

March 2, 2009

To: Chairs and Members of the Academic Matters Council, the Undergraduate Education Council, and the Faculty Senate Rules Committee
From: The General Education Council
Re: Plan for reorganization of the University

The General Education Council does not, as a Council, support any specific reorganization proposal, but we strongly urge that any plan address the following three questions as they bear upon the future of our General Education program – a program that constitutes a full third of the current undergraduate experience.

(1) Resources:

We have learned from hard experience, when confronted with earlier reorganizations, to look at the practical bottom line and to note that the question of resource support for General Education is generally not addressed as an important consequence of reorganization. And so we ask the following: Will any college that provides the bulk of General Education have to choose between this obligation and that of serving their undergraduate majors, as some of our schools and colleges have already decided to do in this challenging fiscal environment? Will there be some redistribution of resources to insure the integrity and quality of General Education, as the responsibility for providing faculty and TA resources moves from one Deanship to another?

(2) Interdisciplinarity:

The assumption behind General Education—and behind the idea of liberal education in general—is that our students will be encouraged to integrate the various dimensions of their education. Developing a student’s abilities to think across disciplines, to bring different disciplinary perspectives together in thinking through a problem, to forge interdisciplinary syntheses, and to write across the curriculum, are the core goals of General Education. From this perspective, we ask that any proposed reorganization provide clear and explicit administrative support and coordinating structures for a curriculum that challenges disciplinary divisions, such as those between the “two cultures” of science and non-science. For example, we note that challenging questions in bioethics, cognitive science, the relations between religion and science, the neurophysiology of creativity, the evolutionary psychology of art, the poetics of physics—and so on—call upon knowledge and skills taught in various distinct departments, schools and colleges. For an interdisciplinary General Education curriculum to address these and similar questions calls for structural and administrative relationships that facilitate and sustain such a curriculum.

(3) Curricular Incentives:

We believe that there are opportunities for all schools and colleges to contribute to the General Education and that reorganization can provide leverage to engage those opportunities. Currently, a few schools and colleges carry the bulk of the General Education curriculum, a situation that is not healthy for General Education on this campus. We urge that a reorganization proposal ask whether there will be clear financial and curricular incentives for those colleges that do not currently contribute to General Education to begin to do so, so that the burden of providing the General Education curriculum not be further split and de-institutionalized.

We urge that these key questions be explicitly addressed by any reorganization proposal that gains traction and is carried forward for campus consideration. We ask that any reorganization proposal be examined on the basis of its positive contribution to the resources, the interdisciplinarity, and curricular incentives for this campus' General Education program.