

Report of the Requirements Team

Introduction-history

In July 1955 the Regents approved the Graham report on "Minimum Requirements" for the bachelor's degree. This report specified (with some exceptions and complications) 12 hours of English -- 6 hours of "English Composition (subject to practices set up by the Department of English for absolving or crediting this requirement)" and 6 hours of "Literature, in English or in another language (all above freshman level)." In practice, for most students, this meant four English courses (commonly 301, 305, 314K, 314L).

As ECT scores rose toward the end of the 1960's, Dean Silber urged the reduction of the English requirement to 9 hours. The Gibbs committee (including Jim Kinneavy and Max Westbrook) was formed to consider implementation of a 9-hour requirement. The question addressed by the committee was not whether to reduce the requirement but how, and the crucial issue was which 9 hours -- how much composition? how much literature? The committee ultimately recommended a sequence similar to 306 (composition)-307 (composition and literature)-314K (literature). But this report was rejected by the General Faculty for being too heavily weighted toward literature.

Subsequently, a new committee, chaired by B. P. Sagik, was formed to reconsider the issue. This committee (including R. J. Kaufmann) modified the recommendation of the Gibbs committee to provide an alternative to 307, namely 308. According to the records of debate on this proposal: "the thrust of the Committee's recommendation of the pair of courses /307, 308/ is to emphasize composition." The Sagik report also listed the specific courses acceptable as the "third course" in the new required sequence (310, 317, 318M, 312L, 314K), but at the same time urged the department to explore alternatives, including: "various great writings of science," "major themes of social thought," "great works of literature which emphasizes the roots of our culture." In effect, the Sagik committee recommended an English requirement that would emphasize composition without neglecting general education. The report of the committee was approved by the general faculty and then by the regents in 1973.

All requirements for the bachelor's degree are currently under review by the Vick committee (including Alan Friedman, who has recently reported to the department on deliberations affecting our curriculum).

Against this background of on-going discussion of degree requirements, the Chairman asked us to consider possible variations in the "number of English hours required for Plan I degree; English courses required; alternate or substitute writing courses in other departments; exit exam between sophomore and junior year." We have focused on

(1) the logistics of varying the number of required hours, and on (2) the educational advantages of different kinds of courses in meeting the hour requirements. Our report is intended to inform and to define helpful areas of debate, rather than to advocate a single set of solutions. Since "Requirements" overlaps with both "Content" and "Format", we have tried to direct attention to areas that may not be stressed in their reports.

Logistical considerations

Assuming a standard class size of 25, and an exemption rate of 25% for one course only:

a 6 hour requirement means 200-220 minimum required sections
per semester

a 9 hour requirement means 300-320 minimum required sections
per semester

a 12 hour requirement means 400-420 minimum required sections
per semester

During the Fall of 1979 we offered 344 sections of required courses:

63 sections taught by regular faculty (18%)

164 sections taught by AI's (48%)

117 sections taught by pool members (34%)

Thanks to the Office of Admission, projections about enrollment in Freshman courses are reasonably easy to obtain. But the Office of Institutional Studies is just beginning to develop reliable figures on attrition and transfer rates. Moreover, total enrollment figures include "hold-overs" who may or may not have already taken their required English courses. So, all figures are absolutely approximate at best, but are still relatively useful for comparisons.

For purposes of comparison, then, we have made rough projections about enrollment using the following constants:

Exemption rate of 25% for the first course in sequence only

Freshman demand of 6000 with attrition of 6% between semesters

Sophomore demand of 5000 with attrition of 5% between semesters

Upper division demand of 5500

All courses filled to indicated capacity; no students voluntarily enrolled

I 6 Hours

Requirements 3

Class size	Sections per semester				
25	205	190	170	200	185
20	255	240	215	250	235
30	170	160	145	170	155
F 25, S 40, UD 25	205	155	110	200	160
F 25, S 200, UD 25	205	105	25	200	120
	F	1F, 1S	2S	1F, 1UD	1S, 1UD

Sequence

II 4 Hours

Class size	Number of Sections per semester (rounded to nearest 5)				
25	305	300	315	280	220
20	380	375	390	355	275
30	255	250	265	235	185
S, S 40, UD 25	265	265	315	220	215
S, S 200, UD 25	215	215	315	135	205
	2F, 1S	1F, 1S, 1UD	2F, 1UD	2S, 1UD	2F, 1S (in each college)

Sequence

Class size	Sections per semester				
25	400	415	395	410	320
20	500	515	495	515	400
30	335	345	330	340	270
F 25, S 40, UD 25	325	375	325	375	280
F 25, S 200, UD 25	230	325	225	325	220
	2F, 2S	2F, 1S, 1UD	1F, 2S, 1UD	1F, 1S, 2UD	2F, 1S, 1S in (students own college)

Sequence

IV 9 Hours + 3

9 hours required + 3 hours optional, with:

A - option exercised by the same colleges that exercise it now.

B - those colleges + Liberal Arts

Class size	A	B	Sections per semester
25	320	350	
20	400	435	
30	265	290	
F 25, S 40	275	295	
F 25, S 200	215	220	
F 25, S 500	205	210	

SEQUENCE
2F 2S

Although these tables probably underestimate future enrollment (especially since the Admissions Office expects a total university enrollment of 50,000 within the decade), they do suggest the statistical impact of a change in hour requirements. They also suggest a possibility not specifically represented by the data: running one (or more) of the courses in two modes -- lecture/discussion and small class. For example, the department could determine in advance the number of 25-person sections it can staff with competent teachers in any one semester, setting aside in addition a small number of large lecture sections of 200 or more. All students who register by a certain date are placed in small sections; all others go into the lecture sections, to be taught by our best lecture teachers and by our top TA's as discussion leaders. This would mean that any necessary last-minute hiring would be of TA's for discussion sections, but not of fully-responsible teachers. Systematic comparison of lecture/discussion vs. small class results would be helpful in making future determinations about the program. In any case, the department will eventually have to confront the problem in something like this form: at what point in a descending scale of teaching competence does the advantage of a small class disappear? From a student's point of view, at what point does it become preferable to have an excellent teacher in a lecture section instead of a mediocre one in a small class? The relevant comparison in any experiment along these lines is not between the excellent teacher in a small class and the same teacher in a large class, but rather between the least effective teacher in a small class and the excellent teacher in a large one.

Pedagogical considerations

If the information available for making logistical choices is approximate, the information for making pedagogical decisions is perhaps even more so. Although everyone has subjective, philosophical views on the educational ends and means of the English requirement, there has not recently been enough careful experimentation in the department to be certain that one approach is more valid than another. Until different approaches are carefully compared, conclusions must be speculative, and ours are.

Given declining test scores and other evidence of declining literacy (however defined), a reduction in the English requirement would be hard to defend. For the same reasons, return to a twelve hour requirement might find substantial support both within and without the English department -- if only the staffing problem would go away: an additional three hours would mean roughly 100 more sections per semester (e.g. 50 new assistant professors at 2 sections apiece). At this time, then, no change in the number of hours is desirable. If, however, some solutions to the staffing problem could be found (lecture sections, assistance from other departments, or . . .), a twelve hour requirement could become more feasible.

Assuming, for the moment, continuation of the nine hour requirement, the question addressed by the Gibbs committee again becomes pertinent: which 9 hours? The literature vs. rhetoric debate, so artfully compromised in the present arrangement of courses will certainly be revived in departmental discussion of the program. The question that this debate should answer is: what is the appropriate relationship between reading and writing in each of the three courses? Three possible answers are: (1) a course in which the principal reading is about writing (e.g. rhetoric books, composition manuals, handbooks); (2) a course in which the writing is about -- or suggested by -- reading of books judged most desirable for our students' general education (e.g. "great books"); and (3) a course in which the reading provides discipline-specific models for the students own writing (e.g. articles in Scientific American).

Once the department comes to some measure of agreement on the writing-reading question, it can consider the possible advantages of elevating one or another of the required courses to the upper division level. We could require 325M (where the reading would be about writing) or designated literature courses (where the writing would be about reading). Similarly, a decision about the appropriate relationship between reading and writing might direct us to ask other departments for help in designing or staffing discipline-specific writing courses (writing in imitation of special models).

Conclusion-recommendations

The committee would like to see careful experimentation with various approaches at various levels before any new configuration of required courses is presented to the general faculty. Pending such trials runs, however, the committee is especially concerned that the department take more seriously than at present the general education component of the English requirement, and that the department coordinate the required courses in a sequence more educationally meaningful and precise than the present composition-composition/literature-literature arrangement.

Specifically, the committee recommends:

1. The department should retain the nine hour requirement at least until changes in format and staffing provide some solution to the problems in coping with the enrollments we already have in our lower-division courses.
2. The department should experiment in a purposeful and controlled and carefully reported way with the content, format, and sequence of possible required courses. Such experimentation could include:

- a. Trial sections of required 325M: permit a controlled group of random non-exempt freshmen to bypass one of the lower division courses provided they take 325M some time after they have completed 60 hours.
 - b. Trial sections of discipline-specific writing courses, such as those described in Professor Kinneavy's proposal, as a substitute for 307/8.
 - c. Trial sections of a coordinated two-semester sequence for freshmen or sophomores focusing on western literature (similar to 603) and/or focusing on English literature (similar to 312): permit a controlled group of freshmen or sophomores to take one of these trial sequences instead of 307-314K. (Sophomores in such a trial section would already have 306; freshmen could complete their requirement with 310.)
3. The English Department should consult with faculty from other colleges in planning experimental sections of writing courses oriented toward specific disciplines, and should consult faculty from other departments in the college in planning courses focused on great books.

The Committee