Everything you wanted to know about the new university-wide general education program...

...but were afraid to ask.

From the Office of the Provost
On March 3, 1997, after almost three years of campus-wide discussion and negotiation, the Faculty Senate adopted a new University-wide general education structure. This is an important change for students, faculty members, administrators and support staff from the college-based programs that currently define general education at the University of Arizona. The new structure is scheduled for implementation as of Fall 1998, roughly 16 months from now. The Office of the Provost invites the participation of all members of the University community in creating a successful and smooth transition.

Benefits of the New Structure
This change to a university-wide general education structure speaks to student, faculty, and institutional needs:

**Students** - Students will be able to change colleges and majors with the assurance that the general education courses they have taken will continue to apply in their new programs. (Since roughly 50% of incoming students are undecided as to major and a recent study indicates that fewer than 20% of students graduate with the major they declared at entry, this is a significant issue.) Further, students who transfer to the University from community colleges will know how to prepare themselves even if they are not decided as to college or major. (Over one-third of the entering students in any academic year are transfer students and half of these come from Arizona community colleges.)

**Faculty** - Because the Foundations and Tier 1 courses are to be completed early in a degree program and because these courses will cover the development of a set of skills and an introduction to foundational knowledge in three curricular areas, faculty members will be able to develop reasonable and achievable pedagogical expectations for their upper division students and in more advanced courses. Further, the university-wide structure distributes decisions about curricular content and teaching more widely, providing all University faculty with a and "stake" in general education.

**Institution** - A single general education program will facilitate modeling course-taking patterns and meeting student demand. The ability to meet student demand more efficiently under the new program will free up resources presently used for general education courses.

The Transition
The new general education structure will be implemented in Fall, 1998, and overseen by the University-Wide General Education Committee. The curricular task that the University faces over the next few years is to ensure that all students have access to the courses needed to complete their programs - under both the previous college-based general education structure and the new university-wide general education structure. The creation of two distinct sets of courses, those that fit within the old general education structure and those that are intended for the new general education structure, would make this task more difficult. Thus, the Committee will be working under a plan designed to ease the transition.

First, this structure can be populated in part with courses that have already been approved under the new guidelines - both new courses and modifications of extant courses.

Second, because this set of courses does not yet offer sufficient seats to meet student demand, department heads and deans have recently received a memo asking them to consider which of their courses are appropriate to Tier 1 or Tier 2 and which are not. Those courses that have been approved under the current general education structure are an obvious resource in this consideration. However, because the course guidelines and the expectations about the
curriculum under the new structure are different in some respects from the current situation, courses satisfying the current curriculum cannot be transferred over wholesale to the new structure. The guidelines for courses within the new general education structure can be found below; they are also available in the Office of Undergraduate Education from Kathy Gonzalez-Landis (621-3913 or kathleen@u.arizona.edu) and at http://w3.arizona.edu/~uge/guidal.html. The guidelines are also available from the Office of Undergraduate Education homepage. (A new General Education Homepage will be up and running shortly. This site will include interactive access to the proposal submission forms.)

While many of the courses now approved in the Arts and Sciences general education program may be appropriate to the new structure or can be made appropriate with some modification, each department should weigh a number of factors in making their decisions.

**Content**: Course content is, of course, one critical consideration. The guidelines are more explicit in some curricular areas than they are in others; thus, they are likely to evolve over time. But they should be sufficient during this transitional period.

**Foundational knowledge**: Especially in Tier 1, general education courses are intended to provide the kind of intellectual underpinnings that later coursework across the curriculum should reasonably be able to depend on. It follows, therefore, that Tier 1 courses will, in general, be disjoint from introductory major courses, whose goal is to prepare students for study in the discipline.

**Non-proliferation**: Because Tier 1 provides foundational knowledge, it is reasonable that there should not be a large number of courses within each of Tier 1’s three segments. Further, no Tier 1 course should be tied to a single faculty member, but rather should be constructed so that it can be offered by a number of faculty members. A logical consequence of this expectation is that any segment of Tier 1 would probably not include more than one course or course sequence from a single department.

**Honors**: Honors students comprise roughly a quarter of new freshmen. Thus, part of the assessment of course proposals submitted for general education must include a consideration of how honors students will be served and what portion of an offering will be reserved for them. Although not every offering need set aside one quarter of its seats for honors students, the offerings in Tier 1 and Tier 2 must provide enough courses with an honors designation to meet the curricular needs of honors students.

The third step in the plan involves ongoing development and assessment. It may take a number of years to develop the appropriate set of courses for the new structure. Thus, the new structure will be parasitic on courses previously developed, insofar as this is necessary to meet student demand.

Finally, all courses approved for the new structure will also meet requirements under the old general education programs.

**Timetable**

The normal registration schedule requires that departments set their fall offerings by the beginning of January, because the course schedule has to be printed in time for students to register in March. This January date has important ramifications for the implementation of the new general education structure. If departments are to plan their offerings for Fall 1998 in a timely fashion, the University-Wide General Education Committee must make its decisions about what courses are to be included in the

**TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

**March 1998**
Students begin to register for Fall 1998.

**January 1998**
Departmental course schedules for fall 1998 are due and the updating of curricular information (APRRs, catalog etc.) for academic year 1998-99 is completed

**December 15, 1997**
The University-Wide General Education Committee completes the approval of general education offerings sufficient to meet the curricular needs of 1998-99 entering class.

**October 15, 1997**
Departments complete the submission of general education offerings for 1998-99 to the University-Wide General Education Committee.

**September 15, 1997**
Departments complete submission of 1998-99 general education offerings to college curriculum committees, if this is required by the college.
new structure before the end of the Fall 1997 semester. The Committee will be guided in its decisions about courses by departmental and college curricular decisions, so it requires information from departments and colleges by the middle of the fall semester.

This timeline suggests that departments should begin considering their options as soon as possible. Further, the members of the University-Wide General Education Committee believe that they could better accomplish their task of reviewing proposals if similar courses were grouped together. Thus, they are proposing the following schedule:

- **June 15**: receipt of Tier 1 Natural Science proposals
- **July 15**: receipt of Tier 1 Individuals and Societies proposals
- **August 15**: receipt of Tier 1 Traditions and Cultures proposals
- **September 15**: receipt of Tier 2 Arts proposals

That is, the members of the University-Wide General Education Committee are asking that, insofar as possible, departments with Tier 1 Natural Science courses submit their proposals by **June 15, 1997**, departments which intend to put forward Tier 1 Individuals and Societies courses submit their proposals by **July 15, 1997**, etc. Tier 2 Natural Science and Tier 2 Individuals and Societies proposals are less immediately pressing because incoming freshmen will not be taking courses in these areas during their first year. The Committee will entertain proposals outside of these deadlines, but it must receive all proposals for 1998-99 by **October 15, 1997**. Departments and other units submitting proposals should be careful to check with their college as to the college review process that might precede the Committee’s review.

The expectation is that most of the courses coming forward during this first review period will be revisions of extant courses, rather than entirely new offerings, simply because of the temporal constraints. That is, by October 15, the second part of the four-part transition plan will be close to completion.

**Plan for course numbering**

While Tier 2 courses will be taught under departmental prefixes, Tier 1 courses will be offered under one of three subject area prefixes.

- Traditions and Cultures -- TRAD
- Individuals and Societies -- INDV
- Natural Sciences -- NATS

Each subject area will include a small set of numbers, each designating a particular focus. The following is the tentative list, although some modification may be necessary.

- TRAD 101 - non-western
- TRAD 102 - western: Ancient times - Renaissance
- TRAD 103 - western: Renaissance - Present
- TRAD 104 - topics in culture
- INDV 101 - individuals
- INDV 102 - societies
- NATS 101 - physical science (physics, chemistry, etc.)
- NATS 102 - biological science
- NATS 105 - physical science (astronomy, geosciences, etc.)
Individuals courses will be taught as sections within one of these numbers -- with a subtitle identifying the specific focus, e.g. INDV 101, Section 1 'The Sciences of the Mind'; TRAD 104, Section 2 'The Problem of Evil'.

The Tier 1 numbering system reflects the idea that the courses meeting these requirements will share certain fundamental aspects. Departments will be credited with the SCHs generated by their faculty members under this system.

Non-western courses in Tier 2 and elsewhere in the curriculum would be best identified by the final two digits of the course number, e.g. X47. Similarly, gender, race, class and ethnicity courses in Tier 2 and elsewhere in the curriculum should be identified by a designated final two digits, e.g. X62. The Office of Curriculum Initiatives will be investigating the possibilities in this regard.

Next Steps
The development of this new structure has implications for many parts of the University that will require deliberation and discussion. 

**Students:** Some students enter the University with AP credits; others enter with deficiencies. The accommodation of both within this new structure must be fleshed out and committees have been formed to do so. Individuals interested in participating in this discussion should contact Lynne Tronsdal, Associate Dean of the University College, at 621-8257.

Another student issue is the accommodation of transfer students within the new structure. If a student enters with a completed general education program from one of the state's community colleges, the University accepts this as completing our general education. This is a reasonable position to take in regard to students from other institutions as well. At the moment, however, most students enter having only partially completed general education. These students programs will need to be evaluated on a course-by-course basis by advisors.

**Faculty:** Faculty members teaching within the general education curriculum and in Tier 1 in particular require institutional support. The demands of delivering courses that are intended to meet the instructional and intellectual needs of students from across the University can be daunting. A group that represents the campus instructional support units -- the Instructional Resource Coordinating Council -- has been formed, specifically with an eye to supporting faculty members interested in the development and delivery of general education. Instructors who want to avail themselves of the opportunities this support affords should contact Terri Riffe, Director of the University Teaching Center, at 621-7788.

**Advising and Advisors:** In Fall 1996, the University established a new First Year Center, devoted to helping students, both freshmen and transfer, successfully make the transition to the University during their first months on campus. The Center offers advising, tutoring, major and career exploration and information about student services. Future development of the Center will be closely tied to the first year curricular structure, i.e. to Foundations and Tier 1.

Lynne Tronsdal, Associate Dean of the University College, has also been working to develop tools to help advisors make the appropriate choices among the curricular offerings in the new structure. She is interested in getting feedback from all advisors about whether these tools meet advisors’ needs.

**Teaching Assistants:** Tier 1 and Tier 2 courses are to be taught by faculty members. But Graduate Teaching Assistants are critical in various support roles. The teaching assistant resources currently within the Colleges can accommodate the new general education structure, given a reasonable ratio of graduate assistants to
undergraduate students. One issue that remains is how to ensure that instructors from departments without graduate students or with few graduate students receive the appropriate teaching assistant support. Another issue in training. Graduate assistants involved in the delivery of Tier 1 courses should be advanced graduate students who have shown through prior teaching experience excellent teaching skills. The University Teaching Center is available to work with departments in developing appropriate training for graduate assistants.

Classrooms: Two problems with classrooms have confronted faculty members teaching lower division classes. (1) The classrooms have been in poor repair, with little or no equipment. (2) The University’s inventory of classrooms does not match instructional needs. The first problem is in the process of being remedied. The classroom renovation project has targeted the most heavily used classrooms on campus for upgrading. In addition, all centrally scheduled classrooms have been equipped with basic teaching equipment and the number of classrooms providing high quality technological support has been significantly increased.

The Center for Research on Undergraduate Education has been working on a model to address the second problem. According to its projections, the University is most critically short in classrooms of size 60-69. The Integrated Instructional Facility will increase the inventory of such classrooms, consistent with our projected needs. The classroom renovation project can also provide a partial resolution of this problem by combining some small classrooms to make larger ones. Finally, the Office of Undergraduate Education will work with Room Scheduling to make Tier 1 and Tier 2 courses a scheduling priority.

Departmental Curricula: One possible consequence of the new structure that departments might want to consider is a regularization of the curriculum. Foundation courses, Tier 1 courses, and other prerequisite courses are reasonably numbered in the 100s. Many Tier 2 courses and introductory major courses would reasonably be numbered in the 200s; others might reasonably be numbered in the 300s. This would leave the 400s for advanced undergraduate coursework. Some departments have begun to restructure their curriculum in response to these likely changes. The University will also have to consider the implications for curricular policies like the 42-upper division unit rule. The Undergraduate Council is in the process of considering the implications for such policies.