

A Summary By the Undergraduate Council (AY2002 – 2004)

Purpose and overall conclusion. Review of the Group Curriculum -- that is, the body of courses that introduce students to fundamental ideas and approaches in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences -- was undertaken at the request of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies. This was the first systematic review ever conducted of the Group Curriculum as a whole, in contrast to the reviews of individual courses by various curriculum committees at the proposal stage. The UGC review offered the university an unusual opportunity to get a sense of the scope and character of the Group Curriculum, as well as the quality of Group-satisfying courses as they are actually offered. The Council was delighted to report that a great many excellent courses in all three areas were revealed by the review, and most Group-satisfying courses clearly meet the previously-legislated guidelines and are appropriate for this central curriculum.

Approach. For the purpose of review, the Council developed a questionnaire for its own use that focused on whether a course met the specific legislated criteria in its area and was consistent with the overall intent of General Education. The review was based on the syllabi of all of the 100- and 200-level Group-satisfying courses (excluding Math and Language courses) offered in 2002-3, plus the syllabi of the 300-level Group-satisfying courses offered in Fall Term of that year. As shown in the summary tables below, this amounted to review of approximately 230 syllabi from the total of ~300 different courses that make up the Group Curriculum.

2002/03 UO Group-satisfying Courses

Courses Offered (Unique offerings; math and language courses excluded)

	FALL	SPRING	WINTER	SUMMER	Total
100/200-level	106	44	27	3	180
300-level	57	31	27	5	120
Total	163	75	54	8	300

Courses Reviewed (Unique offerings; math and language courses excluded)

	FALL	SPRING	WINTER	SUMMER	Total
100/200-level	106	44	27	3	180
300-level	51	0	0	0	51
Total	157	44	27	3	231

Results and Recommendations. The review revealed a rich and diverse curriculum that is not as unwieldy as might have been anticipated. The total number of distinct courses is not overwhelming, and the Council was delighted at the ease with which course materials were obtained. The majority of syllabi were available online, and the others were quickly provided by departmental staff or faculty. The Council endorses the idea of global review, as an effective means of understanding what we are doing as educators, and as a catalyst for general improvement. Four specific proposals for improvement emerged from this review:

- Two proposals are designed to increase awareness and appreciation of the excellent Group-satisfying courses that already exist. Since some syllabi did not do justice to the courses themselves, as inferred from other course materials, the Council's recommendations are intended to help faculty communicate to naïve audiences the appeal of their subject and the key ideas in their courses.
- A third proposal deals with timeframe, since, although the Council encourages innovation in course design, it is convinced of the need for sustained engagement – particularly in the Group Curriculum, whose purpose is to provide entrée to new intellectual territory.
- The fourth proposal deals with the distinction between Group-satisfying courses at the lower- and upper-division levels. Although much of the Group Curriculum is deliberately offered at the lower division level, appropriate for incoming Freshmen, a substantial segment is offered at the 300 level. The Council identified excellence at both levels, but sought to improve the review process by adding explanatory detail to the current criterion for upper-division Group courses.

Comments on the Council's proposals were solicited from administrators and curriculum committees during Fall, 2003, and Winter, 2004, and the Council subsequently revised the proposals in their light. The product was the motion passed by the Senate on May 12th, 2004.

That motion is an amendment that is meant to supplement existing legislation and to be used in the review of new courses as well as the cyclical reviews of existing courses. Points 1 through 3 of the motion apply to all Group-satisfying courses, and call for the following:

1. posting of electronic course descriptions for all Group-satisfying courses;
2. explanation in the syllabus of (a) the fundamental questions addressed by the course and (b) how the course meets the criteria for Group status; and
3. offering of Group-satisfying courses in periods standard for regular terms, and not less than 3 week format.

Point 4. applies specifically to 300-level Group courses, and offers guidelines to illuminate what is meant by requiring that upper-division Group courses provide "depth and rigor" beyond that typical of lower-division Group courses (the current criterion), yet be accessible to non-specialists. The Council provided illustrative examples, and suggested, in summary, that 300-level Group courses should:

- a. introduce students to a discipline;
- b. educate students in the way knowledge is produced in a discipline;

- c. encourage students to integrate perspectives and material;
- d. assume that students have completed lower-division University coursework, although not necessarily in same field as the course.