

General Education – An Implicit Curriculum Trend at Bakersfield College

Thoughts on HistoryB9 Proposal: An Opinion Paper By Michael McNellis

Introduction

With a new state funding formula that is centered, in part, on student success measured by completion of degrees and certificates, I have seen a shift in the understanding of what the General Education requirements stand for. This shift, or new trend, is to treat General Education areas as independent of the disciplines (Title 5, § 55063 – see attached) and areas of expertise (*CCCCO Minimum Qualifications for Faculty*) and more as a function of a kind of checklist of sorts outlined in the *Guiding Notes for General Education Course Reviewers* (*Guiding Notes* here forward). The *Guiding Notes* lay out language that should be included in each of the courses seeking a specific General Education area.

To explain, no longer is the discipline or department considered an important element in determining whether a course should be approved for a General Education area. The guiding premise of the Curriculum Committee recently is simply “as long as a department creates a course that can meet the *Guiding Notes* checklist, then the class should be approved for General Education in that area.” *Thus, in theory, a Welding class could meet English Composition General Education area as long as it uses the correct language in the Guiding Notes that meets that area. Or a Nursing department¹ could teach a course that meets the Critical Thinking area of General Education provided it includes the correct language outlined in the that area of the Guiding Notes.* Proof is in the pudding: Bakersfield College has already approved an Agricultural² course that now satisfies the Oral Communication General Education area. *I would hope anyone reading this would be shocked to hear this news. I am.*

General Education – “Staying in One’s Own Discipline’s Lane”

In the past, departments typically “stayed in their own lanes,” determined by the department expertise and areas defined by Title 5 and the State Chancellor Disciplines List. For example, ten years ago we would never be worried that an astronomy course would submit a course requesting a general education category like Written Communication, Area A2 (CSU-Breadth) or English Composition Group 1A (UC-IGETC). Why, because Astronomy has no expertise in composition. It was that simple. No Astronomy teaches English Composition. In fact, prior to AB 705, no other discipline should or would be so overreaching or audacious to assume that they could teach English Composition – thus only English Departments would teach the General Education categories of Area A2 or 1A. **This made sense.**

With the introduction of AB 705, the state made an exception: English as a Second Language could now teach English Composition courses, which regardless of what we think about the disciplines qualifications of EMLS, they are now given the State exception to teach college-level English Composition courses. **This is the law. So we allow it.**

In fact, as it so happens, Title 5 provides us a list of the general education areas and we have usually abided by these suggestions in principle. See below for the general education areas and the corresponding disciplines that are listed within those areas:

¹ According to the *CCCCO Minimum Qualifications for Faculty*, Nursing is not an academic area requiring a Master’s Degree – it is listed as “a discipline requiring any degree and professional experience” (p. 45).

² *Ibid*, 17. Agriculture is considered “a discipline requiring a Master’s degree, (p. 17).

Title 5, § 55063

(b) General Education Requirements.

(1) Students receiving an associate degree shall complete a minimum of 18 semester or 27 quarter units of general education coursework which includes a minimum of three semester or four quarter units in each of the areas specified in paragraphs (A), (B) and (C) and the same minimum in each part of paragraph (D). The remainder of the unit requirement is also to be selected from among these four divisions of learning or as determined by local option:

(A) **Natural Sciences.** Courses in the natural sciences are those which examine the physical universe, its life forms, and its natural phenomena. To satisfy the general education requirement in natural sciences, a course shall be designed to help the student develop an appreciation and understanding of the scientific method, and encourage an understanding of the relationships between science and other human activities. This category would include introductory or integrative courses in **astronomy, biology, chemistry, general physical science, geology, meteorology, oceanography, physical geography, physical anthropology, physics and other scientific disciplines.**

(B) **Social and Behavioral Sciences.** Courses in the social and behavioral sciences are those which focus on people as members of society. To satisfy the general education requirement in social and behavioral sciences, a course shall be designed to develop an awareness of the method of inquiry used by the social and behavioral sciences. It shall be designed to stimulate critical thinking about the ways people act and have acted in response to their societies and should promote appreciation of how societies and social subgroups operate. This category would include introductory or integrative survey courses in **cultural anthropology, cultural geography, economics, history, political science, psychology, sociology and related disciplines.**

(C) **Humanities.** Courses in the humanities are those which study the cultural activities and artistic expressions of human beings. To satisfy the general education requirement in the humanities, a course shall be designed to help the student develop an awareness of the ways in which people throughout the ages and in different cultures have responded to themselves and the world around them in artistic and cultural creation and help the student develop aesthetic understanding and an ability to make value judgments. Such courses could include introductory or integrative courses in **the arts, foreign languages, literature, philosophy, and religion.**

(D) **Language and Rationality.** Courses in language and rationality are those which develop for the student the principles and applications of language toward logical thought, clear and precise expression and critical evaluation of communication in whatever symbol system the student uses. Such courses include:

(i) **English Composition.** Courses fulfilling the written composition requirement shall be designed to include both expository and argumentative writing. Such courses may be taught in disciplines such as, but not limited to, **English and English as a Second Language.**

(ii) **Communication and Analytical Thinking.** Courses fulfilling the communication and analytical thinking requirement including, but not limited to **oral communication, mathematics, and quantitative reasoning such as logic, statistics, computer languages and programming, and related disciplines.**

(2) **Ethnic Studies** will be offered in at least one of the areas required by subdivision (1).

While it would be an interesting task to take each of these categories, let's focus on one: Analytical Thinking, or what CSU-Breadth and UC-IGETC call Critical Thinking. Title 5 states the following: "Courses fulfilling the communication and analytical thinking requirement including, but not limited to oral communication, mathematics, and quantitative reasoning such as logic, statistics, computer languages and programming, and related disciplines." Whereas it states that this is a list that includes, but is not limited to the listed areas, it does include another key phrase, "**related disciplines**" that, I take to mean, disciplines that are experts in the areas of "logic, statistics, computer languages and programming."

Essentially, while I have tried to be as flexible as I can with the language, I just cannot see the discipline of history being "related" to logic, statistics, computer languages and programming." **This does not make sense.** A course in math or computer science makes sense here, but not history.

My Conclusions

I see this vote on whether history should be considered a related discipline to those listed in Title 5 to meet Critical Thinking on two levels:

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1. **If we vote yes**, then we are saying that history is a related discipline to logic, statistics, computer languages and programming, those listed in Title 5 for Analytical Thinking.

AND

2. **If we vote yes**, then we are opening ourselves up to almost any discipline meeting the requirements for Analytical Thinking, and by extension, opening up the possibility of any department, profession or academic, to teach any general education area regardless of the Title 5 language or discipline boundaries.

I think 1. and 2. are questionable paths to do down.

3. **If we vote no** to HistoryB9 seeking Critical Thinking General Education area, then we are voting to uphold the standards of Title 5 and maintain the integrity of discipline boundaries in all areas and in general.