

Report to the Senate Committee on General Education

First Round Internal Review of University General Education Courses (2005-2007)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In the *Report* submitted by the Review Committee on General Education (RCGE) in October 2003, it has been stipulated that all existing University General Education (UGE) courses should be reviewed in stages starting from spring 2005 by the Standing Committee of the Senate Committee on General Education (SCGE). All the courses should be reviewed according to the GE objectives, area requirements, and desired characteristics of GE courses clearly set out in the *RCGE Report*.
- 1.2 The aim of the review is twofold: to ensure all courses with the status of UGE courses are in line with the objectives and academic requirement for general education at CUHK; and to enhance teaching and learning quality of all UGE courses.
- 1.3 Accordingly, the review exercises for the existing UGE courses include two levels of review. The course design of UGE courses is reviewed against the overall UGE objectives and the specific area requirements; while the implementation quality is evaluated by a close examination of the materials issued from the actual teaching and learning process.

2 Process of the review exercises:

- 2.1 Starting from fall 2004, the Office of University General Education is responsible for collating and archiving course materials of all UGE courses for review purpose.
- 2.2 The course materials collected include:
 - course description form indicating the general course design
 - course information for students with course outline, reference list and assessment method
 - tutorial/laboratory guidelines, if applicable
 - other course information and teachers' feedback
 - instruction or guidelines for other learning activities, if applicable
 - question paper / guidelines of all assessment components
 - samples of students' answer scripts of selected assessment
 - other optional teaching materials

- 2.3 Every year two batches of courses were selected for review; each batch contained 30 to 40 courses. The spring review exercise took place in April-May, and the fall review exercise in October-November.
 - 2.4 A set of documents of each course selected to be reviewed was compiled and submitted to members of the Standing Committee.
 - 2.5 Each course was assigned a principal reviewer, who gave her/his comments and overall recommendation on the course and individual class. A second review was arranged for courses with serious concerns identified, and recommended for possible major revision or withdrawal from UGE course list.
 - 2.6 The comments and recommendations of the courses in question were presented and fully discussed in plenary meetings of the Standing Committee.
- 3 Recommendations to SCGE
- 3.1 In consequence of careful consideration and discussion, the Standing Committee would submit its recommendation to SCGE for deliberation and endorsement.
 - 3.2 Courses that met the GE objectives and possessed the GE desired characteristic were recommended for endorsement
 - 3.3 Courses were recommended for minor revisions when improvement was needed for some specific components of the course design and/ or delivery.
 - 3.4 Courses were recommended for major revisions when structural modification of the course syllabus was necessary and /or significant improvement was needed in the implementation quality.
 - 3.5 Courses that did not fit in the GE objectives and the GE desired characteristics were recommended for withdrawal.
- 4 Result of the first round internal review
- 4.1 From 2005 to 2007, all the existing and active UGE courses have undergone the review exercise. A total number of 201 courses and 366 sections were reviewed.
 - 4.2 Of the 201 courses reviewed, 79 courses were endorsed without change; 82 were endorsed after minor revision; 33 courses need major revision, of which 3 were subsequently withdrawn and 30 were endorsed; and 7 courses were found not suitable for GE.
 - 4.3 The statistics of the six exercises conducted in the past three years are given in Table 1:

Table 1 Outcome of first-round Internal GE Course Review (six exercises conducted from 2005 to 2007)

	05-1	05-2	06-1	06-2	07-1	07-2	Total
Endorsed	10	19	12	16	7	15	79
Not suitable for GE	2	2	2	1	0	0	7
Endorsed subject to major revision	9	5	4	5	5	5	33
Endorsed subject to minor revision	17	12	12	13	18	10	82
Total no. courses reviewed	<u>38</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>201</u>

5 Procedures for appeal against the resolution of SCGE

- 5.1 The department concerned could, if thought fit, formulate its appeal, with relevant arguments and new evidence if any, to the Chairperson of the SCGE within one month after receiving notification of the resolution of SCGE.
- 5.2 The Standing Committee would reconsider the course and deliberate a recommendation to the SCGE for final approval.
- 5.3 No appeal has ever been received by the Standing Committee.

6 Feedback loop issued from internal reviews

- 6.1 The Office of University GE (OUGE) conveyed the endorsed recommendations and comments to the teaching departments concerned, and when necessary, organized special meetings with department chairperson, GE coordinator, and/or teachers to exchange ideas on possible ways for objectives alignment and quality improvement.
- 6.2 The teaching departments would submit revised course design and implementation plan for approval in due course.
- 6.3 The final approval for courses with minor revisions was entrusted to the administrative decision of the Director of University General Education.
- 6.4 Course design and implementation details of courses subject to major revision would be resubmitted to the Standing Committee for review and endorsement.
- 6.5 Departments with courses proposed for withdrawal were invited to re-introduce these courses to the UGE programme, if desired, with an overhaul of the course design.

- 7 Overall performance and good practices
- 7.1 The overall result of the internal review evinces the satisfactory performance of the UGE programme and the commendable engagement of the teachers to the programme.
 - 7.2 A great majority of courses (161 out of 201) are considered to have met in principle the GE objectives and possess the required characteristics, though some minor revisions are suggested for the further improvement of course design or delivery.
 - 7.3 The implementation quality of individual section is in general up to standard too. Most course syllabuses are well structured and 93.7% of the section reviewed employed multiple assessments to evaluate students' learning.
 - 7.4 Courses are in general well prepared and teachers enthusiastic for the teaching of UGE courses. The overall report of students' course evaluation confirms the findings of the review exercises.
 - 7.5 On a 6-point scale and for the 366 sections reviewed, only 2 courses obtained less than 4.0 regarding Q5 "teacher well prepared", and only 6 for Q6 "teacher enthusiastic". 352 (96.2%) sections recorded satisfactory result (4.0 or above) for Q11 "satisfied with the teacher", and 340 (92.9%) for Q12 "satisfied with the course".
 - 7.6 Excellent initiatives are taken to implement interactive teaching and learning activities. 66.9% of the sections reviewed used different activities to stimulate students' learning. Some teachers rigorously plan their tutorials with adequate reading materials to guide students to in-depth reading, reflection and debates; others use Web forum to encourage students to express themselves, ask questions and engage in discussions. Some courses provide field trip with clear academic guidance, and a course shifts to deliver the content by web, with time freed up for discussion.
 - 7.7 Most teachers give clear guidelines for written assignment. Some teachers provided precise and detailed instructions, others gave comments to students' drafts of term paper, and with the teacher's concrete suggestions students could improve their writing and produce assignment of higher academic quality.

Table 2. Statistics of implementation details of the UGE sections (classes) reviewed in the First-round Internal Course Review Exercise conducted from 2005 to 07

	2005	2006	2007	Total	%
Total no. of sections reviewed	106	130	130	366	
With teaching assistant	59	75	63	197	53.8%
With interactive teaching	54	90	101	245	66.9%
With multiple assessments	99	123	121	343	93.7%
Attendance / Participation included in course assessment	36	39	42	117	32%
Guidelines given for assignments (The figures in brackets are the total no. of sections with written assignments)	74 (80)	92 (110)	103 (113)	269 (303)	88.8%
Readings specified for individual topic	33	51	61	145	39.6%
<u>Course Evaluation Findings</u>					
<u>(6-point scale: 6 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree)</u>					
a. Teacher well-prepared (4 points or above)	104	130	130	364	99.5%
b. Teacher enthusiastic (4 points or above)	103	127	130	360	98.4%
c. Satisfied with teacher (4 points or above)	98	126	128	352	96.2%
d. Satisfied with course (4 points or above)	97	119	124	340	92.9%

8 Concerns and General Recommendations for UGE courses

8.1 In spite of the overall performance of the UGE courses, the Standing Committee would like to draw the attention of the SCGE to some areas of concern where there is still space for improvement.

8.2 Course design and content:

8.2.1 The content of quite a number of courses tends to be rather factual, or even too technical for UGE courses. Some other courses lack a clear academic and conceptual framework, and the course content only consists of topics loosely related.

8.2.2. As the objective of UGE courses is not to impart facts or skills of a specific field of knowledge, but to provide broad intellectual perspective, to instill an understanding of the methods and values of different academic disciplines, and to develop sensitivity to the common concerns of human existence, it is recommended that a UGE course should

- a) illustrate how human knowledge in the field concerned is gained;
- b) introduce students to basic concepts, theories and/or methodology of the discipline.
- c) link up the course subjects with broader human concern in contemporary society.

8.3 Teaching and learning activities:

8.3.1. One-way teaching method (i.e. lectures only) is still adopted in more than

one third of the sections reviewed. Lecturing, though efficient in the delivery of facts and knowledge, does not encourage in-depth reflection and active learning.

- 8.3.2. As one of the aims of UGE courses is to equip students with life-long learning capacities, teaching and learning activities should be designed to encourage students to do more reading, analytical thinking and writing. It is recommended that
- a) tutorials and interactive activities should be in use to enrich the students' learning, especially for large class;
 - b) teaching departments should ensure that teachers of large class do have adequate resource for conducting interactive learning activities.

8.4 Student workload:

- 8.4.1 Student workload appears relatively light in some courses, especially in courses where only one final examination or one term paper is required, with no other complementary assignment or learning activity.
- 8.4.2 Readings: Some courses did not provide any or sufficient required readings, while others provide an extensive reading list without specifying chapters or pages to be read for each topic. Certain courses lacked adequate mechanism to ensure that the required readings are actually read in spite of an adequate reading list.
- 8.4.3 GE courses should carry the same workload in terms of reading and assignment as the other university courses with the same number of credit units, and it is undesirable that students can get a pass by attending lectures and reading lecture notes only. Hence, it is reiterated that
- a) There should be adequate course work to facilitate student learning;
 - b) there must be required readings for UGE courses and specific required reading should be assigned for individual course topics;
 - c) some mechanism should be introduced to ascertain that reading assignment has actually been carried out so that reading constitutes an integrative part of students' learning.

8.5 Multi-section courses:

- 8.5.1 For some courses offered in multiple sections (classes) and by different teachers, the actual teaching plan sometimes deviated from the master course outline and the course contents did not correspond to the original course objectives and expected learning outcomes.
- 8.5.2 It is recommended that the teachers involved in offering multi-section courses should be informed of the original course design, the fundamental concepts and key theories or principles that students need to learn.

8.6 Team-taught course:

- 8.6.1 Some team-taught courses were very fragmentary without coherent

academic framework to connect the wide array of topics covered. The coherence of other better structured courses was sometimes undermined by the large number of different lecturers.

8.6.2 It is recommended that

- a) there should be coordination among professors to work out a coherent syllabus;
- b) it is necessary to have a course coordinator who can monitor the implementation quality of the whole course;
- c) there should be pre- and post-course meetings to ensure and review the standard and smooth running of each lesson;
- d) the number of teachers should be reduced when possible.

9 Outcomes of the first round internal review

9.1. Several policies have been adopted according to the recommendation of previous review exercises. These policies help to better define the desired characteristics of UGE courses and the expected implementation qualities.

9.1.1 Policies on course assessment:

- a) Course assessment should not be conducted solely in response-type questions (e.g. multiple choice, true-or-false) or very short questions (those to be answered in a few words).
- b) Marks could be deducted for absence but not awarded for mere attendance. If class participation is an assessment component, it should be effectively assessed.
- c) As double-coded courses should be identical in all aspects and the credits earned are transferable between GE and departmental programmes, students of double-coded courses, whether registered under GE code or department code, should be assessed as one single class with the same assessment standard.

9.1.2. Policy on viewing of films and movies: Viewing of films should take place outside class, except for short fragments for immediate discussion. For courses related to films and movies, course teachers should ensure that film copies are available in the Library and arrange for viewing sessions outside class time.

9.2. Improvement of course design and implementation quality: though it may be too early to conclude the overall impact of the internal review, repeated review in fall 2007 of 9 courses recommended for major revision shows that notable improvement in the course design and implementation quality have been made since the last review. Course syllabuses are better structured with more coherent academic framework, and assessment methods are more various to assess different learning outcomes. Intellectual level and student workload become commensurate with credit bearing major courses.

10 Ways ahead

- 10.1 After the first round of internal review, it is assured that most of the UGE courses are consonant with the objectives of GE, and have the desired characteristics for GE with appropriate intellectual level and workload. Courses with major concerns are under revision and will be resubmitted for approval.
- 10.2 As the University Grants Committee (UGC) is promoting outcomes-based approaches (OBA) to teaching and learning and the OUGE is requested to develop an OBA 'roadmap', it is desirable that more effort will be put into evaluating the teaching and learning in the light of outcomes-based approaches in the next round of internal review.
- 10.3 Two levels of review are recommended:
 - a) At the course design level, systematic review on the formulation of expected learning outcomes and its articulation with learning activities and assessment methods should be carried out.
 - b) At the implementation level, students' learning achievement will be measured by samples of written assignments and answers to exam papers.