

Final Report of the Subcommittee on Supplemental Education
By Kenneth Janken

The subcommittee reviewing the supplemental education requirements met on April 19 to discuss our charge. In preparation for the meeting, sub-committee members reviewed a variety of material, including information on the functioning of the course clusters that have been established in the past few years, the comments from people who attended the College-wide advising forum in February, the difficulty students have finding and enrolling in classes at the 200+ level in the Fine Arts and Natural Sciences, and facts pertaining to the number of students who minor in a subject outside their major division. This last point would give us a rough idea of whether students are on their own designing their education in the spirit of the supplemental education requirement: promoting a substantial breadth of knowledge outside a student's major and beyond the curriculum's Foundations and Approaches requirements. After the meeting a preliminary report was circulated among the subcommittee members, who made comments and suggestions for revisions. The changes were incorporated into this report.

The supplemental education requirement in the 2006 Making Connections curriculum was intended to require BA candidates to extend their liberal arts courses into their third and fourth year of academic study. Faculty members designing the 2006 curriculum thought it desirable that students who, under the previous curriculum, had been required to take Arts and Sciences "perspectives" courses as juniors and seniors should continue to take courses outside the division of their major. In the subcommittee's judgment, however, the two ways of fulfilling what is now known as the supplemental education requirement seem at odds with each other. The distributive option spreads nine credit hours across three divisions of the College outside the student's major, whereas the integrative option provides focused study of a topic in a "cluster" of three courses representing at least two divisions or schools (one course may be used in the student's primary major). Courses for each option must be numbered above 199.

The distributive option creates problems for students because the Division of Fine Arts lacks sufficient capacity to offer the needed courses; between ten and twenty percent of May 2010 graduates needed to substitute other courses, often at the 100 level, to meet the fine arts divisional distribution for the distributive option. To a lesser extent, students also have difficulty satisfying the divisional requirement in mathematics and natural sciences because courses above the introductory level often restrict enrollment to majors. The cluster program, though popular with faculty members, is virtually moribund. Some courses have not been offered for two years, and infrequent offerings of core courses prohibit students from completing, or worse, beginning the clusters. Students, consequently, have walked away from this option; fewer than ten May 2010 graduates met the supplemental education requirement by completing a cluster.

Our discussion centered on three points: 1) the practical problems of students' fulfilling the supplemental education requirement with the distributive option; 2) the dysfunctional state of the cluster program; and 3) the intent of the supplemental education requirement itself. As we moved back and forth among the three points, we kept returning to the intent of the requirement. Whether a student supplements the Foundations and Approaches with a three-course sequence that examines in depth and from multiple disciplines a discrete set of issues like evolution or human rights, or samples courses in the three divisions outside her/his first major, the intent of

the requirement was to encourage students taking the BA degree (and the BS with a major in psychology) to educate themselves in areas outside their majors beyond the introductory level. We discovered that a significant portion of the student body already does that: 38 percent of students taking the BA degree in the College (and the BS degree with a major in psychology) have a major or minor in a division different from their primary major. Other students increasingly encounter cross-disciplinary perspectives in the courses they take for their majors and minors, and double majors and double minors are much more common today than they were when the original Arts and Sciences “perspectives” requirement was proposed in the early 1980s.

Given both the practical problems of administering the cluster program and the difficulty many students have in finishing the distributive option, and taking into account a significant tendency of students to enhance their education in the spirit of the supplemental education requirement, we propose to the Administrative Boards the following modification of the supplemental education requirement:

- Students in the College who are pursuing the BA degree or the BS degree with a major in psychology and who have only a single major must fulfill the supplemental education requirement by taking three courses above 199 that are not being used to fulfill the student’s major requirements. These three courses must be from outside the home department/curriculum of the major and cannot be cross-listed with a course that the student has used to satisfy his or her major requirements.
- Students in the College who are pursuing the BA degree or the BS degree with a major in psychology and who take a minor or a second major are deemed to have fulfilled the supplemental education requirement.
- Students pursuing a BA degree in a professional school are deemed to have fulfilled the supplemental education requirement by virtue of completing a concentration outside the school as part of their degree requirements.
- Given the myriad difficulties experienced by the cluster program, including irregular course offerings and the small number of students who have fulfilled their supplemental education requirement using it, we recommend that this program be discontinued. Of course, this recommendation neither would prevent faculty from continuing to collaborate across disciplinary boundaries nor preclude students who must fulfill the supplemental education requirement from selecting related courses to do so.