

INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared pursuant to the Program Review Policy adopted by Humphreys College in October, 1993. This is the second in a series of program reviews, the first of which centered around the College's office administration program.

The liberal arts program consists of three main components: the general education core curriculum, the associate of arts degree in liberal arts and the bachelor of science degree in community affairs. This report focuses primarily on the general education and community affairs programs, although inferences may be drawn pertaining to the associate degree program on the basis of the analysis contained herein. This program review was conducted by a six-person committee whose membership is listed below:

Linda Rahmoller, Office Administration (chair)
Rowena Walker, Liberal Arts
Bruce Bodine, Court Reporting
Joe Orlando, Adjunct Faculty
Roy Childs, Sociology, University of the Pacific
Gaither Loewenstein, Dean of Instruction (ex-officio)

METHOD OF STUDY

The committee drew from a variety of data sources in conducting this analysis. Sources of information utilized included the following:

- ACT COMP examination results for June, 1996 (N=26)
- Focus group of College alumni (N=5)
- Written survey of faculty members (N=16)
- Written survey of current students (N=105)
- Telephone interviews (N=10) and written survey (N=7) of students majoring in community affairs

In addition to these data sources, the committee reviewed existing documents, including previously adopted mission statements, the College policy on program reviews, teaching evaluations and a complete set of course syllabi for all liberal arts courses. Finally, over the course of committee deliberations, various members reported the results of informal discussions with faculty, staff and students.

All of this information was collected, distributed to each committee member and reviewed by the committee as a whole. A draft document was prepared by one committee member and was reviewed and approved by the committee. Recommendations contained in this report reflect the consensus of the program review committee, based upon its evaluation of the above referenced data. The report has been circulated to full-time liberal arts faculty members, some of whose written comments appear in the appendix.

EVALUATION OF GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Information concerning the general education program was derived mainly from the ACT COMP examination results, surveys of students and faculty and a focus group of recent graduates. These sources suggest that the strengths of the program include overall instructional quality and facilitating students' problem solving abilities. With regard to specific subject areas, English and the humanities appear to be held in the highest regard by faculty and students. Areas in apparent need of improvement include library resources and remedial instruction. Mathematics and science instruction, as well as values clarification and critical thinking appear to have received mixed results. In the sections below, each of these areas will be addressed in greater detail.

Instructional Quality: In the survey of current students conducted expressly for this report, 90 percent of those stating an opinion rated the overall quality of instruction in the general education program as "good" or "excellent." This finding is consistent with the results of quarterly surveys of students in individual courses, in which the overall quality of instruction regularly rates in the 3.5 to 3.8 range on a scale of 1 to 4. It is also consistent with the results of the alumni focus group, in which more than half of the favorable comments made related to the issue of instructional quality. Further evidence of high instructional quality within the general education program is provided by the ACT COMP exam results. 93 percent of the graduating students who took the exam agreed that general education courses "have been a valuable part of the college program." Moreover, the fact that four-year students scored in the 50th percentile of a comparison group of graduates, while two-year students scored in the 38th percentile of their comparison group, suggests that the longer a student stays at Humphreys College, the higher their performance in relation to students at other institutions. All of these indicators attest to the high degree of instructional quality within the general education program.

Problem Solving: 88 percent of the students who expressed an opinion agreed that general education courses improved their problem solving abilities. 61 percent of faculty survey respondents concurred that general education courses provide adequate instruction in problem solving. In the ACT COMP exam results, solving problems was among the areas in which Humphreys College students fared best. These results suggest that students' problem solving abilities are enhanced as a result of their general education coursework, despite possible definitional differences in the three data sources.

Critical Thinking: Survey results indicate that 91 percent of students with an opinion agree that general education courses taken at the College have improved their ability to think critically. On the other hand, a majority of faculty members

surveyed disagree with the notion that general education courses provide adequate instruction in critical thinking. This discrepancy may be due to differences between students and faculty with respect to how they define the concept. In addition to posing problems relating to the analysis of survey results, the nebulous nature of the term “critical thinking” makes it difficult to recommend means by which this aspect of the general education program can be improved.

Values Clarification: This is the area in which Humphreys students taking the ACT COMP examination received their highest scores. In addition, a sizable majority of the faculty survey respondents expressing an opinion rated the College’s general education program highly in terms of this criterion. Curiously, not all students seem to agree. Even when queried, none of the focus group participants expressed the view that general education courses had helped them to better clarify their values. Perhaps more significantly, nearly 30 percent of student survey respondents disagreed with the statement that general education courses “have helped me to better understand my values.” Again, differences in how this term is defined and understood within the context of the different sources of data make it difficult to evaluate results and to formulate meaningful recommendations in this regard.

Math / Science Instruction: Among student survey respondents, mathematics courses received the highest number of “poor” and “fair” quality ratings, followed closely by science courses. Students taking the ACT COMP exam fared comparatively poorly in “Using Science” and mathematical calculations, which are incorporated into the criterion entitled “Communicating,” in which both two and four-year students received their lowest average scores. On the other hand, 78 percent of faculty survey respondents expressing an opinion believe that general education courses “provide adequate instruction in mathematics,” while 83 percent agree with the statement that they “provide adequate instruction in science.” One plausible explanation for this discrepancy may be that faculty members define adequacy in terms of rigor, while students define quality by some other means. Nevertheless, significant levels of students dissatisfaction, combined with questionable, albeit inconclusive ACT COMP scores and impressionistic data from students, faculty advisors and the Registrar’s Office suggesting that many Humphreys students choose to take their math and science courses elsewhere, provide grounds for serious concern and, at a minimum, further investigation.

Library Resources: Nearly 40 percent of the students who expressed an opinion rated library holdings in general education as “poor” or “fair.” Several alumni focus group participants indicated that they were forced to visit other college libraries in order to complete assignments. Fully two-thirds of the faculty survey

respondents rated library holdings as “poor” or “fair.” Problems with library resources in relation to the general education program go beyond the mere need for increased materials acquisition. In particular, there is a need for greater interaction between faculty and library staff in terms of integrating the library into the course curriculum. For example, librarians should play an active role in developing lists of recommended readings for various general education classes, thereby making students more aware of materials that are available in the College library. A greater degree of participation on the part of library staff in the orientation course and in the development of assignments for all courses requiring library research is also needed. In the absence of a more effective integration of faculty and library staff, simply adding more books and periodicals will not be sufficient to adequately enhance the role of the library in the general education process.

Remedial Instruction: While not all of the data sources employed by this report directly address this issue, overall trends in higher education, combined with recent indicators of student performance and widespread thoughts expressed by faculty, staff, and potential employers of Humphreys College graduates suggest that a close examination of remedial education is warranted. Focus group results and responses to the student survey indicate that reading comprehension and mathematics are areas of particular concern. Recently, the Academic Council has approved the concept of a standardized, two-quarter sequence of courses to be taken by all underprepared students. Additionally, a second basic English course, focusing on reading, has been added to the regular schedule of course offerings. These improvements, while substantial, may not be entirely sufficient to meet the challenges faced by the College in addressing the educational needs of the underprepared student.

SUMMARY OF GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM EVALUATION

The above discussion indicates that the general education program at Humphreys College has both obvious strengths, as well as areas in which improvement is needed. Recommendations for strengthening the general education program are enumerated in the final section of this report.

EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS PROGRAM

The bachelor’s degree program in community affairs was initiated in the Fall, 1995 quarter. It was intended to meet the College’s need for a liberal arts bachelor’s degree while offering greater focus than the typical, generic bachelor of liberal arts degree program.

Program Review, p. 5

The community affairs curriculum is designed to prepare students for work in the human service, governmental and non-profit sectors. It features extensive contact with practicing community-based professionals and has a strong experiential component through its internship program and a two-course research methods sequence geared toward applied research.

Because of its relatively recent inauguration, it would be premature to assess reactions of program graduates or their employers. Consequently, this evaluation is based mainly on the perspectives expressed by current students and should be viewed as exploratory in nature.

Views of students were solicited through a two-fold process; some students completed a written questionnaire, while others were interviewed by telephone. In an effort to elicit greater candor from respondents, the telephone interviews were conducted by Professor Roy Childs of UOP rather than a Humphreys College faculty member. Responses of students are summarized briefly below.

Program Strengths: By far and away, the highest regarded component of the program is the introductory course, which received high marks from virtually all students who had taken it. For some students, the course served as a transformational experience, in which their values were altered in fundamental ways. Others simply indicated that the class was challenging and made them think. Assigned readings were also viewed favorably by most respondents.

Program Aspects Receiving Mixed Reviews: Both the internship program and the social research methods class fall into this category. Regarding the latter, several survey respondents expressed low to moderate satisfaction with the course. On the other hand, those interviewed by telephone expressed opinions that were largely favorable. It is possible that the rigor of the course, combined with the lack of sufficient preparatory coursework on the part of some students, contributed to some of the less favorable comments. Nonetheless, greater scrutiny of student evaluations of the methods course may be advisable. Concerning internships, those who found their own placements easily seemed to be satisfied, while some students appear to need greater oversight and guidance.

Areas Needing Improvement: Library holdings and the range of elective course offerings were two items cited by some students as needing improvement. In addition, several students emphasized a need for more of a “hands-on” orientation, with a greater use of guest speakers, field trips and experiential learning. On a more general level, it seems as though after getting off to a great start via the introductory course, the program may lose focus, at least in the eyes of some students. There appears to be a need for increased efforts to communicate the goals, objectives and expectations of the program to the students. In particular,

the fact that many aspects of the program (choice of a research project, identification of internship opportunities, etc.) are largely self-initiated needs to be explained to the students, some of whom seem to be relying upon faculty members to make it all happen.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS PROGRAM EVALUATION

This program appears to be off to an acceptable start, although efforts must be undertaken to ensure that the program lives up to the expectations generated by the introductory course. Over time, the program must become more than a one-man show, with greater involvement by practicing professionals as adjunct instructors, guest speakers, field trip hosts and internship supervisors. Specific suggestions for program improvements are presented in the following section of this report.

PROGRAM REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Dr. Humphreys should convene and chair a committee to conduct a comprehensive review of mathematics course offerings, including:
 - a. The degree of rigor required by Humphreys College courses in comparison with the offerings of comparable institutions;
 - b. Adequacy of remedial offerings and possible new methodologies, including computer-assisted learning, for enhancing the math skills of underprepared students;
 - c. Instructional methods employed by mathematics teachers at the College; and
 - d. Strategies for improving the continuity of instruction, including the feasibility of adding a full-time faculty member in mathematics.
- 2) Expand the range and quantity of library holdings, with the idea of strengthening and updating the collection in subject areas pertinent to liberal arts course offerings.
- 3) Establish mechanisms for greater involvement by library staff in curriculum development and implementation, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Preparing lists of books and readings held by the library which might be useful as supplementary readings for specific general education courses;

Program Review, p. 7

- b. Participation by library staff in the orientation course and in other classes which require library research assignments; and
 - c. Restoration of participation by the College Librarian in meetings of the Academic Council.
- 4) Following a one-year implementation period, study the effectiveness of the recently adopted two-quarter sequence of course offerings for underprepared students to determine its adequacy as a means of increasing the probability of their successful completion of college-level coursework.
- 5) Conduct an annual meeting for all second-year community affairs students in which the objectives and expectations of the program are clarified, with an emphasis on the need for students to use its internship and applied research components as mechanisms for determining their occupational objectives and making contacts with potential employers.
- 6) Ensure that at least one experiential component (eg. guest speakers, field trips, community-based research assignments) is incorporated into each community affairs course.
- 7) Continue to conduct student evaluations of the social research methods course and consider modifications in course content if warranted by the data derived.

CONCLUSION

Over the past several years, the liberal arts program at Humphreys College has made a successful transition from an exclusive focus on servicing professional degree programs to offering a comprehensive assortment of courses and degree offerings. The changing role of liberal arts at Humphreys College is illustrated by recent enrollment data. For example, between Fall, 1994 and Fall, 1996, the number of liberal arts majors at the College increased by six percent while overall College enrollment at the College declined by 16 percent. Consequently, over this same time period, liberal arts majors as a proportion of total enrollment increased by 26 percent. Thus, while the primary mission of the liberal arts program continues to be the provision of a broad-based general education curriculum to students majoring in court reporting, paralegal studies, office administration, accounting and business, liberal arts has begun to emerge as a successful academic program in its own right.

By addressing some of the concerns identified by this report, the solid foundation that has been established may be built upon, ensuring an even more prominent role for liberal arts

Program Review, p. 8

at Humphreys College in future years. Enhanced library resources, improved remedial programs, refinements in the community affairs major and other improvements called for by this review should be viewed as desirable augmentations to an already effectively functioning program.