One team created a schematic to illustrate this approach to General Education:*

ESSENTIAL EDUCATION



* The use of the term “Essential Education” illustrates general consensus that we should reconsider using “General Education” and, instead, find a more creative, clear, and impactful way to describe what we are trying to achieve with a general education program.

3. Given the role of GE in UC Merced baccalaureate degrees, what should GE “look like”? What experiences should it include?

General Education at UC Merced:

Connects ladder-rank Senate faculty to the delivery of GE

- Means to connect students and faculty include:
- Freshman seminars, learning communities, discussion sections, and capstone projects focused on implementing the goals of GE
- Common intellectual experiences across all undergraduate years

- Feature these, and other, High-Impact Education Practices (see appendix)

Creates synergy between major programs and GE

- Focus on the notion of Merced as a “crossroads”: Tie GE and broad research themes of the campus. Courses could be thematic and integrative, featuring different ways of knowing
- Learning communities and linked courses, potentially involving residence life
- Feature GE at orientation, research week, and recruitment activities; Consider a GE “festival” to cultivate and represent broad, institutional engagement from student, faculty, staff and community (including employers)

Provides undergraduates with research skills and experiences

- Exposure to research methods and authentic problems: Modes of inquiry and approaches to research could be more explicitly featured as aspects of GE. Case studies and research problems could engage students in authentic issues and experiences
- Distinctive local experiences with community research: Community-based learning could be one model that is inclusive, local, and foundational
- Access to research-based experiences: Research experiences could be sequenced and inclusive, beginning with exposure to research to applied work

Builds GE experiences and outcomes from lower to upper division courses

- Lower-division GE could focus on themes/topics/key questions from multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives, with learning communities focused on integration
- Upper-division GE in the disciplines could provide in-depth multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives to address problems/questions of interest to the discipline
- Capstone experiences could be within the major, but reinforcing the themes of GE and expanding desired outcomes (e.g., communication, critical thinking, team work, etc.)
- *Across all 4 years*: Out-of-class experiences that build on/reinforce GE themes. Examples may include: community engagement, service learning, teamwork, leadership

Provides GE programming that connects courses *and* experiences

- Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Projects: A comprehensive GE experience integrates courses and activities, culminating in GE experiences that go beyond simply coursework. Students could participate in courses with related co-curricular projects; conversely, students could bring to a GE course co-curricular experiences that inform projects (e.g. community-based learning)
- Learning Communities: Linked courses or coursework could strengthen curricular coherence, increase active learning, and promote interaction between faculty and staff.
- GE themes – each year, for 2-year periods, etc. – that provide focus for GE programming in curricular and co-curricular activities.

Retreat Participants

School of Engineering

Valerie Leppert
Christopher Viney
Linda Zubke

School of Natural Sciences

Miriam Barlow
Michael Dawson
Kamal Dulai
Arnold Kim
Erik Menke
Erica Robbins
Jay Sharping

School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts

Virginia Adan-Lifante
Susan Amussen
Alisha Kimble
Nathan Monroe
Kurt Schnier
Michael Spivey
Peter Vanderschraaf
Jack Vevea

Academic Affairs

Donald Barclay
Tom Hothem

Student Affairs

Vernette Doty
Lezley Juergenson
Charles Nies
Martin Reed

GE Subcommittee Members:

Stephen Hart (SNS)
Jane Lawrence (Student Affairs)
Kelvin Lwin (SOE)
Laura Martin (Academic Affairs)
Rose Scott (SSHA)
Wil van Breugel (SNS/Undergraduate Education)
Elizabeth Whitt (Academic Affairs/Undergraduate Education)
Anne Zanzucchi (SSHA)