

October 16, 2012

To: Faculty Senate Academic Policies Committee
General Education Advisory Group
Lori Gonzalez, Provost
Paulette Marty, Director of General Education

CC: Janice Pope, Chair of the Council of Chairs
Anthony Calamai, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
Glenda Treadaway, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
Randy Edwards, Dean of the College of Business
Mike Mayfield, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, University College

Dear Colleagues:

As Chairs and Directors of departments and programs with faculty who teach and conduct research in the social and behavioral sciences, we would like to address an issue that arises in the proposed changes to general education. In short, we find that modifications proposed for the general education curriculum inadvertently produce a significant change in social and behavioral science content. This letter outlines that change and proposes a solution in the form of a Social and Behavioral Sciences designation.

Social and behavioral science courses at ASU exist across at least four colleges in departments and programs including Sociology, Government and Justice Studies, Psychology, Anthropology, Geography, Sustainable Development, Economics, Communication, Interdisciplinary Studies, Women's Studies, Appalachian Studies, and Global Studies. Courses from these departments currently have a robust presence on the general education checksheet, particularly in the Historical and Social Perspective and the Local to Global Perspective. In fact, each and every theme in both of these perspectives offers among its choices at least one if not several social science courses. While it may be possible for students to slip through general education without taking a social science course (other than history), it would be unusual for them to do so. In the current structure, most students taking general education would take a social science course *in addition to* a history course (with a Historical Studies designation).

This stress on social science courses makes sense and matters for general education, for these courses provide content essential to achieving General Education Learning Goals. For example, Learning Goal IV, "Understanding responsibilities of community membership," states that "General education prepares academically skilled and engaged citizens capable of contributing to the *betterment of society* and taking responsibility for the common good. Responsible contribution to a vibrant democracy governed by the rule of law *requires a basic understanding of the ways in which governments, economies, and societies function.*" The first

learning outcome under this goal states, moreover, that students will learn to “identify potential consequences that personal choices as well as *political, economic, and other social forces* may have on individual, societal, and environmental health.” Furthermore, learning outcomes under Learning Goal III, “Making Local to Global Connections,” state that students will “demonstrate the ability to think critically and creatively about *the relationship between local regions and global issues, processes, trends, and systems,*” and that students will “demonstrate knowledge of contemporary issues related to *cultural diversity in the United States and other areas of the world.*”

These stated goals and outcomes fall directly within the purview of the social and behavioral sciences. It is in the social sciences that social forces, systems, structures, and indeed the very condition of human sociality, are theorized and directly addressed. It is in the social sciences that “culture” becomes an analytic category and “diversity” exists as a foundational disciplinary concern. It is in the behavioral sciences that the relationship between the individual and society is addressed with empirical research. It is in the social and behavioral sciences that relations between the local and global social processes are addressed along several dimensions, including the critical dimension of sustainability, a concept that also figures centrally in learning goals and outcomes. It is in the social sciences that political and economic structures and processes are subject to critical and empirical analysis. It is in the social and behavioral sciences that methods of social inquiry are developed and taught.

The proposed changes to general education will likely curtail the contribution of the social sciences to general education and weaken student achievement in those learning outcomes that most directly stress social awareness, knowledge, method, and critique. In order to help students achieve the learning outcomes of general education that focus explicitly on social (including political and economic) structures, systems, and forces, as well as related concepts of cultural diversity, sustainability, human-environment relations, and the place of the individual in society, we propose the addition of a social and behavioral sciences designation in addition to three that already exist.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

Diane Mines, Chair of Anthropology
James Denniston, Chair of Psychology
Ed Folts, Chair of Sociology
Kathleen Schroeder, Chair of Geography
Brian Ellison, Chair of Government and Justice Studies
John Whitehead, Chair of Economics
Janice Pope, Chair of Communication
Sandra Lubarsky, Director of Sustainable Development

Ray Miller, Interim Director of Interdisciplinary Studies

Pat Beaver, Director of Appalachian Studies

Donna Lillian, Director of Women's Studies

Alexandra Hellenbrand, Director of Global Studies