

L&S Futures: *What education do our students need to lead lives of consequence?*

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Opportunity

Berkeley Letters & Science educates generations of students from all kinds of backgrounds for lives of consequence--as civic leaders, artists, professionals, entrepreneurs, government officials, and more. Berkeley Letters & Science students not only understand the world around them, but also seek to improve it, and have the skills, knowledge, and disposition to succeed. But what kind of education will our students need in order to make contributions beyond themselves? The world has been radically transformed over the last four decades: the end of the cold war; NAFTA; September 11; marriage equality; the massive expansion of the internet and digital data; repeated financial crises; rising awareness of climate change; racial reckoning; and the resurgence of infectious disease. Our campus has also been radically transformed: in 1984, we had 20,000 undergraduates and the state directly funded 50% of our expenses; today, we have over 30,000 undergraduate students and the state funds 13% of our expenses. The requirements for a Berkeley L&S degree, however, have not substantively changed in that time. Since we seek to educate students for a changing world, can our requirements really remain unchanging? If we wish to empower students to be creative, flexible public leaders, we need to offer a creative, flexible education that provides students with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions they need.

Plan

Over the course of the 2022-23 academic year the College of Letters and Science will engage in a comprehensive, inclusive project of exploration, leading to curricular design in 2023-24. Engaging faculty, students, alumni, staff, and friends of the College, we will develop a shared understanding of what a Letters and Science education needs to mean, be, and do; and then design a curriculum oriented toward achieving those aims.

In-scope are the general education parts of the L&S BA degree, with the goal of educating students for lives of consequence. We will not look at the content of majors, but only at the **basic skills requirements** and **breadth requirements**. The current basic skills requirements are: 2 semesters of Reading and Composition, 2 semesters of language other than English, and

quantitative reasoning. The seven breadth requirements are: Arts & Literature, Biological Science, Historical Studies, International Studies, Philosophy & Values, Physical Science, and Social & Behavioral Science.¹

There will be two outputs of the project:

1. A report answering the question “What skills, knowledge, and dispositions do Berkeley L&S students need now and in the future?”, to be ready for circulation and discussion by the end of the summer 2023, and
2. A proposal for a new set of general education requirements, to replace the existing basic skills and breadths, to be ready for circulation and discussion at the end of the fall 2023. This proposal will lead to a vote by the Executive Committee on whether to revise the L&S regulations, and if yes then a subsequent vote by the faculty of the College to update the L&S bylaws, both likely in spring 2024.

Structure

For the 2022-23 academic year, our structure will include a steering committee and five working groups. The structure needed for the 2023-24 curricular design phase will be determined later, once we know more about where we are trying to go.

- The steering committee will provide strategic vision and orientation to the working groups, informed by a deep dive into key literature on the nature and future of the liberal arts (bibliography currently in prep). The steering committee comprises the five deans of the College, representatives of the Executive Committee, and additional faculty from a diverse set of departments. Steering committee meetings will also include staff and invited guests. The Steering Committee will meet three times—in September, January, and May, to align the work of the working groups. Some Steering Committee members will serve on or chair working groups.
- Five working groups which will include faculty, staff, and students. These working groups will meet on whatever cadence is needed for their specific projects, and will shift over the course of the project. Starting over the course of the fall 2022, ***the working groups will focus on learning what kind of skills, dispositions, and knowledge we are aiming for, with each group emphasizing the points of view of a particular constituency.*** These constituencies are:

¹ Additional degree requirements include: systemwide requirements in American Institutions and the Entry-level writing requirement, a campus-wide requirement in American Cultures, and campus-wide unit requirements, a GPA requirement, and a PNP limit. The College also has its own unit requirements, unit exclusions, a residency requirement, and transfer unit limits.

- Working group on the FACULTY: This group will mostly work in-person, by attending faculty meetings or holding small, targeted town-hall meetings to gather perspectives of faculty.
- Working group on STUDENTS: in collaboration with ASUC leaders and senior staff in the office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Student group will survey current students, and perhaps also run focus groups
- Working group on ALUMNI: in collaboration with the newly hired director of Alumni Relations for L&S, this group will survey L&S alumni about their experiences in and since college.
- Working group on PEER INSTITUTIONS: this group will investigate general education requirements across a range of peer institutions, with particular attention to creative new developments.
- Working group on CAREER and COMMUNITY. This group will explore what potential employers and civic leaders think our students need by way of skills, knowledge, and dispositions with the collaboration of the Career Center.

The Design Process

Once we figure out the goal—what skills, knowledge, and dispositions we are trying to inculcate—we will seek to design a curriculum to support that, mostly over the fall 2023. The details of how we do the design process will depend on what we learn in the research phase, but may include for example replacing our general education requirements, developing new recommended academic pathways, and integrating co-curriculars more closely into the curriculum. Most decision rights over courses and curricula sit with the L&S Executive Committee, although some changes would also require a vote of the whole L&S faculty.

What would success look like?

The most important piece of success is that we are able to design and implement a better set of College requirements, which will better serve our students. In addition, we hope that these requirements will meet three conditions:

- ***Mission-Centered:*** Every College requirement should have a clear connection to our mission of educating a diverse population of students for lives of consequence. Our requirements should be grounded in the student outcomes we are seeking, and tied to the skills, knowledge, and dispositions we agree are significant.
- ***Narrative:*** The 120 units of a degree are not a monolithic block. Our curriculum should have a trajectory—a story with a beginning, middle, and end, that students can understand and that builds progressively over their time at Berkeley. People in this age group are developing rapidly, and so first year students tend to have different needs and abilities than graduating students.

- *Simple:* Our current general education requirements are very complicated. This complexity results in students not knowing where they are in relation to degree completion, a lot of administrative time and cost, a high demand on faculty to serve on CAPS, and a high number of exception requests. A future design should be significantly less complex—ideally, our whole faculty should be able to know what our undergraduate requirements are and why.