

**GE Subcommittee Agenda**  
**Friday, May 15, 2015**  
**3:00-4:30pm**  
**KL 324**

- I. Announcements (5 minutes)**
  - A. Update on consultation with VPF Camfield and Professor Bhat – Chair Zanzucchi
  
- II. Discussion (15 minutes)**
  - A. Faculty Responses to Retreat Synthesis (2014)- Professor Schnier
  - B. GE Retreat (June 10-11, 2015), participants update to confirm scope – Chair Zanzucchi  
*(List of participants will be distributed prior to the meeting)*
  
- III. Program Review, First Stage (10 minutes)**
  - A. PROC updates (May 14 PROC meeting), Dr. Lwin and Dr. Martin
  - B. PROC Memo to UGC re: GE review (pp. 2-40) – Update on UGC’s May 6 discussion – Professor Brokaw
  - C. Creating an action plan from April to November, with September check-in with PROC  
*\*Retreat objectives should inform identifying areas of consensus and creating an action plan*
  
- IV. Discussion, GE Retreat (50 minutes)**
  - A. Engage in backward design activity, with the goal of identifying priorities and situating “deliverables” from the GE Subcommittee
  - B. Review participant confirmations to situate scope of activities. See revised retreat agenda draft (p. 41).
  - C. Plan and outline the retreat agenda and related communications.
  
- V. Executive Session (10 minutes) – Voting GESC Members only please**



ACADEMIC SENATE, MERCED DIVISION  
PERIODIC REVIEW OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (PROC)  
THOMAS W. PETERSON, CO-CHAIR  
CRISTIÁN RICCI, CO-CHAIR

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED  
5200 NORTH LAKE ROAD  
MERCED, CA 95343  
209-228-7930

**April 30, 2015**

**To: Jack Vevea, Chair, Undergraduate Council**

**From: Thomas W. Peterson, Provost/Executive Vice Chancellor and Co-Chair, Periodic Review Oversight Committee**  
**Cristián Ricci, Senate Vice Chair and Co-Chair, Periodic Review Oversight Committee**

**Re: External Review Team Report for the Program Review of General Education**

With this memo, the Periodic Review Oversight Committee (PROC) forwards the Report of the External Review Team for the General Education Program Review to Undergraduate Council, along with memos from the General Education Subcommittee documenting its review of the report for factual accuracy and misconceptions (appended). It is now the responsibility of UGC, as per policy<sup>1</sup>, to ask the General Education Subcommittee to undertake the response phase of the review.

In forwarding this report, the PROC endorses the team's findings and recommendations, notes their significance in terms of anticipated impact on the design and delivery of General Education at UC Merced, and urges they be carefully considered and addressed, as appropriate, in the General Education action plan. The PROC also asks UGC to share the following recommendations in its instructions to the Subcommittee; specifically, that the General Education Subcommittee

1. Continue to act as the "chair" of the GE program for the purposes of the review process. PROC also emphasizes the necessity of institution-wide collaboration in formulating the action plan, particularly as GE is institutional in scope.
2. Pursue multiple avenues for enlisting faculty participation, including School Curriculum Committees, School Executive Committees, Undergraduate Program Chairs, and Academic Senate Committees. In particular, recommendations regarding teaching assistantships and undergraduate research are expected to impact a large number of senate faculty and fall under the purview of multiple standing committees.
3. Ensure administrative inclusion in the response phase, as a thorough response to the External Team Report will require integrated planning, including attention to resources (of all types) and the institution's growth trajectory and related timeline. In particular, PROC expects involvement of Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education, Elizabeth Whitt, who must approve and submit the program response and action plan in her role as Dean<sup>2</sup>, as well as of the Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor, Tom Peterson, and Interim Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, Charles Nies.

<sup>1</sup> please see Item V of the [Undergraduate Program Review Policy](#), p.14

<sup>2</sup> Undergraduate Program Review Policy, Item V, "Response Phase" (p.14)

4. Evaluate the Strategic Academic Focusing pillars as an organizing structure for the redesign of GE, noting the potential intellectual and resource (including faculty FTE) efficiencies in connecting the campus' undergraduate, graduate, and research priorities and the potential benefits of undergraduate alumni that can echo the campus' distinctive research foci.
5. Attend to the WSCUC accreditation expectations that intersect with General Education. These include (a) the need to demonstrate that students of all majors achieve the five WSCUC Core Competencies at or near graduation, including quantitative reasoning, and (b) [WSCUC Commission expectations](#) stemming from our review for initial accreditation that we extend our assessment efforts to General Education and advance undergraduate student success.
6. Provide to PROC, at the start of AY 2015-16, a brief summary of the goals and outcomes from the second General Education Retreat planned for June 2015, along with related next steps for developing a comprehensive action plan within the response phase period. PROC encourages the subcommittee to move forward as aggressively as possible while recognizing that broad institutional engagement and ownership is essential to successfully responding to the recommendations of the External Review Team.

PROC also notes that the success of this final stage of the program review process will benefit greatly from continuity in the membership of General Education subcommittee. It commends the important work that members have completed thus far and hopes that Undergraduate Council can encourage many of the members to continue their valuable service.

The response phase is meant to be the culmination of academic program review; a collaborative process during which the groundwork is laid to thoroughly address the findings of the review. We look forward to our continued role in this undertaking.

Copy: Periodic Review Oversight Committee  
Undergraduate Council  
Fatima Paul, Senate Assistant Director



20 April 2015

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PROC Co-Chairs Peterson and Ricci

Re: GE Team Report, Corrections

Dear Provost Peterson and Senate Vice Chair Ricci,

According to our academic review [policy](#), the General Education subcommittee of Undergraduate Council has the opportunity to review the report for factual errors or misperceptions until 20 April 2015.

We appreciate how the GE Review Team has provided such a comprehensive and thoughtful report, with identifying strengths and weaknesses of UCM's current GE program to inform future planning. Of particular note are the detailed descriptions of relevant GE programs from more established campuses; these models will likely prove as informative with developing a complete and high-impact GE program.

In providing suggested foci for review, faculty workload and program resources were part of the intended focus. We appreciate the review team report's suggestions and offer two related clarifications, which are largely specific to our institutional context and historical moment. Situating faculty workload is very important in planning a GE program's implementation and resources and thus benefits the most from clarification. The following clarifications are intended to address potential misperceptions about UCM faculty workload to strengthen the meaning and application of these related summaries.

Page 3, para 4 { **Although different workload measures are used, this has led to lower teaching workloads than on most other UCs.** }: Teaching workload for UCM Senate faculty is noted in the self study; however, it is to emphasize intensive teaching and service responsibilities with developing a new campus and associated academic programs. During the site visit, varied perspectives on workload from either program or previous experiences were likely shared, which we understand this statement summarizes. However, to clarify, the team did not have access to campus or program-based workload policies that govern faculty time. Also, our campus does not have a formal study of workload. At this point, there is variation across disciplines regarding teaching and services workloads that continue to be part of campus planning. To our knowledge, a reduction in teaching workload to account for service, at least at the institutional level, would be inaccurate to conclude and would benefit from study.

Page 4, para 1 { Now that many of the **majors have been established, it is an opportune time to re-direct faculty attention to teaching the GEs and bridging the disciplines, even though it may mean adjusting both the allocation of time and workload expectations** }: Compared to 2005, we have expanded undergraduate major programs from fewer than 10 to over 20. Unlike other campuses, though, our new and relatively established undergraduate majors are still in development and are in initial phases of implementation and assessment. Re-directing attention

to GE will need to be balanced with these efforts, as a clarification. While we see consistency in vision about bridging disciplines as part of GE planning, associated time and workload with developing a GE program will benefit from heightened recognition, planning, and resourcing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Zanzucchi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Anne Zanzucchi, GE Subcommittee Chair

Cc: PROC Members and analyst  
UGC Members  
GESG Members



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**April 13, 2015**

**Tom Peterson and Cristián Ricci, PROC Co-Chairs**

**Re: GE Team Report**

Dear Provost Peterson and Senate Vice Chair Ricci,

According to our academic review [policy](#)<sup>1</sup>, the General Education Subcommittee (GESC) of Undergraduate Council has the opportunity to review the report for factual errors or misperceptions until April 20. The GESC plans to discuss and confirm priorities for clarification, related to potential misperception, on April 16.

Please know that the GE Subcommittee has reviewed the GE review team report for corrections, and we do not have any substantive concerns beyond a standard set of clarifications. We understand that this program review process would benefit from the Periodic Review and Oversight Committee and Undergraduate Council having opportunity this semester to review the team report and related agenda items. In the interest of sharing this report before the end of the semester, we would like to recommend that the GE team report be available to your committee and other standing Senate Committees. Access to this team report can only further assist us in collaborating and planning across the Senate.

The GE Subcommittee, then, recommends that the GE team report be available to all standing Senate Committees and School Curriculum / Executive Committees. Based on our review of the team report, we do not foresee corrections beyond a standard practice of clarifications. On behalf of the GESC, please find attached the GE team report for our shared reference.

General Education is an institutional program such that inclusive and wide-scale planning will be complex as well as critical to its success. We value PROC's insight on what constitutes an implementation plan for a multi-faceted academic program like GE. In sum, we appreciate PROC's guidance on next steps with our being responsive to our GE review team's recommendations and continuing to engage with planning priorities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Zanzucchi".

Anne Zanzucchi, GE Subcommittee Chair

Cc: PROC Members and Analyst  
GESC Members and Analyst  
UGC Members and Analyst

Enclosure: GE Review Team Report

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<sup>1</sup> After the review team report is received, the PRC Chair will send a copy to the program coordinator. The Program Chair will have the opportunity to review the report for factual inaccuracies and misperceptions; any corrections should be submitted to the PRC within two weeks. The PRC will forward the review team report, along with any corrections submitted by the program, to UGC. UGC will receive the report, and forward it to the Chair of the Program, the relevant Dean, the VPUE, the EVC, and any other relevant parties.

**UC Merced**  
**General Education Academic Program Review**  
Report of the Review Team  
*March 31, 2015*

**Executive Summary**

The General Education (GE) program at UC Merced was established before the University opened in 2005. Ten years later, the institution undertook a serious, comprehensive, and thoughtful review of the state of General Education. This review comes at an important time in the institution's evolution, as enrollment is expanding and strategic academic focusing is underway. Review findings are intended to contribute to the development of a cohesive, coherent, assessable, and sustainable General Education program that reflects the institution's goals for student learning in light of emerging institutional priorities.

UC Merced's General Education program is intended as a means for cultivating eight institutional guiding principles and supporting student success. However, the only common General Education experienced by incoming freshman students is two courses, Writing 10 and Core 1. Transfer students have no common General Education experience. It is the Review Team's recommendation that the current General Education requirements, including School requirements, are insufficient, lack coherence, and are simply not serving the students or campus well. Tinkering with the current requirements will not fix the problem. A thorough reconsideration is needed, of both content and delivery.

A re-envisioning of General Education at UC Merced should include: a set of common breadth requirements that exist outside of the disciplinary colleges; a better connection between Writing 10 and subsequent writing-intensive courses; better connection between academic and student life experiences in the requirements, particularly those involving research, internship and/or community service; consideration of enhancing the involvement of Senate faculty in delivery of the GE curriculum; coordinating General Education responsibility and accountability in a single administrative home, such as the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education's office.

Changes to General Education requirements will also require changes to advising, faculty support and reward for effective teaching, and Senate oversight of the curriculum. A concerted campus effort will be required to achieve a new GE program and requirements. Building on the work of last year's GE retreat and the self-study, perhaps a second retreat should follow soon, capitalizing on the campus momentum.

## **Introduction**

The review team conducted a site visit of UC Merced, February 8-11, 2015, to review the university's General Education requirements. We met with students, faculty (both Senate and non-Senate), staff, and administrators over the three days, and were grateful for the generosity of everyone with whom we interacted. They gave freely of their time, and were engaged contributors to our discussions. The Academic Senate Office staff was responsive to every request and need of our team, and we are most grateful to them.

The materials prepared for the review team were extensive and thorough. It was clear that much preliminary work had been done, and that the campus was ready for this review, and that it looks forward to our input so that the next phase of work can begin – the re-envisioning of an integrated General Education. This is an important component of UC Merced's transition from a start-up to a sustaining institution.

## **Approach**

The self-study, written by the Senate GE Subcommittee of the Undergraduate Council, provides an excellent framework, around which we have structured our input. Thus we have chosen to build on the campus' faculty and staff work to date to organize this report using the five recommendations outlined in the self-study (pp. 25-28). These recommendations also reflect emphases from the campus GE retreat, held in 2014.

### ***(1) Broaden instructional engagement with the design and delivery of GE***

The Regents of the University of California have delegated curriculum design and oversight to the Academic Senate. UC Merced's initial faculty designed their GE requirements well before many other faculty colleagues and any students arrived on campus. It is not a surprise that such requirements would need revision, even a complete overhaul, now more than 12 years later.

Most public research universities use a combination of Senate faculty, lecturers, and teaching assistants (TAs) to deliver their basic writing, college writing, and GE courses in the disciplines. But the balance among the instructor types must be considered and planned when the curriculum is designed, so that there is a match between the skills and expectations. It is important to undergraduates that they have exposure to the permanent faculty in their early university years, as happens at other UC campuses. Some campuses, such as Berkeley and San Diego, put their highest-rated professors in introductory courses.

Oversight of GE must be carried out by Senate faculty, and should include attention to both content and method of delivery as well as assessment of demonstrated student learning

proficiencies. It is good that the GE Subcommittee has been formed recently, but its mission should be clarified and strengthened, and it should review and approve all new GE courses, and periodically review ongoing GE courses. In addition, faculty and staff expressed strong interest in expanding ownership, oversight and delivery of GE beyond Senate faculty and the schools to include student affairs staff and advisors who are particularly important to bring into discussions given the interest in developing General Education experiences that emphasize undergraduate research and community-based learning. The GE subcommittee is a strong organizational structure, but broader campus-wide engagement is needed to develop an enriched General Education experience.

In the review team's view, the design and delivery of General Education at UC Merced needs the concentrated attention of the faculty. We can see that there is a growing body of Senate faculty who are engaged with GE, as evidenced by the participation in the recent retreat and self-study. But essentially no Senate faculty teaches in Writing 10, and few in Core 1, other than guest lectures. These two courses are the only common thread for all students, with no direct connection to the Senate faculty, the student's majors, or to any subsequent requirement from their school.

As the foundation of UC Merced's current General Education program, Core 1 is a signature experience, dedicated to enacting the eight General Education principles and introducing students to multiple disciplines and to UC Merced academic fields and faculty. The course clearly provides students a broad introduction to scholarly inquiry and wide exposure to different ways of viewing the world. Yet, faculty, students, administrators, advisors, and lecturers view, as well as assessment results about the value of Core 1, are mixed at best, and perhaps polarizing. The course was critiqued for failing to reflect non-dominant cultures, being unevenly implemented, pedagogically flat, and lacking interdisciplinarity. Students are unclear of the course purpose and outcomes and find little relevance to their experience and their educational paths.

The current delivery method of GE is not sustainable at UC Merced. Consideration of bringing more Senate faculty into the teaching is necessary. We realize that the service expectation of the faculty has been disproportionately high during the campus' first decade. Although different workload measures are used, this has led to lower teaching workloads than on most other UCs. Now that many of the majors have been established, it is an opportune time to re-direct faculty attention to teaching the GEs and bridging the disciplines, even though it may mean adjusting both the allocation of time and workload expectations. The Vice Provost for Faculty, working with the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence, can also support the

faculty in expanding their GE teaching role, workshops and assistance in ways to present their teaching in their academic file. Teaching awards specific to GE instruction might be considered.

Given the growth expectation of both graduate and undergraduate students over the next five years, TAs need to play a more important role in teaching GE. TA-ships are an important component of supporting graduate students, training the next generation of faculty instructors, and of enabling Senate faculty to teach large lower division courses. Undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty will all gain from the expansion of the use of TAs.

Current circumstances do not encourage involvement of the Senate faculty in GE teaching. There is no academic “home” for GE, or for many of the temporary instructors who teach in it. Other UC’s provide some possible models for organizing GE, for example at UC San Diego GE is housed in the undergraduate interdisciplinary colleges, under the Dean of Undergraduate Education. General Education at Davis and Santa Cruz is centralized under undergraduate education, while at UCLA the Freshman Clusters of GE fall under the Dean/Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education. The campus would be well-served by creating an infrastructure in which responsibility, authority, and accountability for GE are aligned. This will facilitate the Senate and administration to work closely together, to the benefit of the students. The VPDUE Office would be one logical home to consider, though there may be others.

#### Recommendations:

- More encompassing common GEs should be established.
- Regardless of a student’s major, whether entering as a freshman or transfer students, he/she should have a signature UC Merced experience.
- The formal charge of Undergraduate Council and its GE Subcommittee need strengthening with respect to their role of overseeing GE on the campus. Consider including a Unit 18 representative, student life representative from Student Affairs, and a student, on the GE Subcommittee.
- In addition to revising the role of the GE Subcommittee, an administrative home for GE should be assigned, where a single unit has the responsibility and authority to deliver the curriculum and strengthen co-curricular connections and outcomes in student affairs.
- The campus Long Range Enrollment Plan calls for significant growth in both the undergraduate and graduate population. For this to be financially feasible, the graduate students, as TAs, will need to play a bigger role in undergraduate education and GEs.

- Greater involvement of Senate faculty in teaching GEs is desirable. The Senate and the administration should agree on ways to engage faculty in this effort, working with the new Vice Provost for Faculty.

## ***(2) Create synergy between major programs and GE***

The current school-based distributed model of General Education delivered almost entirely through discipline-specific courses in each degree program served UC Merced well in the early phases of its development. The model allowed breadth requirements to develop with some intentionality. However, as schools and programs grew, the commitment to General Education principles and to oversight of courses waned in the Schools. Currently there is a disconnect between the schools and campus-wide GE, which means that students do not have an understanding of the mission and goals of GE, and there is essentially no coherent plan on campus for GE after Writing 10 and Core 1. This separation of GE from the disciplines, and each school from the others, is very much a disadvantage to all students, but particularly for students who change their major. More importantly, by not having a campus-wide GE program, it misses the opportunity to establish the identity of UC Merced undergraduates, and how they are uniquely educated. Students should have an identifiable, shared experience in GE that they can recognize as broadening their perspectives.

We applaud the formation of curriculum committees in each of the dean's areas. These seem relatively new, and did not demonstrate a recognition that the current GE system does not serve the students. The faculty on these committees could be tapped to join a campus-wide reconsideration of the entire GE requirements.

Recommendations:

- The schools should be intimately involved in rethinking GE, and should search for common ground that allows students to take shared GE courses throughout their first two years or even throughout their undergraduate experience. This means a campus framework for GE must be designed, with clear goals and mission.
- The idea, expressed during the Review Team's visit, of developing hallmarks of a UC Merced graduate could present various ways to more constructively connect generic GE courses and disciplinary-focused courses through, e.g. intentional research/inquiry and/or thematic pathways.

## ***(3) Provide undergraduates with research skills and experiences***

UC Merced's status as a small, research-intensive university has created high expectations – on the part of faculty and students – for engaging undergraduates in research. UC Merced is

poised and indeed could establish itself within the UC system as a campus where undergraduate research and inquiry are emblematic and central to every program, area of study and student affairs focus across the campus. The 2014 retreat report notes a strong aspiration to develop a culture of discovery and inquiry at UC Merced as the emergent hallmarks of undergraduate education (Retreat Synthesis, p. 2). As the retreat report indicates, “This emphasis speaks to how undergraduate research experiences continue to be an ongoing priority and potential area of synergy between disciplines and GE programming.”

Three important components of this emerging hallmark emerged through the faculty and staff feedback:

- 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 and to applied work.

This broadly shared commitment to research and inquiry provides an opportunity that many campuses lack. The primary challenge is not really resources, but rather how we in higher education have been developed as experts in our respective disciplines. The research model strongly reflects the graduate preparation of faculty and applied researchers; rather than on the critically important and necessary steps needed in a student’s education to prepare her or him to engage in meaningful inquiry and research. Too often, the value of developing knowledge, skills and abilities to conduct inquiry among our undergraduate students is deemed impossible because most of them are not honors students or planning to attend graduate programs. However, the research from such places as Indiana University’s Center for Post-Secondary Research, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and the National Academies of Science is clear and growing that undergraduate research and inquiry is a powerful strategy, a high-impact practice that deepens learning for all students, especially those who come to the university less well prepared than privileged students. [Kuh, 2008; Shulman, 1987, 1992; AAAS, 2013]

As discussed earlier in this document, a more integrated and intentional GE program is essential for UC Merced to achieve these goals of engaged inquiry and research as a core part of the institutional identity. Increasingly, universities are exploring approaches to GE and interdisciplinary collaboration by creating Pathways or Themes/Wicked Problems/Big Questions around important societal issues that are relevant to students and their lives prior to coming to

or outside of their university lives. Through building directly on what students bring with them, campuses are finding that retention and graduation rates have been enhanced through an increase in perceptions of relevance and connection to the university experience and the faculty and staff. [Purdue/Gallup, 2014]

For years, the University of Oregon has had Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs), intentionally organizing the first year around shared interests, including the informal Faculty Learning Communities. Portland State University has had faculty-developed thematic, year-long courses for all entering students that take different paths as a student moves into the Sophomore and Junior years, allowing student to tailor their GE paths toward a specific major; culminating in a senior capstone that must be interdisciplinary in focus and students (and involving a community partner) so that graduates can begin to see how their multiple major fields of study actually prepared them to make important contributions to a real world problem. Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts, a problem-based Engineering school, builds two specific integrative reflection and collaborative points in every student's curriculum where they work on community projects either locally or abroad.

Through a broad national group of faculty and recognized higher education research and policy leaders, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recently developed a framework for General Education Maps and Markers (GEMs) that makes the case for the power of organizing GE around a set of principles aligned and supported by educational research – proficiency, agency and self-direction, integrative and problem-based inquiry, equity, and assessment. The central argument of the GEMs work is that students from all backgrounds and levels of preparation will be better prepared for the worlds they will inhabit after their college studies if they must engage in “signature work.”

In Signature Work, a student uses his or her cumulative learning to pursue a significant project related to a problem she or he defines; the student takes the lead and produces work with attention to insights and learning gained from the inquiry and demonstrates the skills and knowledge she or he acquires. Faculty and other mentors provide support and guidance.

Signature work might be pursued in a capstone or in research conducted across thematically linked courses, or in another field-based activity or internship. It might include practicums, community service, or other experiential learning. It always will include substantial writing, multiple kinds of reflection on learning, and visible results. Many students choose to use e-portfolios to display their Signature Work products and outcomes. [AAC&U, 2015]

All of this is to say that because we know that undergraduate students cannot do what faculty have been educated to do, that we under-estimate what they actually can do if we engage them in ways that build on their existing capabilities and interests. As UC Merced grows its graduate and research components of the university, there also are many opportunities to draw on the strengths of graduate students as part of developing a GE program with signature emphasis on inquiry and research. Graduate students were most recently undergraduate students and hence are closer to understanding or translating the undergraduate experience into higher education parlance and application.

One way to begin consideration of an intentional and engaged approach to GE could be to define what undergraduate research means to disciplines across the campus to then identify priority skill areas, resource support, and areas of collaboration. A natural resource at UC Merced could be the recently founded Undergraduate Research Opportunities Center and its faculty advisory board that could inform GE planning.

Another under-utilized resource is a well-established and talented group of Student Affairs professionals already connected to undergraduate students and supporting their success. This group of motivated, educated professionals could provide many resources to collaborate with faculty to identify and connect community-based projects and opportunities, to direct students to other resources they need to improve skills and abilities, and to help student make connections among academic, social and co-curricular aspects of their education.

#### Recommendations:

- Approximately 85% of UC Merced entering students live in campus housing. The residential experience needs to be leveraged to build deeper and more meaningful introductions to General Education. Theme-based living learning communities, or FIGs, offer some examples.
- Establish undergraduate research and inquiry as hallmarks for all UCM students, beginning in first year GE courses and continuing through senior projects or capstones, intentionally linked with student programs of study.
- Explore connecting research/inquiry pathways to both co-curricular and community-based linkages and involvement to share workload and benefits of engaged learning opportunities that enhance and provide extended meaning to academic studies.
- Consider organizing GE pathways around contemporary and enduring questions/issues/topics of interest to students and faculty/educational professionals and the broader community, local and global.

***(4) Build GE experiences and outcomes from lower to upper-division courses***

The GE self-study described that GE courses currently are proposed in the context of the Eight Guiding Principles. The Principles are strong and useful, but they are not learning outcomes, and therefore both the ability to communicate what GE is meant to achieve in UC Merced students' educations, as well as how it will be possible to assess the success with which students achieve the outcomes remains problematic. Translating the Principles into learning outcomes for GE is a necessary first step. GE learning outcomes are much more than content exposure and indeed are developed throughout a student's educational pathway from entering to graduating. Many commonly identified GE learning outcomes, e.g. written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, critical thinking and Information literacy are a necessary part of any student's undergraduate education. As the Senior College and University Commission of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) states:

The institution has a program of General Education that is integrated throughout the curriculum, including at the upper division level, together with significant in-depth study in a given area of knowledge (typically described in terms of a program or major). CFR 2-2A

In the current GE organizational structure and its relation to the major fields of study, it is difficult to see the integrated and significant dimensions of the WASC accreditation standards.

The discussions in sections 2 and 3 above provide some framing thoughts for addressing the expectations for integrated work on learning outcomes as well as scaffolding the development of the GE program across the curriculum. In addition to the articulation of GE learning outcomes, decisions regarding the organization and structure of the GE program will need to occur before details for assessing the GE learning outcomes can be determined. An integral part of the redesign of the GE program needs to be assessment of the learning students experience through the program.

One way many campuses are approaching the assessment of their GE program learning outcomes as well as institutional and major program learning is through engaging students with e-portfolios. E-portfolios often are connected to an institution's Learning Management System or course management system. The usability and transparency of e-portfolios has improved immensely in the past several years. E-portfolios allow faculty to frame the learning outcomes and the types of evidence students need to produce to meet the faculty expectations for learning. They allow for faculty to examine the student evidence or work whenever they wish to access it. Students have the responsibility of producing the required work and placing it in the e-portfolio in ways the faculty or the institution specifies. The work that faculty require through

course assignments is the same evidence needed for learning outcome assessment and can be evaluated for both course grading and program assessment at one time once familiarity with assessment processes is established.

One of the appeals of e-portfolios is the flexible uses to which they can be used by faculty, educators and institutions, e.g. the University of Notre Dame uses e-portfolios beginning with all entering students to advise students on their educational requirements and paths of study; Stanford University is using e-portfolios with graduating seniors to connect the actual examples of their work with the formal university transcript to illustrate what students did in specific courses; and Florida State University has graduates use their portfolios connected to their resumes and job applications through the university's Career Center for post-graduate placement. Overall, research on e-portfolios is beginning to reveal that portfolios are a useful space for students to reflect on their own learning and their strengths and weaknesses; portfolios are a place where students can be instructed to integrate learning across multiple disciplinary venues, the curriculum and the co-curriculum; and portfolios seem to be particularly valuable for first generation and under-served students to connect their life experiences to their academic pursuits resulting in gains in retention and graduation success. (Eynon, et. al. 2014)

The new conception of the purposes and structures of GE raised in the self-study will require a new governance arrangement for GE that moves beyond the course proposal process. A structure that can actually play a role in ensuring that GE is a complete program rather than a couple courses; that learning outcomes are articulated in measurable ways that can be assessed throughout the course of the students' education at UC Merced or as a transfer student; that GE plays a central part in engaging students in the hallmarks of a UC Merced undergraduate education, and that faculty and graduate students are involved in the instruction of students throughout the GE program. The alignment of lower and upper division courses will be based on this evolving GE mission, articulated outcomes, a program assessment strategy and faculty engagement in providing the hallmarks of the UCM education.

As the UC Merced self-study indicated, "Upper division GE coursework will benefit from a focus on synergy with lower-division foundational coursework and broader alignment with a GE program. At the GE retreat, participants noted that GE could provide a context for "learning to learn" with potential to transfer content and skills throughout undergraduate education." The current GE program in its current form fails to achieve these aspirations, as GE courses are part of an unconstrained menu. So far, available seats have largely dictated upper-division GE enrollment which is limited as far as intentional and aligned programming.

#### Recommendations:

- Transform the Eight Guiding Principles into Learning Outcomes that are measurable and assessable at desired levels of student proficiency
- Create pathways or guided ways, e.g. through e-portfolios in which students can engage throughout their GE program (as well as major program of study) to integrate and connect their learning across courses and co-curricular experiences.
- Institute initial and periodic review of courses and experiences that comprise GE to ensure scaffolded and integrated opportunities for students that develop students' abilities, skills and knowledge necessary to demonstrate learning outcomes at desired levels.

#### ***(5) Provide GE programming that connects curricular and co-curricular experiences***

An integrative General Education program emphasizes the important higher education goal of fostering students' capacity to integrate learning across courses, over time, and between campus and community life. Building intentional connections between the curriculum and co-curriculum advances this goal by encouraging students to make connections among ideas and experiences, and to synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations within and beyond their coursework. The intentional creation of co-curricular experiences that align with and advance General Education provides reinforcing opportunities for students to integrate their learning throughout their college career.

UC Merced's self-study report outlined a future of General Education emphasizing a comprehensive vision that values the connection between curricular and co-curricular experiences. In addition, the future direction section highlighted the importance of relating "high-impact practices" including first-year seminars, learning communities, service-learning and research with faculty, to General Education. The basis for these connections was explored in the self-study. For example, results from the Graduating Senior Survey revealed that students' perceived that their co-curricular experiences helped improve their proficiency with all current General Education principles. UC Merced student focus groups also pointed out that "extracurricular activities reinforce and cultivate valued GE outcomes" (p. 16), specifying that opportunities to apply GE principles were part of campus employment, community-based learning, and peer leader positions. These findings point to the potential for building a more comprehensive, integrated General Education experience that bridges the curriculum and co-curriculum.

The notion of connecting the curriculum and co-curriculum was further explored during our visit. Overall, the idea of integration was viewed favorably by administrators, faculty, students,

and student affairs professionals. Specific ideas related to this theme were most often connected to the institutions' Carnegie designation of Community Engagement and the importance of emphasizing connections to the needs and resources of the Central Valley community. Suggestions included the expansion of community-based learning projects that would provide students structured occasions to apply what they are learning in different contexts and to reflect on General Education goals. Strong community engaged institutions that effectively connect the curriculum and co-curriculum, including Keene State College, CSU Monterey Bay, and Tufts University, could be consulted for ideas. Keene State College, for example, has established a pervasive civic engagement culture, with strong academic and co-curricular components. Whereas CSUMB has developed an intentional, scaffolded approach that introduces all new students to service through required experiences, followed by upper division courses (designated as service-learning) and opportunities to do meaningful community-based research in Capstone. The most innovative and extensive approach to community engagement is found at Tufts University's Tisch College, which builds a culture of active citizenship throughout the university by developing citizenship programming in collaboration with Tufts schools, departments, and student groups. This university-wide, entrepreneurial approach offers extensive programming in the curriculum and co-curriculum, supports faculty research in the area of civic engagement, and builds capacity to meet community-identified needs among local non-profits.

An integrated approach to General Education demands collaboration between academic and student affairs colleagues on the planning and delivery of General Education programming and systematic efforts to ensure opportunities for students to make the connections and synthesize learning beyond the classroom. The student affairs staff at UC Merced expressed enthusiasm and interest in building these connections, particularly in relation to developing high-impact practices. Student affairs staff indicated that they have been programming events to reinforce the current General Education principles and outcomes. Although student affairs is poised and ready to design and deepen these connections, greater attention needs to be paid to cultivating more intentional partnerships with faculty and working to align their activities to academic priorities and initiatives.

The most obvious opportunity to build curricular and co-curricular connections in General Education is in the first college year, particularly through orientation, residence life, first-year seminars, and other common experiences. The configuration of a coherent UC Merced first year experience, could for example bring together the two themes of interest – community engagement and undergraduate research – by including community service, social justice programs, or a community-based research experiences. These activities could be incorporated in a first-year seminar course or via a signature “UC Merced experience” that is a common,

integrated experience for all first year students, and also through themed residential learning communities, such as that in several colleges at UC Santa Cruz. A strong integrated learning approach in the first year experience is offered at Chico State, in which academically intense and applied “town hall meetings” and book in common events connect curricular and co-curricular learning in public sphere pedagogy and peer mentoring. Connections established in the first year experience can certainly continue into the sophomore year and into the major, reinforced through advising that seeks to ensure students are getting connected to academic clubs and co-curricular leadership experiences and via UC Merced’s commitment to contextualized generation education in the major.

Student affairs staff at UC Merced are willing partners in General Education. They see the value of being more intentional about linking the curriculum and co-curriculum, recognize the importance of an effective General Education that positively contributes to student belonging and persistence, and believe that aligning programming around General Education outcomes can enhance student development and learning. Student affairs involvement and intentional co-curricular experiences can help foster the goals and support student learning in General Education. Even more, the articulation or a more integrated General Education would help reinforce the value of General Education for all students, and in particular to UC Merced’s many first-generation students and families.

#### Recommendations:

- Leverage the significance of the Carnegie Community Engagement classification and strong interest of UC Merced faculty, staff and students in investing in the Central Valley to build a unique approach to civic learning that emphasizes General Education outcomes, integrates the curriculum and co-curriculum, and deepens students’ sense of belonging to the institution and the community.
- Reinforce and support student affairs interests in bringing co-curricular programming and student life experiences in line with General Education outcomes, encouraging ideas like organizing the Involvement Portfolio around General Education principles, and develop assessment and program evaluation to assure effectiveness.
- Connect student affairs more deliberately to all aspects of General Education planning, assessment, and delivery to develop a more integrated undergraduate education. Concurrently, student affairs staff must work to align their activities to support academic priorities and initiatives.
- Construct a coherent first year experience that emphasizes active citizenship and community engaged research through intellectually intense curricular and co-curricular experiences.

In conclusion:

By building a GE program focused on developing students' inquiry and research skills and abilities and organized around important questions or problems, new doors open to involve student affairs and engage Senate faculty in GE education and instruction, especially with intentional and integrated support resources and collaboration across departments and offices. The array of experiential and co-curricular opportunities can also be strengthened and expanded to foster integrated learning.

Simply having students take a menu of courses in diverse fields or departments or topics does not achieve the intentional development of inquiry and research skills or the interdisciplinarity needed for university graduates to be successful in an economy that is rapidly changing or a society that is under siege from forces that repudiate thoughtfulness, reason and evidence. In short, UC Merced has identified important and emergent hallmarks for UCM students at a time when it is receiving new resources to grow and develop these very abilities in its students; as a hallmark for all of its students. The existing approach and conception of the value and role of GE and the attendant necessary characteristics of the new faculty to be hired is inadequate to achieve the hallmarks identified for the institution by the retreat participants and the follow-on activities. UC Merced can hire faculty, and involve graduate students as TAs, who meet disciplinary needs and contribute productively to a re-envisioned GE in the innovative ways identified in the self-study. Guided by the framework and themes from the GE Retreat and the thoughtful vision outlined by the Senate GE Subcommittee of the Undergraduate Council, UC Merced has a strong foundation upon which to construct a sustainable, integrated GE program.

Respectfully submitted by the Review Team,  
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**Appendix**  
**Summary of General Education Program Review Recommendations**

<b>(1) Recommendations: Broaden instructional engagement with the design and delivery of General Education</b>
More encompassing common General Education courses should be established beyond the two existing required courses.
Regardless of a student's major, whether entering as a freshman or transfer students, he/she should have a signature UC Merced experience.
The formal charge of Undergraduate Council and its GE Subcommittee need strengthening with respect to their role of overseeing GE on the campus. Consider including a Unit 18 representative, a representative from Student Affairs, and a student, on the GE Subcommittee.
In addition to revising the role of the GE Subcommittee, an administrative home for GE should be assigned, where a single unit has the responsibility and authority to deliver the curriculum and strengthen co-curricular connections and outcomes in student affairs.
The campus Long Range Enrollment Plan calls for significant growth in both the undergraduate and graduate population. For this to be financially feasible, the graduate students, as TAs, will need to play a bigger role in undergraduate education and GEs.
Greater involvement of Senate faculty in teaching GEs is desirable. The Senate and the administration should agree on ways to engage faculty in this effort, working with the new Vice Provost for Faculty.
<b>(2) Recommendations: Create synergy between major programs and General Education</b>
The schools should be intimately involved in rethinking GE, and should search for common ground that allows students to take shared GE courses throughout their first two years or even throughout their undergraduate experience. This means a campus framework for GE must be designed, with clear goals and mission.
The idea, expressed during the Review Team's visit, of developing hallmarks of a UCM graduate could present various ways to more constructively connect generic GE courses and disciplinary-focused courses through, e.g. intentional research/inquiry and/or thematic pathways.
<b>(3) Recommendations: Provide undergraduates with research skills and experiences</b>
Approximately 85% of UC Merced entering students live in campus housing. The residential experience needs to be leveraged to build deeper and more meaningful introductions to general education. Theme-based living learning communities, or FIGs, offer some examples.
Establish undergraduate research and inquiry as hallmarks for all UCM students, beginning in first year GE courses and continuing through senior projects or capstones, intentionally linked

with students' programs of study.
Explore connecting research/inquiry pathways to both co-curricular and community-based linkages and involvement to share workload and benefits of engaged learning opportunities that enhance and provide extended meaning to academic studies.
Consider organizing GE pathways around contemporary and enduring questions/issues/topics of interest to students and faculty/educational professionals and the broader community, local and global.
<b>(4) Recommendations: Build GE experiences and outcomes from lower to upper-division courses</b>
Transform the Eight Guiding Principles into Learning Outcomes that are measurable and assessable at desired levels of student proficiency
Create pathways or guided ways, e.g. through e-portfolios in which students can engage throughout their GE program (as well as major program of study) to integrate and connect their learning across courses and co-curricular experiences.
Institute initial and periodic review of courses and experiences that comprise GE to ensure scaffolded and integrated opportunities for students that develop students' abilities, skills and knowledge necessary to demonstrate learning outcomes at desired levels.
<b>(5) Recommendations: Provide GE programming that connects curricular and co-curricular experiences</b>
Leverage the significance of the Carnegie Community Engagement classification and strong interest of UC Merced faculty, staff and students in investing in the Central Valley to build a unique approach to civic learning that emphasizes general education outcomes, integrates the curriculum and co-curriculum, and deepens students' sense of belonging to the institution and the community.
Reinforce and support student affairs interests in bringing co-curricular programming and student life experiences in line with general education outcomes, encouraging ideas like organizing the Involvement Portfolio around general education principles, and develop assessment and program evaluation to assure effectiveness.
Connect student affairs more deliberately to all aspects of general education planning, assessment, and delivery to develop a more integrated undergraduate education.
Construct a coherent first year experience that emphasizes active citizenship and community engaged research through intellectually intense curricular and co-curricular experiences

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**UC Merced**  
**General Education Academic Program Review**  
Report of the Review Team  
*March 31, 2015*

**Executive Summary**

The General Education (GE) program at UC Merced was established before the University opened in 2005. Ten years later, the institution undertook a serious, comprehensive, and thoughtful review of the state of General Education. This review comes at an important time in the institution's evolution, as enrollment is expanding and strategic academic focusing is underway. Review findings are intended to contribute to the development of a cohesive, coherent, assessable, and sustainable General Education program that reflects the institution's goals for student learning in light of emerging institutional priorities.

UC Merced's General Education program is intended as a means for cultivating eight institutional guiding principles and supporting student success. However, the only common General Education experienced by incoming freshman students is two courses, Writing 10 and Core 1. Transfer students have no common General Education experience. It is the Review Team's recommendation that the current General Education requirements, including School requirements, are insufficient, lack coherence, and are simply not serving the students or campus well. Tinkering with the current requirements will not fix the problem. A thorough reconsideration is needed, of both content and delivery.

A re-envisioning of General Education at UC Merced should include: a set of common breadth requirements that exist outside of the disciplinary colleges; a better connection between Writing 10 and subsequent writing-intensive courses; better connection between academic and student life experiences in the requirements, particularly those involving research, internship and/or community service; consideration of enhancing the involvement of Senate faculty in delivery of the GE curriculum; coordinating General Education responsibility and accountability in a single administrative home, such as the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education's office.

Changes to General Education requirements will also require changes to advising, faculty support and reward for effective teaching, and Senate oversight of the curriculum. A concerted campus effort will be required to achieve a new GE program and requirements. Building on the work of last year's GE retreat and the self-study, perhaps a second retreat should follow soon, capitalizing on the campus momentum.

## **Introduction**

The review team conducted a site visit of UC Merced, February 8-11, 2015, to review the university's General Education requirements. We met with students, faculty (both Senate and non-Senate), staff, and administrators over the three days, and were grateful for the generosity of everyone with whom we interacted. They gave freely of their time, and were engaged contributors to our discussions. The Academic Senate Office staff was responsive to every request and need of our team, and we are most grateful to them.

The materials prepared for the review team were extensive and thorough. It was clear that much preliminary work had been done, and that the campus was ready for this review, and that it looks forward to our input so that the next phase of work can begin – the re-envisioning of an integrated General Education. This is an important component of UC Merced's transition from a start-up to a sustaining institution.

## **Approach**

The self-study, written by the Senate GE Subcommittee of the Undergraduate Council, provides an excellent framework, around which we have structured our input. Thus we have chosen to build on the campus' faculty and staff work to date to organize this report using the five recommendations outlined in the self-study (pp. 25-28). These recommendations also reflect emphases from the campus GE retreat, held in 2014.

### ***(1) Broaden instructional engagement with the design and delivery of GE***

The Regents of the University of California have delegated curriculum design and oversight to the Academic Senate. UC Merced's initial faculty designed their GE requirements well before many other faculty colleagues and any students arrived on campus. It is not a surprise that such requirements would need revision, even a complete overhaul, now more than 12 years later.

Most public research universities use a combination of Senate faculty, lecturers, and teaching assistants (TAs) to deliver their basic writing, college writing, and GE courses in the disciplines. But the balance among the instructor types must be considered and planned when the curriculum is designed, so that there is a match between the skills and expectations. It is important to undergraduates that they have exposure to the permanent faculty in their early university years, as happens at other UC campuses. Some campuses, such as Berkeley and San Diego, put their highest-rated professors in introductory courses.

Oversight of GE must be carried out by Senate faculty, and should include attention to both content and method of delivery as well as assessment of demonstrated student learning

proficiencies. It is good that the GE Subcommittee has been formed recently, but its mission should be clarified and strengthened, and it should review and approve all new GE courses, and periodically review ongoing GE courses. In addition, faculty and staff expressed strong interest in expanding ownership, oversight and delivery of GE beyond Senate faculty and the schools to include student affairs staff and advisors who are particularly important to bring into discussions given the interest in developing General Education experiences that emphasize undergraduate research and community-based learning. The GE subcommittee is a strong organizational structure, but broader campus-wide engagement is needed to develop an enriched General Education experience.

In the review team's view, the design and delivery of General Education at UC Merced needs the concentrated attention of the faculty. We can see that there is a growing body of Senate faculty who are engaged with GE, as evidenced by the participation in the recent retreat and self-study. But essentially no Senate faculty teaches in Writing 10, and few in Core 1, other than guest lectures. These two courses are the only common thread for all students, with no direct connection to the Senate faculty, the student's majors, or to any subsequent requirement from their school.

As the foundation of UC Merced's current General Education program, Core 1 is a signature experience, dedicated to enacting the eight General Education principles and introducing students to multiple disciplines and to UC Merced academic fields and faculty. The course clearly provides students a broad introduction to scholarly inquiry and wide exposure to different ways of viewing the world. Yet, faculty, students, administrators, advisors, and lecturers view, as well as assessment results about the value of Core 1, are mixed at best, and perhaps polarizing. The course was critiqued for failing to reflect non-dominant cultures, being unevenly implemented, pedagogically flat, and lacking interdisciplinarity. Students are unclear of the course purpose and outcomes and find little relevance to their experience and their educational paths.

The current delivery method of GE is not sustainable at UC Merced. Consideration of bringing more Senate faculty into the teaching is necessary. We realize that the service expectation of the faculty has been disproportionately high during the campus' first decade. Although different workload measures are used, this has led to lower teaching workloads than on most other UCs. Now that many of the majors have been established, it is an opportune time to re-direct faculty attention to teaching the GEs and bridging the disciplines, even though it may mean adjusting both the allocation of time and workload expectations. The Vice Provost for Faculty, working with the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence, can also support the

faculty in expanding their GE teaching role, workshops and assistance in ways to present their teaching in their academic file. Teaching awards specific to GE instruction might be considered.

Given the growth expectation of both graduate and undergraduate students over the next five years, TAs need to play a more important role in teaching GE. TA-ships are an important component of supporting graduate students, training the next generation of faculty instructors, and of enabling Senate faculty to teach large lower division courses. Undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty will all gain from the expansion of the use of TAs.

Current circumstances do not encourage involvement of the Senate faculty in GE teaching. There is no academic “home” for GE, or for many of the temporary instructors who teach in it. Other UC’s provide some possible models for organizing GE, for example at UC San Diego GE is housed in the undergraduate interdisciplinary colleges, under the Dean of Undergraduate Education. General Education at Davis and Santa Cruz is centralized under undergraduate education, while at UCLA the Freshman Clusters of GE fall under the Dean/Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education. The campus would be well-served by creating an infrastructure in which responsibility, authority, and accountability for GE are aligned. This will facilitate the Senate and administration to work closely together, to the benefit of the students. The VPDUE Office would be one logical home to consider, though there may be others.

#### Recommendations:

- More encompassing common GEs should be established.
- Regardless of a student’s major, whether entering as a freshman or transfer students, he/she should have a signature UC Merced experience.
- The formal charge of Undergraduate Council and its GE Subcommittee need strengthening with respect to their role of overseeing GE on the campus. Consider including a Unit 18 representative, student life representative from Student Affairs, and a student, on the GE Subcommittee.
- In addition to revising the role of the GE Subcommittee, an administrative home for GE should be assigned, where a single unit has the responsibility and authority to deliver the curriculum and strengthen co-curricular connections and outcomes in student affairs.
- The campus Long Range Enrollment Plan calls for significant growth in both the undergraduate and graduate population. For this to be financially feasible, the graduate students, as TAs, will need to play a bigger role in undergraduate education and GEs.

- Greater involvement of Senate faculty in teaching GEs is desirable. The Senate and the administration should agree on ways to engage faculty in this effort, working with the new Vice Provost for Faculty.

## ***(2) Create synergy between major programs and GE***

The current school-based distributed model of General Education delivered almost entirely through discipline-specific courses in each degree program served UC Merced well in the early phases of its development. The model allowed breadth requirements to develop with some intentionality. However, as schools and programs grew, the commitment to General Education principles and to oversight of courses waned in the Schools. Currently there is a disconnect between the schools and campus-wide GE, which means that students do not have an understanding of the mission and goals of GE, and there is essentially no coherent plan on campus for GE after Writing 10 and Core 1. This separation of GE from the disciplines, and each school from the others, is very much a disadvantage to all students, but particularly for students who change their major. More importantly, by not having a campus-wide GE program, it misses the opportunity to establish the identity of UC Merced undergraduates, and how they are uniquely educated. Students should have an identifiable, shared experience in GE that they can recognize as broadening their perspectives.

We applaud the formation of curriculum committees in each of the dean's areas. These seem relatively new, and did not demonstrate a recognition that the current GE system does not serve the students. The faculty on these committees could be tapped to join a campus-wide reconsideration of the entire GE requirements.

Recommendations:

- The schools should be intimately involved in rethinking GE, and should search for common ground that allows students to take shared GE courses throughout their first two years or even throughout their undergraduate experience. This means a campus framework for GE must be designed, with clear goals and mission.
- The idea, expressed during the Review Team's visit, of developing hallmarks of a UC Merced graduate could present various ways to more constructively connect generic GE courses and disciplinary-focused courses through, e.g. intentional research/inquiry and/or thematic pathways.

## ***(3) Provide undergraduates with research skills and experiences***

UC Merced's status as a small, research-intensive university has created high expectations – on the part of faculty and students – for engaging undergraduates in research. UC Merced is

poised and indeed could establish itself within the UC system as a campus where undergraduate research and inquiry are emblematic and central to every program, area of study and student affairs focus across the campus. The 2014 retreat report notes a strong aspiration to develop a culture of discovery and inquiry at UC Merced as the emergent hallmarks of undergraduate education (Retreat Synthesis, p. 2). As the retreat report indicates, “This emphasis speaks to how undergraduate research experiences continue to be an ongoing priority and potential area of synergy between disciplines and GE programming.”

Three important components of this emerging hallmark emerged through the faculty and staff feedback:

- 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 and to applied work.

This broadly shared commitment to research and inquiry provides an opportunity that many campuses lack. The primary challenge is not really resources, but rather how we in higher education have been developed as experts in our respective disciplines. The research model strongly reflects the graduate preparation of faculty and applied researchers; rather than on the critically important and necessary steps needed in a student’s education to prepare her or him to engage in meaningful inquiry and research. Too often, the value of developing knowledge, skills and abilities to conduct inquiry among our undergraduate students is deemed impossible because most of them are not honors students or planning to attend graduate programs. However, the research from such places as Indiana University’s Center for Post-Secondary Research, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning and the National Academies of Science is clear and growing that undergraduate research and inquiry is a powerful strategy, a high-impact practice that deepens learning for all students, especially those who come to the university less well prepared than privileged students. [Kuh, 2008; Shulman, 1987, 1992; AAAS, 2013]

As discussed earlier in this document, a more integrated and intentional GE program is essential for UC Merced to achieve these goals of engaged inquiry and research as a core part of the institutional identity. Increasingly, universities are exploring approaches to GE and interdisciplinary collaboration by creating Pathways or Themes/Wicked Problems/Big Questions around important societal issues that are relevant to students and their lives prior to coming to

or outside of their university lives. Through building directly on what students bring with them, campuses are finding that retention and graduation rates have been enhanced through an increase in perceptions of relevance and connection to the university experience and the faculty and staff. [Purdue/Gallup, 2014]

For years, the University of Oregon has had Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs), intentionally organizing the first year around shared interests, including the informal Faculty Learning Communities. Portland State University has had faculty-developed thematic, year-long courses for all entering students that take different paths as a student moves into the Sophomore and Junior years, allowing student to tailor their GE paths toward a specific major; culminating in a senior capstone that must be interdisciplinary in focus and students (and involving a community partner) so that graduates can begin to see how their multiple major fields of study actually prepared them to make important contributions to a real world problem. Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts, a problem-based Engineering school, builds two specific integrative reflection and collaborative points in every student's curriculum where they work on community projects either locally or abroad.

Through a broad national group of faculty and recognized higher education research and policy leaders, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recently developed a framework for General Education Maps and Markers (GEMs) that makes the case for the power of organizing GE around a set of principles aligned and supported by educational research – proficiency, agency and self-direction, integrative and problem-based inquiry, equity, and assessment. The central argument of the GEMs work is that students from all backgrounds and levels of preparation will be better prepared for the worlds they will inhabit after their college studies if they must engage in “signature work.”

In Signature Work, a student uses his or her cumulative learning to pursue a significant project related to a problem she or he defines; the student takes the lead and produces work with attention to insights and learning gained from the inquiry and demonstrates the skills and knowledge she or he acquires. Faculty and other mentors provide support and guidance.

Signature work might be pursued in a capstone or in research conducted across thematically linked courses, or in another field-based activity or internship. It might include practicums, community service, or other experiential learning. It always will include substantial writing, multiple kinds of reflection on learning, and visible results. Many students choose to use e-portfolios to display their Signature Work products and outcomes. [AAC&U, 2015]

All of this is to say that because we know that undergraduate students cannot do what faculty have been educated to do, that we under-estimate what they actually can do if we engage them in ways that build on their existing capabilities and interests. As UC Merced grows its graduate and research components of the university, there also are many opportunities to draw on the strengths of graduate students as part of developing a GE program with signature emphasis on inquiry and research. Graduate students were most recently undergraduate students and hence are closer to understanding or translating the undergraduate experience into higher education parlance and application.

One way to begin consideration of an intentional and engaged approach to GE could be to define what undergraduate research means to disciplines across the campus to then identify priority skill areas, resource support, and areas of collaboration. A natural resource at UC Merced could be the recently founded Undergraduate Research Opportunities Center and its faculty advisory board that could inform GE planning.

Another under-utilized resource is a well-established and talented group of Student Affairs professionals already connected to undergraduate students and supporting their success. This group of motivated, educated professionals could provide many resources to collaborate with faculty to identify and connect community-based projects and opportunities, to direct students to other resources they need to improve skills and abilities, and to help student make connections among academic, social and co-curricular aspects of their education.

#### Recommendations:

- Approximately 85% of UC Merced entering students live in campus housing. The residential experience needs to be leveraged to build deeper and more meaningful introductions to General Education. Theme-based living learning communities, or FIGs, offer some examples.
- Establish undergraduate research and inquiry as hallmarks for all UCM students, beginning in first year GE courses and continuing through senior projects or capstones, intentionally linked with student programs of study.
- Explore connecting research/inquiry pathways to both co-curricular and community-based linkages and involvement to share workload and benefits of engaged learning opportunities that enhance and provide extended meaning to academic studies.
- Consider organizing GE pathways around contemporary and enduring questions/issues/topics of interest to students and faculty/educational professionals and the broader community, local and global.

***(4) Build GE experiences and outcomes from lower to upper-division courses***

The GE self-study described that GE courses currently are proposed in the context of the Eight Guiding Principles. The Principles are strong and useful, but they are not learning outcomes, and therefore both the ability to communicate what GE is meant to achieve in UC Merced students' educations, as well as how it will be possible to assess the success with which students achieve the outcomes remains problematic. Translating the Principles into learning outcomes for GE is a necessary first step. GE learning outcomes are much more than content exposure and indeed are developed throughout a student's educational pathway from entering to graduating. Many commonly identified GE learning outcomes, e.g. written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, critical thinking and Information literacy are a necessary part of any student's undergraduate education. As the Senior College and University Commission of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) states:

The institution has a program of General Education that is integrated throughout the curriculum, including at the upper division level, together with significant in-depth study in a given area of knowledge (typically described in terms of a program or major). CFR 2-2A

In the current GE organizational structure and its relation to the major fields of study, it is difficult to see the integrated and significant dimensions of the WASC accreditation standards.

The discussions in sections 2 and 3 above provide some framing thoughts for addressing the expectations for integrated work on learning outcomes as well as scaffolding the development of the GE program across the curriculum. In addition to the articulation of GE learning outcomes, decisions regarding the organization and structure of the GE program will need to occur before details for assessing the GE learning outcomes can be determined. An integral part of the redesign of the GE program needs to be assessment of the learning students experience through the program.

One way many campuses are approaching the assessment of their GE program learning outcomes as well as institutional and major program learning is through engaging students with e-portfolios. E-portfolios often are connected to an institution's Learning Management System or course management system. The usability and transparency of e-portfolios has improved immensely in the past several years. E-portfolios allow faculty to frame the learning outcomes and the types of evidence students need to produce to meet the faculty expectations for learning. They allow for faculty to examine the student evidence or work whenever they wish to access it. Students have the responsibility of producing the required work and placing it in the e-portfolio in ways the faculty or the institution specifies. The work that faculty require through

course assignments is the same evidence needed for learning outcome assessment and can be evaluated for both course grading and program assessment at one time once familiarity with assessment processes is established.

One of the appeals of e-portfolios is the flexible uses to which they can be used by faculty, educators and institutions, e.g. the University of Notre Dame uses e-portfolios beginning with all entering students to advise students on their educational requirements and paths of study; Stanford University is using e-portfolios with graduating seniors to connect the actual examples of their work with the formal university transcript to illustrate what students did in specific courses; and Florida State University has graduates use their portfolios connected to their resumes and job applications through the university's Career Center for post-graduate placement. Overall, research on e-portfolios is beginning to reveal that portfolios are a useful space for students to reflect on their own learning and their strengths and weaknesses; portfolios are a place where students can be instructed to integrate learning across multiple disciplinary venues, the curriculum and the co-curriculum; and portfolios seem to be particularly valuable for first generation and under-served students to connect their life experiences to their academic pursuits resulting in gains in retention and graduation success. (Eynon, et. al. 2014)

The new conception of the purposes and structures of GE raised in the self-study will require a new governance arrangement for GE that moves beyond the course proposal process. A structure that can actually play a role in ensuring that GE is a complete program rather than a couple courses; that learning outcomes are articulated in measurable ways that can be assessed throughout the course of the students' education at UC Merced or as a transfer student; that GE plays a central part in engaging students in the hallmarks of a UC Merced undergraduate education, and that faculty and graduate students are involved in the instruction of students throughout the GE program. The alignment of lower and upper division courses will be based on this evolving GE mission, articulated outcomes, a program assessment strategy and faculty engagement in providing the hallmarks of the UCM education.

As the UC Merced self-study indicated, "Upper division GE coursework will benefit from a focus on synergy with lower-division foundational coursework and broader alignment with a GE program. At the GE retreat, participants noted that GE could provide a context for "learning to learn" with potential to transfer content and skills throughout undergraduate education." The current GE program in its current form fails to achieve these aspirations, as GE courses are part of an unconstrained menu. So far, available seats have largely dictated upper-division GE enrollment which is limited as far as intentional and aligned programming.

#### Recommendations:

- Transform the Eight Guiding Principles into Learning Outcomes that are measurable and assessable at desired levels of student proficiency
- Create pathways or guided ways, e.g. through e-portfolios in which students can engage throughout their GE program (as well as major program of study) to integrate and connect their learning across courses and co-curricular experiences.
- Institute initial and periodic review of courses and experiences that comprise GE to ensure scaffolded and integrated opportunities for students that develop students' abilities, skills and knowledge necessary to demonstrate learning outcomes at desired levels.

#### ***(5) Provide GE programming that connects curricular and co-curricular experiences***

An integrative General Education program emphasizes the important higher education goal of fostering students' capacity to integrate learning across courses, over time, and between campus and community life. Building intentional connections between the curriculum and co-curriculum advances this goal by encouraging students to make connections among ideas and experiences, and to synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations within and beyond their coursework. The intentional creation of co-curricular experiences that align with and advance General Education provides reinforcing opportunities for students to integrate their learning throughout their college career.

UC Merced's self-study report outlined a future of General Education emphasizing a comprehensive vision that values the connection between curricular and co-curricular experiences. In addition, the future direction section highlighted the importance of relating "high-impact practices" including first-year seminars, learning communities, service-learning and research with faculty, to General Education. The basis for these connections was explored in the self-study. For example, results from the Graduating Senior Survey revealed that students' perceived that their co-curricular experiences helped improve their proficiency with all current General Education principles. UC Merced student focus groups also pointed out that "extracurricular activities reinforce and cultivate valued GE outcomes" (p. 16), specifying that opportunities to apply GE principles were part of campus employment, community-based learning, and peer leader positions. These findings point to the potential for building a more comprehensive, integrated General Education experience that bridges the curriculum and co-curriculum.

The notion of connecting the curriculum and co-curriculum was further explored during our visit. Overall, the idea of integration was viewed favorably by administrators, faculty, students,

and student affairs professionals. Specific ideas related to this theme were most often connected to the institutions' Carnegie designation of Community Engagement and the importance of emphasizing connections to the needs and resources of the Central Valley community. Suggestions included the expansion of community-based learning projects that would provide students structured occasions to apply what they are learning in different contexts and to reflect on General Education goals. Strong community engaged institutions that effectively connect the curriculum and co-curriculum, including Keene State College, CSU Monterey Bay, and Tufts University, could be consulted for ideas. Keene State College, for example, has established a pervasive civic engagement culture, with strong academic and co-curricular components. Whereas CSUMB has developed an intentional, scaffolded approach that introduces all new students to service through required experiences, followed by upper division courses (designated as service-learning) and opportunities to do meaningful community-based research in Capstone. The most innovative and extensive approach to community engagement is found at Tufts University's Tisch College, which builds a culture of active citizenship throughout the university by developing citizenship programming in collaboration with Tufts schools, departments, and student groups. This university-wide, entrepreneurial approach offers extensive programming in the curriculum and co-curriculum, supports faculty research in the area of civic engagement, and builds capacity to meet community-identified needs among local non-profits.

An integrated approach to General Education demands collaboration between academic and student affairs colleagues on the planning and delivery of General Education programming and systematic efforts to ensure opportunities for students to make the connections and synthesize learning beyond the classroom. The student affairs staff at UC Merced expressed enthusiasm and interest in building these connections, particularly in relation to developing high-impact practices. Student affairs staff indicated that they have been programming events to reinforce the current General Education principles and outcomes. Although student affairs is poised and ready to design and deepen these connections, greater attention needs to be paid to cultivating more intentional partnerships with faculty and working to align their activities to academic priorities and initiatives.

The most obvious opportunity to build curricular and co-curricular connections in General Education is in the first college year, particularly through orientation, residence life, first-year seminars, and other common experiences. The configuration of a coherent UC Merced first year experience, could for example bring together the two themes of interest – community engagement and undergraduate research – by including community service, social justice programs, or a community-based research experiences. These activities could be incorporated in a first-year seminar course or via a signature “UC Merced experience” that is a common,

integrated experience for all first year students, and also through themed residential learning communities, such as that in several colleges at UC Santa Cruz. A strong integrated learning approach in the first year experience is offered at Chico State, in which academically intense and applied “town hall meetings” and book in common events connect curricular and co-curricular learning in public sphere pedagogy and peer mentoring. Connections established in the first year experience can certainly continue into the sophomore year and into the major, reinforced through advising that seeks to ensure students are getting connected to academic clubs and co-curricular leadership experiences and via UC Merced’s commitment to contextualized generation education in the major.

Student affairs staff at UC Merced are willing partners in General Education. They see the value of being more intentional about linking the curriculum and co-curriculum, recognize the importance of an effective General Education that positively contributes to student belonging and persistence, and believe that aligning programming around General Education outcomes can enhance student development and learning. Student affairs involvement and intentional co-curricular experiences can help foster the goals and support student learning in General Education. Even more, the articulation or a more integrated General Education would help reinforce the value of General Education for all students, and in particular to UC Merced’s many first-generation students and families.

#### Recommendations:

- Leverage the significance of the Carnegie Community Engagement classification and strong interest of UC Merced faculty, staff and students in investing in the Central Valley to build a unique approach to civic learning that emphasizes General Education outcomes, integrates the curriculum and co-curriculum, and deepens students’ sense of belonging to the institution and the community.
- Reinforce and support student affairs interests in bringing co-curricular programming and student life experiences in line with General Education outcomes, encouraging ideas like organizing the Involvement Portfolio around General Education principles, and develop assessment and program evaluation to assure effectiveness.
- Connect student affairs more deliberately to all aspects of General Education planning, assessment, and delivery to develop a more integrated undergraduate education. Concurrently, student affairs staff must work to align their activities to support academic priorities and initiatives.
- Construct a coherent first year experience that emphasizes active citizenship and community engaged research through intellectually intense curricular and co-curricular experiences.

In conclusion:

By building a GE program focused on developing students' inquiry and research skills and abilities and organized around important questions or problems, new doors open to involve student affairs and engage Senate faculty in GE education and instruction, especially with intentional and integrated support resources and collaboration across departments and offices. The array of experiential and co-curricular opportunities can also be strengthened and expanded to foster integrated learning.

Simply having students take a menu of courses in diverse fields or departments or topics does not achieve the intentional development of inquiry and research skills or the interdisciplinarity needed for university graduates to be successful in an economy that is rapidly changing or a society that is under siege from forces that repudiate thoughtfulness, reason and evidence. In short, UC Merced has identified important and emergent hallmarks for UCM students at a time when it is receiving new resources to grow and develop these very abilities in its students; as a hallmark for all of its students. The existing approach and conception of the value and role of GE and the attendant necessary characteristics of the new faculty to be hired is inadequate to achieve the hallmarks identified for the institution by the retreat participants and the follow-on activities. UC Merced can hire faculty, and involve graduate students as TAs, who meet disciplinary needs and contribute productively to a re-envisioned GE in the innovative ways identified in the self-study. Guided by the framework and themes from the GE Retreat and the thoughtful vision outlined by the Senate GE Subcommittee of the Undergraduate Council, UC Merced has a strong foundation upon which to construct a sustainable, integrated GE program.

Respectfully submitted by the Review Team,  
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**Appendix**  
**Summary of General Education Program Review Recommendations**

<b>(1) Recommendations: Broaden instructional engagement with the design and delivery of General Education</b>
More encompassing common General Education courses should be established beyond the two existing required courses.
Regardless of a student's major, whether entering as a freshman or transfer students, he/she should have a signature UC Merced experience.
The formal charge of Undergraduate Council and its GE Subcommittee need strengthening with respect to their role of overseeing GE on the campus. Consider including a Unit 18 representative, a representative from Student Affairs, and a student, on the GE Subcommittee.
In addition to revising the role of the GE Subcommittee, an administrative home for GE should be assigned, where a single unit has the responsibility and authority to deliver the curriculum and strengthen co-curricular connections and outcomes in student affairs.
The campus Long Range Enrollment Plan calls for significant growth in both the undergraduate and graduate population. For this to be financially feasible, the graduate students, as TAs, will need to play a bigger role in undergraduate education and GEs.
Greater involvement of Senate faculty in teaching GEs is desirable. The Senate and the administration should agree on ways to engage faculty in this effort, working with the new Vice Provost for Faculty.
<b>(2) Recommendations: Create synergy between major programs and General Education</b>
The schools should be intimately involved in rethinking GE, and should search for common ground that allows students to take shared GE courses throughout their first two years or even throughout their undergraduate experience. This means a campus framework for GE must be designed, with clear goals and mission.
The idea, expressed during the Review Team's visit, of developing hallmarks of a UCM graduate could present various ways to more constructively connect generic GE courses and disciplinary-focused courses through, e.g. intentional research/inquiry and/or thematic pathways.
<b>(3) Recommendations: Provide undergraduates with research skills and experiences</b>
Approximately 85% of UC Merced entering students live in campus housing. The residential experience needs to be leveraged to build deeper and more meaningful introductions to general education. Theme-based living learning communities, or FIGs, offer some examples.
Establish undergraduate research and inquiry as hallmarks for all UCM students, beginning in first year GE courses and continuing through senior projects or capstones, intentionally linked

with students' programs of study.
Explore connecting research/inquiry pathways to both co-curricular and community-based linkages and involvement to share workload and benefits of engaged learning opportunities that enhance and provide extended meaning to academic studies.
Consider organizing GE pathways around contemporary and enduring questions/issues/topics of interest to students and faculty/educational professionals and the broader community, local and global.
<b>(4) Recommendations: Build GE experiences and outcomes from lower to upper-division courses</b>
Transform the Eight Guiding Principles into Learning Outcomes that are measurable and assessable at desired levels of student proficiency
Create pathways or guided ways, e.g. through e-portfolios in which students can engage throughout their GE program (as well as major program of study) to integrate and connect their learning across courses and co-curricular experiences.
Institute initial and periodic review of courses and experiences that comprise GE to ensure scaffolded and integrated opportunities for students that develop students' abilities, skills and knowledge necessary to demonstrate learning outcomes at desired levels.
<b>(5) Recommendations: Provide GE programming that connects curricular and co-curricular experiences</b>
Leverage the significance of the Carnegie Community Engagement classification and strong interest of UC Merced faculty, staff and students in investing in the Central Valley to build a unique approach to civic learning that emphasizes general education outcomes, integrates the curriculum and co-curriculum, and deepens students' sense of belonging to the institution and the community.
Reinforce and support student affairs interests in bringing co-curricular programming and student life experiences in line with general education outcomes, encouraging ideas like organizing the Involvement Portfolio around general education principles, and develop assessment and program evaluation to assure effectiveness.
Connect student affairs more deliberately to all aspects of general education planning, assessment, and delivery to develop a more integrated undergraduate education.
Construct a coherent first year experience that emphasizes active citizenship and community engaged research through intellectually intense curricular and co-curricular experiences

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## **GE Retreat Agenda**

Draft Framework

4 May 2015

### *Informational Item: GE Retreat (2014)*

- Pre-Reading: UCM campus mission statement, GE catalog pages, Boyer Report, Greater Expectations, AACU High-Impact Practices
- Retreat Outcomes:
  - (1) Re-imagine UC Merced's General Education program in light of our institutional mission and our goals for undergraduate education
  - (2) Explore GE experiences consistent with our goals for GE at UC Merced
  - (3) Establish priorities for fall planning and the GE program review self-study
- Session 1: *What are the hallmarks of a baccalaureate degree at UC Merced?* Established small team reports, focused on outlining the hallmarks of undergraduate education
- Session 2: *What is General Education's role in supporting these institutional goals?* Teams identify themes and ways that GE supports these emergent hallmarks. Established consensus and identified ongoing questions.
- Session 3: *What Should a General Education Program Include?* Team discussion and group discussion to establish priorities.

### *GE Retreat, June 2015*

- Pre-Reading: (a) *Background Materials* = GE Self study report, External team report, Memos associated with external team report, GE retreat synthesis + related feedback in SATAL student report and Faculty / program report (b) *Discussion materials (and/or slides)* = GE retreat synthesis, plus highlights from the faculty / program report, the student report, GE self study, and GE external team report
- Overview: Building on the confirmation of the hallmarks of an undergraduate degree at UC Merced, GESC's self study project, and the external review team report, the retreat could establish two objectives:
- Goal 1: Develop a set of guiding principles that explicitly articulate the role of GE at UC Merced. These principles would be in light of the hallmarks and build on the discussion about the role of GE in the retreat synthesis.
- Goal 2: Craft a set of learning outcomes that reflect the GE principles and most importantly capture GE-relevant aspects of the hallmarks.
- Goal 3: Develop related metrics to measure and evaluate GE principles and outcomes.

*\*Additional consideration: Alumni panel discussion {possibly during retreat or in fall semester}*