

## RANDOM THOUGHTS ON GENERAL EDUCATION

### Compiled by The Editor

During the past two years I have received notes and memoranda from faculty across the campus expressing views on the issue of General Education. Two questions were asked: (1) "What do you believe constitutes the primary ingredient of a general education?" and (2) "Does your discipline offer an essential component of what should constitute a general education?" Below are excerpts from some of the responses:

From a Psychology professor: "My bias is toward viewing the Social Sciences, sciences, and humanities as the core areas of learning for General Education. All understanding of man in terms of his contemporary situation, its historical development, and the interrelationships between man and our nature and fabricated world would constitute the central focus of general education along with various appreciative (art, music, literature, etc.) and expressive skills, including foreign language proficiency.

The Emphasis Phase segments of general education fosters much faculty busy work without any demonstrable improvement in G.E. (student learning). I would favor free electives of courses but am sympathetic with the idea of keeping the electives within the framework of (1) above and also limiting the number of units in a major and supporting courses applicable to the B.A. or B.S."

From a Health and Physical Education professor: "If you can find out what determines a general education—it will be a FIRST in the history of education. Every institution has a unique concept of general education and each student has one also. I suppose the personnel of each institution, those in a position to influence what is included in general education, determine what shall be offered. Traditionally, most programs exclude physical education and, of course, you must know my feelings about this exclusion."

From a Biology professor: "I believe in G.E. Gave up teaching majors and other fun things to work in this area. Somehow I do not see structure

and rules as very important. Creative, interesting faculty that demonstrate how their particular discipline looks at and solves problems is the important thing. Anyway, if I get time will write you more ideas."

This professor also wrote that in the spring of 1979 or 1980, a poll was taken by CCUFA on the issue of Emphasis Phase packages. Of 156 faculty polled, 90 said they should be abolished and 46 said they should be maintained (the other 20 either had other suggestions or did not reply).

From a business Administration professor: "I did my undergraduate work at one of the country's finest liberal arts colleges and believe that my life has benefitted immensely by being forced to learn outside my major interest. However, I'm not sure that I can define a liberal arts education, but I have strong reservations about the General Education program on this campus.

Presumably, we want graduates of HSU to be able to read or listen and, at least generally, comprehend and critically evaluate the ideas and opinions of others, to formulate informed personal opinions from information available, and to communicate effectively and, perhaps, persuasively, those opinions to others. We recognize that to do this they must have some exposure to a broad variety of the sometimes disparate components of the general body of knowledge—the natural and social sciences and the arts and humanities. In his sampling these disciplines we want the student to come to an understanding of the role and contributions of the discipline in the development of man's understanding of his universe and environment, to examine the underlying assumptions of the discipline and, at least in a broad sense, the theories and controversies that have been resolved in the past or may still persist among scholars in the discipline. We might also hope that the student will gain some understanding of the boundaries separating disciplines as well as the current frontiers of the disciplines."

**From a Political Science professor:** "The primary ingredient of general education is the breadth of the educational experience to which every student is exposed. In an era of specialization, much of the undergraduate academic program should provide students with a wide range of subjects and methodologies. In short, the primary focus of a liberal arts institution should be to provide a well-rounded "generalist" in the broadest sense of that term.

Nearly all of our courses are oriented to this type of learning experience. As a small department, we do not have a sufficient number of students to justify a specialized curriculum emphasizing the skills required to conduct sophisticated research in the area of behavioral science. We do offer some relatively specific courses designed for the more advanced student of politics. For the most part, though, all of our courses are available and comprehensible to the student who is only seeking a brief and limited exposure to one of the several sub-disciplines of political science.

The strength of our present G.E. program is that it is founded on the principle of breadth. On the

other hand, many disciplines in this university are fundamentally opposed to the concept of G.E. as I defined it above. Rather, these programs are devoted to specialized training at the undergraduate level. Given the pressures, political and economic, on the university, the present G.E. structure at least establishes a minimally broad education for most students at this institution.

The fundamental weakness of the present G.E. program, from my perspective, is the absurdly heavy structure imposed on the upper-division (emphasis phase) G.E. packages. The regulations adopted by the University Curriculum Committee reflect assumptions about both learning and teaching which are unrealistic and unfounded. Moreover, the stringent guidelines for emphasis phase packages fail to account for the difficulties of scheduling and staffing confronted by a small department like political science. Presumably, we will participate in one or more packages, but the cost to our own curriculum may be severe.