General Education Final Task Force Reports from Teams 1 – 6

November/December 2007

Team 1: Effective and Persuasive Communication, Dr. Heidi Mills, Chair

The Effective and Persuasive Communication team met as a whole to reaffirm the title, definition and outcomes devised by a subcommittee of our team last spring.

Integrating Knowledge and Service Through Effective and Persuasive Communication:

Graduates of the University of South Carolina will think, read, write, inquire and converse critically as citizens in a diverse, democratic society. Students will identify and competently use appropriate technology, genre and media to communicate ideas in conventional, creative and persuasive ways to varied audiences. Communication and critical thinking skills will be demonstrated in both general education and discipline specific courses within the greater culture of scholarship at the university. Graduates will use these skills to address issues, problems and needs of South Carolinians and the broader Global Society.

Outcomes:

Students will engage in inquiry to articulate a critical, informed position on an issue and engage in productive and responsible intellectual conversations.

Students will identify and demonstrate appropriate means of communication for varied audiences and purposes.

Students will use logical reasoning in oral and written language to inform, persuade and express creative ideas.

Students will apply communicative skills to identify and address problems relevant to South Carolinians and communities the world over.

We also expressed our sincere gratitude to Christy Friend for the extensive planning involved in orchestrating two campus talks by Neal Learner on November 7 and 8. Christy Friend accessed support from the Office of the Provost to bring Dr. Neal Learner from the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* to campus in order to help the General Education Task Force envision new possibilities for our Writing Center. He gave an informative and inspirational talk to the General Education Team on November 7. On November 8 Neal Learner spoke to a broader campus audience as part of the *Writing Across the Curriculum Teaching Excellence Colloquium. He entitled his talk: Developing a Culture of Student Engagement and Writing.*

A description of his talk:

Effective writing is more than a skill to be acquired in introductory English courses. It is a fundamental practice that is essential for students to learn and communicate across the curriculum. Faculty can create a classroom culture such that students value good writing as

part of every assignment. In this Colloquium, Dr. Lerner will discuss moving from inoculation to enculturation in writing practices on campus.

I also solicited team members to invest in the cross-team collaboration for a new course established to meet the General Education goals and objectives.

Several members from our team met with two other teams to collaborate on the development of a new course proposal. Our team generated the outline that follows.

<u>Vision for a new Gen. Ed. course from the Effective and Persuasive Communication Team</u>

The university might create or designate one required course as a "Critical Thinking and Communication" course. All students would be required to take the course and to produce a public document such as a photo essay, webpage, video documentary, letter to the editor, etc. as part of their work where the general public could read or have electronic access to it. The course would incorporate several key experiences and skills for students:

(1) the opportunity to examine a complex issue from the perspective of different disciplines;

(2) the opportunity to master a rich body of literature surrounding an issue;

(3) the experience of taking a position on an issue;

(4) the opportunity to generate some public document associated with that issue, which would be accessible to readers throughout the state of South Carolina.

The Ethics and Multicultural Education Teams expanded and refined our proposal. Dr. Fred Medway has the final draft and will take it to the Provost for consideration.

It has been a genuine pleasure to work on this initiative. It is the hope of our team that the thought, time and care we put into recommendations will result in substantive changes in general education at the University of South Carolina. We are especially hopeful that significant improvements will be made in the Writing Center as a result of this initiative.

Team 2: Effective Mathematical Reasoning and Problem-Solving, Dr. Bob Brookshire, Chair

The Effective Mathematical Reasoning and Problem Solving Work Team met three times this semester, on October 18, November 2, and November 15. During the first meeting we developed a set of learning outcomes that were further refined in the later meetings. Our recommended set of outcomes is the following:

Effective mathematical reasoning and problem solving skills are essential for daily adult life and citizenship. All college graduates should be able to understand and apply, as appropriate, mathematical, logical, statistical, and algorithmic principles to solve problems. Specifically, they should be able to:

- Use analytical reasoning with appropriate technology to solve problems, test conjectures, formulate valid arguments, judge the validity of arguments, check answers to determine reasonableness, and communicate the reasoning and the results;
- Distinguish relevant from irrelevant information, identify missing and faulty information, and have knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate means for gathering data and making inferences;
- Evaluate evidential and argumentative claims critically;
- Represent basic mathematical concepts and results verbally, symbolically, visually, and numerically;
- Demonstrate an understanding of how models, given by formulas, verbally, or by graphs, tables, or schematics, are used to represent information and draw inferences; and
- Recognize and use connections among mathematical, logical, statistical, and algorithmic methods and other disciplines.

We understand that the development of learning outcomes in our area completes our charge for this semester. On behalf the members of the work group, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to serve the university in the critical task of improving general education.

Team 3: Scientific Literacy and Technological Skills, Dr. Tangali Sudarshan, Chair

Students Who Are Scientifically and Technologically Literate

Goals

1. Have the knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts and processes required for participation in the Digital Age.
2. Can ask, find, or determine answers to questions derived from curiosity about everyday experiences.
3. Have the ability to understand and describe natural phenomena.
4. Are able to read with understanding articles about science in the popular press and to engage in social conversation about the validity of the conclusions.
5. Can identify scientific issues underlying national and local decisions and express positions that are scientifically and technologically informed.
6. Are able to evaluate the quality of scientific information on the basis of its source and the methods used to generate it.
7. On matters related to Science or Technology, have the capacity to pose and evaluate arguments based on evidence and to apply conclusions from such arguments appropriately.

Outcomes

Outcomes are defined as the metrics that meet at least one of the goals of Scientific Literacy. The metrics can be either quantitative or qualitative.

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles, language and terms (vocabulary) of the physical sciences, life sciences, and mathematics necessary to make risk and benefits analysis of current issues.
2. Demonstrate and apply understanding of the scientific method: using observation, scientific inquiry, and formulation of hypotheses to explain natural phenomena distinguishing between scientific fact and belief; critically evaluating the sources of scientific literature; design of experiments to evaluate hypotheses with appropriate control of experimental parameters; and modeling of natural phenomena based on accepted hypotheses.
3. Evaluate the evolving relationship between science, technology and contemporary society and/or social networks as they affect health, environment, culture, quality of life, ethical issues, and social and economic welfare in terms of risks and benefits, cost, and sustainability.
4. Students demonstrate the ability to use appropriate technologies to communicate and work effectively.

Team 4: Global Awareness and Multicultural Understanding, Dr. Martin Roth, Chair

Definition

A graduate of USC will be aware of contemporary issues around the world, with an appreciation for their historical contexts and an understanding of the natural, material and socio-cultural systems that shape them. Graduates will recognize and appreciate diversity as a characteristic of South Carolina, the nation, and the world. Emphasis is placed on developing the ability to effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds for the achievement of common goals.

Our definition distinguishes Global Awareness from Multicultural Understanding. Global Awareness involves students becoming aware of and appreciating contemporary world issues – seeing the world beyond our national U.S. borders. Multicultural Understanding involves recognizing and appreciating cultural diversity in South Carolina, the nation, and the world.

Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate understanding of contemporary issues faced by citizens and governments around the world and the historical contexts that shaped them
2. Students will demonstrate understanding of the natural, material, and sociocultural systems of other countries and how they compare to those in the United States
3. Students will demonstrate understanding of how cultural diversity influences contemporary issues and shapes social behavior
4. Students will demonstrate understanding of the value of cultural diversity for developing and achieving common goals in business, political, and social contexts

Furthermore, the following outcomes should be common with or part of other general education areas:

5. Students will demonstrate the capability to effectively communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds (Effective and Persuasive Communication)

Students will demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning about global and multicultural issues and a commitment to applying this knowledge to effect social progress (Life-Long Learning).

Team 5: Values, Ethics, and Social Responsibility, Dr. Allen Miller, Chair

Team Members: Avery Fouts (Philosophy and Religion, Union), Cam Byrd (Student), Catherine Porth (student), Cliff Fuhrman (Pharmacy), Colin Bennett (Mathematics), Dan Sabia (Political Science), David Crockett (Marketing), David Weaver (Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management), Dean Kinzley (History), Hayes Hampton (English, Sumter), Kathleen Whitcomb (Management Science), Lynda Nilges (Physical Education), Mary Hjelm (English, Salkehatchie), Maryah Fram (Social Work), Mathieu Deflem (Sociology), RIG Hughes (Philosophy), Stephen Bajjaly (Library Science), Thomas Crawford (Physics), Anne Bezuidenhout (Philosophy) and Chris Tollefson (Philosophy).

Process: We have had seven team meetings, as well as meetings of the team leaders and one meeting with the Teams on Effective and Persuasive Communication and Global Awareness and Multicultural Understanding. We have also had e-mail discussion as well. Two members (Porth and Nilges) were unable to attend in the spring owing to scheduling conflicts. David Weaver resigned from the committee due to other obligations. RIG Hughes resigned owing to health concerns. He was replaced by Anne Bezuidenhout and Chris Tollefson. Stephen Bajjaly, Colin Bennett and Catherine Porth did not participate.

At our first meeting it was determined that we should first try to define a statement of values and then discuss how those values could be taught and subsequently actualized in terms of ethical reflection and social responsibility. This discussion resulted in our Values Statement and Action Plan. In the fall, we were charged with determining educational outcomes for that plan. In the process of reflecting on those outcomes, certain refinements to the initial plan were introduced.

Results: Values Statement

The teaching of values necessarily implies critical reflection upon them. We are committed to the value of intellectual inquiry, the appreciation of artistic endeavor, and the cultivation of good judgment in matters affecting the natural and human world. We are committed to a concern for social justice and respect for the values and rights of others.

In moving from abstract values to the more concrete concerns of ethics and social responsibility the team identified three areas of concern.

Three Concerns

1. How do we set up a manageable system of service learning that does not degenerate into toke nism?

2. How do we set up a research component that is in harmony with students' major areas of study?

3. How do we foster reflection on ethics and values but not become the instruments for the inculcation of a hegemonic ideology?

The team agreed to the following three-point plan to address these concerns.

Proposed Ethical Action Plan

1.   Institute a new required sophomore course: USC 201. This will be an interdisciplinary course, taught by a diverse faculty on the foundations of ethical reflection and value formation on a variety of issues and themes, drawing on texts and traditions from the arts, religion, literature, philosophy, and the social sciences. Students will learn to understand where their values come from, the diversity of value traditions available, and develop the ability to critically reflect on their values and the ethical choices they imply.

This proposal is similar to that forwarded by the team on Global Awareness and Multicultural Understanding as well as that on Effective and Persuasive Communication. There have thus been negotiations between team leaders, as well as one inter-team meeting, on merging these ideas into a single proposal for UNIV 201. This would eventually be a required interdisciplinary course dealing with values, ethics and social responsibility in a global and multicultural context in which students would be required to speak and write effectively and persuasively. The course would debut in a pilot version as an elective as issues of staffing and scheduling were examined and refinements of course content and objectives were pursued. See appendix.

2.   All students will be required to take UNIV 101, which already requires a significant service-learning component. Estimates are that 80% of students are already enrolled in the course.

3.   Each major will develop a capstone course to be taken by all graduating seniors. This course will require students to do research or service learning on the values implicit in their course of study, and the relation between those values and the students' own understanding of their ethical obligations to the larger community. This does not necessarily need to be a new course, but can be incorporated into an existing capstone course or sequence.

Proposed Educational outcomes:

1. Students will acquire knowledge of the diversity, sources, and functions of values, both moral and otherwise.

2. Students will have an understanding of the complex relations that exist between moral, personal, and other values and their realization in a variety of settings.

Continuing Concern: The team feels strongly that general education revision cannot just be a matter of adding additional burdens to students and faculty, but must represent a fundamental rethinking of the enterprise.

Team 5 Report: Appendix

New General Education Course Concept: "Critical Issues, Thinking, and Communication"

Developed by the Following General Education Work Teams: Effective and Persuasive Communication; Global Awareness and Multicultural Understanding; Values, Ethics, and Social Responsibility

November 2007

The university might create a new "Critical Issues, Thinking, and Communication" course that could partially fulfill various General Education requirements. The goal of this course will be to achieve undergraduate student learning outcomes from across those prescribed by various General Education Work Teams. By focusing on a small set of important issues, students will have the opportunity to demonstrate cultural, ethical, global, scientific, mathematical, and socially responsible understanding, and to communicate their understanding through various media.

Course Design and Structure

We envision a three-credit hour course offered to USC undergraduate students in their sophomore year. The course will give students the opportunity to:

- Examine two or three complex issue from the perspective of different disciplines. For instance, global warming, terrorism or religious conflict may be examined. Examples of cross-disciplinary topics and understandings could include:
    - Literature review
    - Scholarly and scientific debates, quantitative data and evidence
    - Global awareness, e.g., public awareness and interest around the world
    - Values, ethics and social responsibility, i.e., an examination of how different value systems and traditions lead to different responses to complex problems.
- Experience taking a position on issues, both individually and collaboratively in groups
- Generate some public document associated with that issue, which could be made accessible to readers throughout the state of South Carolina, and/or more broadly via the USC web site. Examples of media students could use to document their understanding include photo essays, web pages, video documentaries, letters to the editor, narrated Flash or Breeze presentation, etc.

Course Development and Staffing

To achieve a wide cross-section of learning outcomes, we envision the course being team taught by a set of USC expert teachers. Faculty might be identified as those who excel in teaching at the undergraduate level, who desire the opportunity and challenge to collaboratively develop and deliver a unique, cross-disciplinary course.

Faculty from all units should be provided a new course prospectus, and asked to submit their interest in co-developing and co-teaching this course. Processes for attracting faculty and encouraging units to release them might include (a) designating new faculty slots for "University

Professors" thereby allowing their units to hire and staff their previous courses, (b) selecting faculty who have recently entered the TERI plan, and accelerating hiring of new faculty to replace them.

Such a course could be developed using the existing "University 201" course. Initially, we propose that the new course be piloted on a small scale. Section sizes should not exceed 30 students.

Course development resources may be available through the Center for Teaching Excellence.

Team 6: Life-Long Learning, Dr. Cynthia Colbert, Chair

In addition to our previous May report on lifelong learning, our committee members believe that there are certain aspects of university life that encourage lifelong learning.

Participation in the Arts
At USC we offer a full slate of cultural opportunities available to students within walking distance of their housing. Music, Theater, and Dance concerts and productions are numerous. The visual arts are exhibited in McMaster, which change monthly, and more long term exhibits are available in McKissick Museum. We want students to be exposed to and participate in the arts while at USC so that this participation becomes a lifelong habit.

Marketing the Institution
Advertisements, both print and digital media, that showcase students and faculty who are high achieving and making meaningful contributions to scholarship and various forms of inquiry may attract students who want to become lifelong learners. In building a culture of students and faculty who are engaged and focused on inquiry, modeling those behaviors in the media are important.

Creating Inviting Quiet Spaces on Campus
By creating a series of reading rooms and improving the profile of the Writing Center, we can do much to encourage quiet contemplation and improvements in writing. We suggest a series of small places where students might encounter world-class newspapers and magazines, as well as meeting like-minded students. The Writing Center should be seen as a hub for the support of writing, not a place for remediation.

Small Classes
Within every discipline, students should study in a seminar, where they are able to focus on their own research and are required to speak about their work. Being able to discuss one¹s ideas and to banter with peers about ideas is important to students¹ development.

Most of the members of our team reported that they had been taken aside by a professor who told them to continue their graduate studies. We feel that it is essential for students to have relationships with professors to allow this type of encouragement.