Breadth Requirements at Berkeley: The View of the L&S Executive Committee

The Berkeley faculty has always valued two parallel curricula for our students: one that studies a field in depth and may entail connecting two or more disciplines (the departmental or interdisciplinary major); a second curriculum that allows students to explore different fields of knowledge beyond their primary interest (the individual breadth curriculum). The latter is largely designed by students themselves within guidelines provided by the College of Letters and Science’s breadth requirements. By selecting classes from seven broad areas of knowledge, students may develop their known interests and/or explore new ones. As they move into a major, they are free to select breadth classes that establish linkages to it, broadening its scope across different disciplines. Breadth requirements often serve as stimuli for students to double major at Cal, and many students report that breadth classes gave them skills and afforded pleasures that structured their life after graduation. Within the seven areas of knowledge —Arts and Literature, Historical Studies, Biological Science, Physical Science, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Philosophy and Values, International Studies— hundreds of classes are available to students each semester. In short, the breadth curriculum is an essential component of our students’ education at Berkeley and may be shaped by them in numerous ways.

The purpose of the breadth requirement is to provide a liberal arts and science education for all undergraduates and to facilitate each student’s ownership and management of their individual curriculum. More specific goals include:

- To broaden students’ perspectives and introduce them to ways of seeing/studying the world they may not otherwise be exposed to if they adopted only their own disciplinary lenses
- To serve as a context in which students may configure a coherent course of study by drawing from the many curricular options available to them.
- To give students the foundation on which to continue their education after they receive their degree.
- To help form well-rounded, informed and educated individuals and citizens, not only of California and the U.S., but also of the world

1 See “Why Study the Liberal Arts” on the L&S homepage: “The foundation for a liberal arts education lies in a course of study that combines both breadth and depth, and few educational institutions in the world are better equipped to provide students with more breadth and depth than UC Berkeley’s College of Letters and Science” (http://ls.berkeley.edu/about-college/liberal-arts-education).