

May 1, 2002

Lynda Goff
Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education

John Simpson
Campus Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor

Re: Freshman Seminar Program

Dear Lynda and John:

During its last two meetings, the Committee on Educational Policy has discussed the draft document from the Office of the President mandating a freshman seminar program on all UC campuses and VPDUE Lynda Goff's very helpful discussion paper describing the implementation of such a program at UCSC. CEP's recommendations on this issue follow.

CEP supports the concept of one-to-two credit "seminars" designed for freshmen and taught by ladder faculty members on subjects reflecting their expertise and perhaps deriving from their research. In its report last January on the College Core Courses, well before the current initiative from OP, CEP proposed the establishment of such seminars as an appropriate and feasible way to increase the contact between first-year students and the ladder faculty without risking the loss of the college core courses as writing courses. In making this recommendation, CEP was in part influenced by reports from colleagues with children at UC Berkeley who had enjoyed and benefited from the freshman seminars offered there.

This conceptual support notwithstanding, CEP does not support implementation of this program now if doing so takes funds from -- or prevents the rescue of -- important elements of the existing lower division core curriculum, including most notably the College Core Courses and the Writing Program but also extending to support of lower division general education courses throughout the curriculum. The \$140,000 or so it would take to initiate a freshman seminar program (to cover faculty compensation at \$1500 - \$2000 per course and staff support) is not an insignificant amount of money in the current fiscal context. Any approval CEP would give to this project would depend on our being convinced that something of greater importance were not being sacrificed to make this new program possible. (An aside: the budget projections for this program as presented to CEP did not include course support. Would departments be expected to cover things like Xeroxing, film rental, etc. out of their course support budgets?)

CEP notes further that similar successful programs at Berkeley and UCLA have been initiated and announced by the chancellors and funded from their discretionary funds. We believe that similar support from the upper administration will be essential to fostering the enthusiasm and commitment of deans, department chairs, and faculty members that will be necessary for this program to succeed. We also believe it essential that everyone understand that teaching these seminars is a strictly voluntary undertaking.

Description of Seminars

Were a freshman seminar program to be established at UCSC (CEP recommends calling these courses Freshman Discovery Seminars), we believe it should have the following characteristics.

- The program's functions would be (1) to introduce students to creative and critical thinking in an area of a faculty member's scholarship and research; (2) to introduce students to departments, majors, and disciplines by involving them in discussions with faculty experts in those fields; (3) to give freshmen the opportunity for informal advice from and mentoring by a faculty member; and (4) in some instances, to provide students the opportunity to discuss current topics within the context of academic research and discourse.
- Seminars would be designed for first-year students (principally freshmen, with the possibility that some seminars might be designed for new transfer students). Most typically, seminars would consist of the discussion of assigned reading, although faculty members would be free to propose other activities. Freshmen would be urged to take at least one such course and would receive priority when enrolling in their first seminar. Students could take more than one of these courses for credit, were space available, and non-freshmen could fill up empty seats with the instructor's permission.
- Seminars would offer either one or two credits and would typically meet once a week for 1-2 hours or in some other configuration that adds up to approximately 10-20 hours of class time per quarter. Faculty members would decide whether or not to assess student performance on a P/NP basis only or to provide letter grades.
- Seminars would be offered during winter and spring quarters so as to follow students' experience in college core courses.

Administration and Oversight

CEP agrees that it would seem wise for UCSC to follow the administrative structure that works well at Berkeley and UCLA: that is, to establish an oversight committee of faculty members (including one member of CEP) which would report to the VPDUE. CEP suggests that something like the following procedure be followed:

- CEP would establish general guidelines for these seminars and approve a common number and a generic course description analogous to courses currently in the 190 series.
- Faculty members would submit a one-page description of their proposed seminar to the oversight committee which, in consultation with deans and department chairs, would insure that the content of the proposed seminars (topic, reading list, expectations) meets the CEP guidelines and is consistent with the purposes of the program. If necessary, the oversight committee would also choose among proposed seminars to insure distribution across the disciplines and divisions.
- To begin, departments would serve as the sponsoring unit of all seminars. CEP, however, can imagine numerous ways in which departments might work with colleges to make the most of college facilities, personnel, and close connections with freshmen.

Staff Support

As VPDUE Goff's proposal recognized, staff support is essential to this program: to advertise programs, maintain a web-site, solicit and receive proposals from faculty members, work with the oversight committee, serve as a liaison with departments and the Registrar's Office, oversee scheduling deadlines, keep records, and make reports.

CEP believes that a freshman seminar program could play an important role in the education of first-year students, and we have indicated here our support for most of the elements in VPDUE Goff's proposal. In conclusion, however, we must reiterate the importance of securing new permanent funding for a mandate of this kind.

Sincerely,

Carol Freeman, Chair
Committee on Educational Policy

cc: Senate Chair Blumenthal
Vice Provost Brown, Academic Affairs
Chair Meister, Committee on Planning and Budget
Provosts
Deans