

Undergraduate Program Review of Warren College: Review Committee Report

Introduction

The Undergraduate Program Review Committee for Warren College reviewed material submitted by the college and met with faculty, staff, and students to solicit their views. We ended the day's meeting with a very favorable impression. The general educational program is soundly designed and effectively implemented; the college administration has excellent leadership and morale; and students are well served by college requirements and advisers -- and appreciate it. We identified no major problems, and our recommendations mainly echo discussions already underway at the college. These recommendations focus on coordination between the college's required writing and ethics courses; ways to further help students negotiate their Programs of Concentration; and additional steps that might be taken to align GE requirements with the college's larger objectives for students.

General Education requirements

Warren College embraces the ideal of "a life in balance," and it builds that ideal into its General Education program. Lower-division requirements include two courses to develop general skills in persuasive writing (10A-10B) and two devoted to Ethics and Society (Philosophy or Political Science 27-28). 10A-10B are stand-alone writing courses, designed and supervised by College LSOEs and taught by graduate student Teaching Assistants. The Ethics and Society classes are taught by regular Philosophy and Political Science faculty, most recently Jerry Doppelt and Ellen Comisso. Upper-division requirements call for two Programs of Concentration or (for engineering majors) Area Studies. Programs of Concentration consist of 6 courses (at least 3 of them upper division) in departments or programs that are non-contiguous to the major and to each other. Area Studies follow the same model but consist of 3 courses (at least 2 of which must be upper division). The system ensures that students get significant exposure to courses across the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences or Engineering. Finally, students take some general purpose lower division "Formal Skills" course, chosen from a menu of calculus, statistics, and computer programming classes; and another course that satisfies the diversity requirement from the extensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion class list.

Affiliated faculty and the eight students who met with the Review Committee all supported the basic design of the program and thought it worked well. There were also good signs that the College, from the Provost down to a Student Advisory Committee, regularly reflects on what is working and what might be improved. Student suggestions led to some refinements in Warren Writing 10B, for example, and there are preliminary discussions underway about adding a course on interdisciplinary research that would both teach research methods and introduce students to current research by UCSD faculty.

The required Writing and Ethics courses appear to be well thought out and adequately staffed, with no bottlenecks impeding student progress. Direct instruction in 10A and 10B is by Teaching Assistants. They are given as extensive training as time and budgets allow, including an intensive 2 1/2 day workshop before their first stints; on-going observation by and meetings with the

program's assistant director; and weekly meetings to share best practices and standardize instruction and grading across sections. Readings and prompts are also chosen to accommodate varying ability levels and backgrounds. Student evaluations (CAPEs) are variable across sections but generally good-to-excellent, despite the relative scarcity of A-range grades (about 15%, with about 25% falling below B-). The position of Director of Warren Writing, vacant for three years, has now been filled, and the incoming Director is likely to introduce some changes in the program (something that should guide the timing of UPC's separate Warren Writing review). A new LSOE hire in Philosophy in the area of Ethics will enable additional offerings in the Philosophy 27 and 28 series.

The main issue for this lower-division component of Warren's General Education program concerns coordination between the Writing and the Ethics and Society classes. Students expect there to be continuity between them. Those we interviewed, however, agreed that what they learned in 10A and 10B was not put to use in Philosophy 27-28 (the most frequently offered Ethics and Society sequence). Indeed, they argued that Philosophy 27-28 took a quite different approach to writing, more analytical than argumentative. The review committee urges the College to do what they can to address this student concern. In part, the College is already doing so, organizing 10B sections around significant ethical issues (e.g., in medicine and the environment). In part, the College merely needs to manage student expectations so that they know these are different courses with different goals, and that 10A-B's approach to writing is only one possibility. TAs would be the best carriers of this message, and should be used for this purpose (the first-year TA who attended the review meeting seemed only vaguely aware of the Ethics and Society sequence). And in part, it means taking advantage of the fresh blood in the Writing program and Philosophy Department to build more links between the courses, such that Philosophy 27-28 build on 10A-B writing skills even if they also add and emphasize alternative approaches. We recognize, however, that ultimately Warren has no control over the content of Ethics and Society courses.

The other major component of Warren's General Education requirements are the Programs of Concentration and, for engineering majors, Area Studies. These strike a good balance between requiring breadth while also giving students flexibility in choosing how to achieve that breadth. The Review Committee had a few, somewhat contradictory, recommendations to make for the Program of Concentration system. On one hand, the College should consider whether the goal of breadth might be even better served by slightly reducing flexibility. One modest example would be to eliminate the option of having a single course satisfy *both* the Formal Skills or Diversity requirement *and* a Program of Concentration requirement. A major example would be to add one or more courses to engineering students' Area Studies. Faculty Advisory Committee members we interviewed showed no enthusiasm for this option, on the grounds that engineering requirements left no leeway for additional General Education courses and so the change would lengthen students' time to degree. But Warren's self study indicated that engineering students in other colleges graduated in only slightly more time (about 1/3 of a quarter, on average) than their Warren counterparts, and ABET standards may not strictly require the full complement of courses in current UCSD engineering majors. The balance between professional training and liberal arts education is of course an issue for wider campus discussion. The Review Committee's main point, in any case, is to encourage the College to continue to reflect on its primary goals for Warren students and to consider any changes, modest or more ambitious, that further those goals. That

reflection might include the possibility of also giving students somewhat *more* flexibility in their Programs of Concentration. One student we met with made a plausible case that Computer Science might be sufficiently non-contiguous with her Biology major to satisfy a breadth requirement. Whether that particular example is sound, it makes sense to let students use their Writing 10A-B-honed argumentative skills to make a case for such combinations. As Provost Adler suggested, having them do so by proposing Individualized Programs of Concentration rather than simple petitions for exceptions would probably reduce the administrative and advising hassles of this option.

Advising

College advising appeared to be effective. Advisers discussed a variety of practices intended to ensure that students were familiar with requirements and completed them in a timely fashion; to make good use of newer technologies (Live Chat, Virtual Advising) to give students prompt responses to questions; and to accommodate the particular needs of transfer and international Students. A new intern will be dedicated specifically to helping international students. The Review Committee also applauds tentative plans to add a joint freshman-transfer mentoring program. In addition to giving transfer students additional support, it could help them identify more strongly with the College. (Because transfers usually don't need to take Warren General Education classes along with other Warren students, they probably don't develop strong ties to the College. This was certainly the view of one of the transfer students who met with the Review Committee.) The college advisers we met with were very positive about their office's operations, and their favorable views were largely shared by our small sample of Warren students. Survey data on Warren students' satisfaction with advising services is very similar to campus-wide averages.

Some of the students we interviewed did report initial confusion over the details of General Education requirements, particularly in the details of the Programs of Concentration (for example, whether non-departmental programs belonged to a "silo" different from the student's major). It did not take them long to figure things out, with the help of advisers and advising materials, and the students we talked to strongly supported the principle of balance enshrined in the Programs of Concentration system. The Review Committee does recommend that the college consider additional steps to help students navigate that system. If possible given the obvious resource constraints, the online sample four-year plans for the different majors might be augmented with more specific examples of how to include courses that satisfy Programs of Concentration. Another suggestion offered by a student was to display the requirements in a more visual format, whether in print or online, showing decision trees for making increasingly specific choices (of programs, of courses, of upper division electives, etc.) that will meet requirements.

Administration

Warren Provost Steven Adler is assisted by an active Faculty Advisory Committee, Student Affairs officers, and cadre of Academic Advisers. Provost Adler was enthusiastic in his praise of the professionalism and dedication of the staff; staff members we interviewed were equally enthusiastic about Provost Adler's leadership. The business operations of the College have now been shifted to a consolidated campus organization under a single MSO for all six colleges. Our

discussions with the MSO and College deans suggested that this transition had gone surprisingly smoothly.

Although it is outside the scope of this review, we would also commend Warren for managing the Academic Internship Program. This is an invaluable resource for students across the campus.

Conclusion

The Review Committee commends Warren: the College is well run, has excellent morale, and serves its students well. Our main recommendations are essentially refinements to a program that is sound in design and execution.

-- Use the opportunity presented by a new Director of Writing and Philosophy LSOE to better coordinate Writing 10A-B with Phil/PoliSci 27-28. This may be challenging in terms of the content of Ethics and Society, but should at least be pursued by better managing student expectations about the relationship between the Warren and the Ethics and Society courses.

-- Offer students additional guidance to help them navigate Program of Concentration requirements.

-- Give close consideration to whether the College's foundational educational goals -- summarized as "a life in balance" -- might be served by modestly increasing breadth requirements (no double-dipping with the Formal Skills or Diversity courses, additional courses for Area Studies) and judiciously increasing opportunities for students to customize those breadth requirements.

UPC Review Committee for Warren College

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October 4, 2013

**PROFESSOR STEVEN ADLER, Provost
Earl Warren College**

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for Earl Warren College

The Undergraduate Council considered the report of the subcommittee charged with reviewing the undergraduate program of Earl Warren College at its June 14, 2013 meeting. Overall, the Committee shares the very positive assessment of Warren College: it is clear that Warren College students, faculty, and staff support the mission of the College and work collaboratively to strengthen its academic program so that it actively reflects the College's dedication to "a life in balance."

The review subcommittee considered its recommendations as "refinements to a program that is sound in design and execution." The Council is in agreement with the nature of these recommendations. Our specific comments are as follows:

1. **Better coordination between WARR 10AB and POLI/PHIL 27/28:** We are receptive to the College's position that requiring students to develop different approaches to writing in academia, as these two independent course series do, is to the benefit students. The review subcommittee opined that some of the student complaints about the lack of coordination between the requirements could be addressed by management of student expectations. The Council agrees with this assessment and recommends that the College develop a plan to address this issue.

The Council supports the College's effort to engage faculty in Warren Writing and Philosophy to consider ways in which coordination between the two series might be developed.

2. **Programs of Concentration:** The Council is receptive to the College's concern regarding time-to-degree and providing students with flexibility in fulfilling their requirements. We endorse the College's plan to review the Programs of Concentration and to prune these as appropriate.

The review subcommittee report made evident that Warren College is supported by an exemplary community of student, faculty, and staff. The Council applauds the College on this very positive review and appreciates its active engagement in this review process. We look forward to learning about the College's progress on the above issues at the follow-up review in Spring 2014.

Sincerely,



Michael D. Todd, Chair
2012-13 Undergraduate Council

cc: G. Boss R. Rodriguez
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