

THE UP GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (2013)

A Proposal

UP's Liberal Education and the GE Program: A Historical Overview

Liberal education is the bedrock on which the University of the Philippines rests (Kintanar 1991, 123).¹ It is also the very philosophy that is at the core of our GE Program which, despite having been reworked to be more responsive to the changing times, has always remained true to the ideals of liberal education.

Rafael Palma, the first UP president who elaborated on the concept of liberal education also articulated its crucial role in the development of the Philippine nation. In his inaugural address in 1925, he explained that this kind of education should not only provide the students with a "broader outlook on God, man, and events" but also develop their "acumen and quickness of mind," a skill which will enable them to fully understand specific "practices of a certain professional or technical activity." The latter, he claimed, was "nothing more or less than the specific utilization of general cultural attainment"(in Kintanar 1991, 124). Thus, the liberal education tradition of UP has, from its very conception, envisioned scholars characterized by open mindedness and "strong habits of mental discipline"(in Kintanar 1991, 124). This is the education that made UP an embodiment of the people's efforts to become a nation.

Twenty-six years later, President Vidal A. Tan underscored the importance of liberal education in the creation of an educational system that was "spiritual and cultural in emphasis." It was a kind of spirituality anchored on the "deep-seated customs, virtues, and traditions"(in Cortes 1985, 306). Liberal education enabled the scholar to know not merely "the facts and the accomplishments and ideas of the masters" but also the "various disciplines" and approaches used in the social sciences, humanities, the natural sciences, and mathematics.

¹ The College of Liberal Arts, established in 1910, was tasked to immediately "prepare " the students for the professions by providing courses informed by the liberal education philosophy. These subjects were Logic, English, History, Music, all of which had a "humanistic and general culture orientation" (Kintanar 1991, 122).

The “liberalizing influence of great literature” was likewise fundamental in the University’s envisioned education (in Cortes, 1985 306).²

Educational reorganization and curricular reforms constituted the primary goal of Vicente G. Sinco who took on the helm as UP President in 1958. To be best institution in the country, UP had to focus on three main areas, one of which was its liberal or general education program.³ The times called for a general liberal education program that would be at the core of the students’ training in order to be “enlightened and free citizens” (in Guerrero 1985, 356). Every student was expected to understand “materials of great value⁴,” understand his/her history, culture, and society, perceive “the nature of science as an intellectual process,” think critically, make sound judgments, and communicate effectively (in Guerrero 1985, 356). This program therefore included “those disciplines that have relevance to a better understanding of man as a unit of civilized society and as a member of a democratic society” (in Guerrero 1985, 356). As a critical component of UP’s education, the GE was conceived as a “the intervening factor that works for harmony, order and understanding among the different elements constituting our social system” (in Kintanar 1991, 130).

In the early 60s, when President Carlos P. Romulo presented his plan to make UP the best university for the Filipinos, he explained that a general education went beyond formal course work, prescribed syllabi, and classroom attendance. Liberal education was a way of thinking and the liberally educated student had to “think and live his education, wherever he is and whatever he is doing” (in Kintanar 1991, 132). Moreover, it was also important for the GE program to expose the students to the achievements not only of the Philippines, but also of those of its Asian neighbours. Such consciousness, complemented by the attitudes and skills strengthened by GE courses, constituted a strong foundation for the student’s “professional

² Under Tan’s term, the groundwork for a GE program at the College of Liberal Arts was laid, but it was the next administration that carried out the plans (Kintanar 1991, 129).

³ The other two were training for the professionals and research work (in Guerrero 1985, 355)

⁴ Its aim was also to expose students to “the best that has been thought and said” in Asia and in the West” (in Kintanar 1991, 130)

pursuits” and will eventually be useful “in any endeavour. ” Like his predecessors, Romulo wanted an education characterized by a “spirit of free inquiry,” in the context of a strong sense of personal and national identity (in Kintanar 1991, 133).

The succeeding UP Presidents recognized the basic tenets of liberal education in their respective efforts to uphold the intellectual integrity of the University. During the tumultuous years of his presidency between 1969-1975, Salvador P. Lopez reiterated the core values of liberal education: “academic and intellectual freedom, nationalism, and search for truth” (in Kintanar 1991, 133). In its aim to achieve academic excellence, it was imperative that UP continue in its “tireless pursuit of knowledge”(in Evangelista 1985, 447).

Replacing Lopez in 1975, Onofre D. Corpuz echoed his predecessor’s ideas on the role of UP in the search for truth. Corpuz pointed out that the “intellectual life of the University” was grounded on the continuous “seeking, and questing, for ideas” (in Endriga 1991, 505). Nonetheless, he made clear that this “has nothing to do with warring opinions” because the University must not offer itself as a cockpit for fighting ideas, especially if those ideas are merely orthodoxies for, or orthodoxies against, an issue of partisan nature.” It was important for UP to constantly “engage in the politics of ideas” but it should encourage the discussion of unorthodox views because as a premiere University, it was a “catalyst and an enriching agent” (in Endriga 1991, 505).

Still reeling from the effects of Martial Law, the University in the 80s experienced major changes in its system, both academic and administrative. Edgardo J. Angara vowed to make UP a “source of national pride” and a recognized academic institution in the international community; UP was to be the “source of alternative ideas and a crucible for their refinement and adaptation to our own Philippine context ” (in Bauzon 1995, 548). The three-way split of the College of Arts and Letters was lamented upon by the faculty of Humanities and the Social Sciences who felt that this could only result in the “fragmentation of knowledge in the arts and sciences , thus damaging the sense of wholeness and unity which is at the heart of liberal

education” (in Kintanar 1991, 136). This notwithstanding, the new GE program was geared towards bridging the arts and sciences. As a common experience of all UP students, a new program was adopted by all units and had for its major objective the infusion of “a passion for learning with a high sense of moral and intellectual integrity (in Kintanar 1991, 137).”

The years of Martial Law eroded the democratic ideals and moral fiber of the nation and tested the educational institution’s integrity and resilience but the University’s uncompromising determination to uphold its ideals prevailed. In response to the new challenges, UP championed “values that make life humane, meaningful and purposive” because these “values are considered more important educational results than the cognitions which each discipline contains and which may easily be forgotten” (in Kintanar 1991,137).

It was under Angara’s term that the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches of the GE program were solidified. These were concretized in the coordination of several departments teaching courses in the Sciences and Social Sciences. For example, the course Science, Technology, and Society was envisioned to be handled by faculty from the mentioned disciplines, and eventually from the humanities (in Kintanar 1991, 137).

The dialogue among disciplines was likewise reiterated by the Revitalized General Education Program (RGEP) under President Francisco Nemenzo’s administration which encouraged the development of interdisciplinary courses and proposed the creation of a central GE “Council” to monitor the GE offerings and programs of the University. He was likewise one with Romulo’s idea on basic or general education and its goal to prepare “students for lifelong learning” (Re-examining UP’S General Education Program 2010,11). Like other UP Presidents who believed in providing the students with basic knowledge, Nemenzo stressed that “premature specialization at the undergraduate level might only result in the production of half-baked technicians”(Re-examining UP’S General Education Program 2010,11). This concern for liberal education remained at the core of UP education despite the drastic changes in its GE program.

The changes in the program, according to Nemenzo's successor, President Emerlinda R. Roman were inevitable considering the developments in the liberal education in the United States, after which our very own educational system was patterned. The RGEP that the University adopted in 2001/2002⁵ (some CUs in 2001, some in 2002) thus reflected the "cafeteria model" of the U.S. GE program approach which "either specific[ed] three or more subject areas within which courses may be taken or disregard[ed] requirements all together" (Re-examining UP'S General Education Program 2010,11). UP adopted the latter and gave the students the freedom to choose five GE courses in each of the following domains: Humanities, Social Sciences, and Math, Science and Technology.

Although UPD, UPM, and UPMIN had a slightly different GE framework from UPLB and UPV, all units shared the fundamentals of general education earlier articulated by former UP presidents in their discussions on liberal education. The RGEP had the following objectives: to broaden the students' intellectual horizons, balance nationalism with internationalism, develop an awareness of various ways of knowing/disciplines, and teach integration of knowledge and skills. The latter covered quantitative and other forms of reasoning, interpretative and aesthetic modes/approaches, communication skills (both oral and written), and creative, independent, and critical thinking. Looking back at UP's history, it is clear that the RGEP also embodied the objectives, modes of inquiry and competencies integral to liberal education.

Seven years after the implementation of the RGEP, the program had to be reviewed in the context of its ideals and implementation problems. Changes were necessary but these had to be carried out "without undermining the spirit that underlies liberal education" (Re-examining UP'S General Education Program 2010, 24). The efforts to evaluate the program were spearheaded by Roman's administration which studied the results of the cafeteria model in

⁵ The new Program was a result of the GE review in 2001. Prior to this, the program though was also revisited in 1991, 1992, and 1995.

American universities.⁶ In 2012, without changing the RGEP framework,⁷ UPD decided to adopt a new GE Program which required the students to take a number of specific courses under each domain: Eng 10, Comm 3, and Fil 40 under the Humanities Domain, Kas 1 and Philo 1 under the Social Science and Philosophy Domain, and STS and Math 1 under the Math, Science, and Technology Domain. The unit felt that students needed these basic courses to assure their knowledge in history, literature, and logic which were to be complemented by their skills in communication

It is thus clear in the evolution of UP's GE program that despite the changes and modifications that have been made over the years, liberal education has always remained at its core.

This year, the University faces a great challenge. Anticipating the profound effects of the K12 program, we now confront the inevitable changes in the country's educational system. Many, if not most of our higher educational institutions are cynical about the quality of students we will have beginning 2018, but this should not deter us from reconfiguring our GE program. Amidst the realities of our educational system, all of which are results of socio-political and economic forces, we are placed in a position to rework our GE Philosophy, keeping in mind the essence of UP's liberal education.

⁶ President Roman reviewed some revised undergraduate programs in the U.S. and discovered that although students were allowed to choose their GE courses, some universities started to require courses on "writing, a foreign language, and American Government either as part of the GE requirement or in addition to it." Other universities strongly recommended the enrolment in courses in US History, Constitution and American Ideals. In fact, in Harvard University, History was integrated in the new GE program. According to the faculty, students must take "at least one course 'engaged substantially with the study of the past, a move that was seen as largely symbolic and a concession to those who felt the new curriculum was a present-day curriculum'" (Re-examining UP'S General Education Program 2010, 11).

⁷ One of the weaknesses of the RGEP administration as noted by President Roman in her Systemwide conference speech "is the absence of an accountable person or unit, i.e. "the unit or person to blame". Having a GE czar—who is mandated to fight for the GE and Tatak UP vis-à-vis the interests of major disciplines; to monitor the teaching of GE and initiate interventions and research that would improve it across units and campuses (e.g. mentoring etc); to review courses regularly with the power to delist those that do not hew closely to the objectives of the program; to incorporate good features of past GE programs including relevant elements of the old university college; and to provide both systems of incentives and penalties—seems to be imperative at this juncture." (Re-examining UP'S General Education Program 2010, 24).

We find ourselves hemmed in by forces of globalization which have pushed for a greater disciplinary outlook and strengthened specialization in learning and production of knowledge. Although these have already been problematized since Palma's time, the 21st century has definitely intensified the compartmentalization of knowledge. At the core of the the new GE Program we propose is still the tradition of liberal education, embodying the belief that a liberally educated student "is marked by a general cultivation, by certain scholarly traits, and by an attitude toward learning and the process of thought"(Tenmatay 1961, 34).

In light of the implementation of the K12 that will incorporate the skills courses in the various disciplines, particularly in the last two years of basic education, eight courses that provide broader and integrative perspectives would sufficiently complement the basic education of students. As an answer to the problem of excessive specialization of disciplines and the high demand for technical skills, the new program emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach, one which will link the sciences, social sciences, mathematics, and the humanities. This integrative approach of the GE program, complemented by the areas of specialization will ensure that UP education fulfils its mission as an engine of progress in nation building.

General Education Philosophy

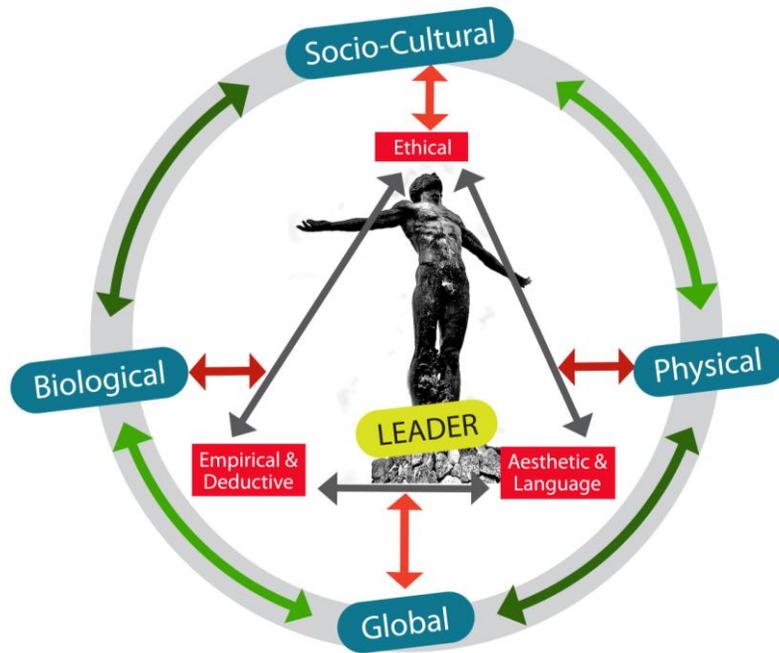
At the heart of liberal education is the UP General Education Program which aims to provide our students with a *broad perspective* that would enable them, outside their own field of specialization, to *engage with issues* and realities of their own times as citizens with sturdy moral and intellectual integrity. That broad perspective implies various approaches or ways of looking at things, concomitant with discernment and good judgment, whereby is enhanced the ability to create, innovate, and communicate for the production of knowledge and the actual implementation of advocacies and projects. The General Education Program, sensitive to the synergistic relationship between the sciences and the humanities, would therefore effect the marriage, as it were, of lofty ideals and constructive action for the common good.

Although it is obvious that everyone is, from childhood, shaped and continues to be shaped or transformed by many factors (one's schooling not the least), still the General Education Program (core and elective courses) aims to:

1. instill a passion for learning and reading, and an understanding of the nature of art, science, philosophy, and culture;
2. develop critical, dialectical, and integrative thinking necessary for examining ideas and values and making sound judgments;
3. inculcate the value of respect for self, others, and the environment;
4. nurture love for country based on our unique historical experience as the inner source of our strength and the basis for our cultural mooring and national identity;
5. motivate and challenge the student to serve the nation with utmost dedication and integrity;
6. enkindle an activism strongly founded on moral conviction where one's action, whether as leader or team-player, is rational and responsible; and
7. foster an aspiration to be a peace-loving citizen of our country and of the world, tolerant, compassionate, and judicious in behavior, speech, and action;

The qualities of mind and traits of character that the General Education Program aims to achieve are precisely the distinctive internalized attributes of the U.P. graduate. Needless to say, such an outcome or result of the students' entire academic course in U.P. depends much on the competence and enthusiasm of our faculty and the maturity and diligence of our students. Any Program is of course, above all, its faculty and their commitment to teaching and scholarship.

GE Framework



Objectives

1. To instill a passion for life-long learning and reading
2. To broaden intellectual & cultural horizons
3. To foster nationalism balanced with internationalism
4. To deepen the capacity for the integration of knowledges & of skills

Methods of Inquiry

1. Empirical & Deductive Forms of Reasoning
2. Interpretive & Aesthetic Approaches
3. Ethical Reasoning

Competencies and Values

1. Communication (Oral, Visual, Written, Digital & Performative)
2. Independent, Creative, Critical, Dialectical and Integrative Thinking
3. Integrity, honor, and excellence

Number of GE Courses

The total number of GE courses is 36 units, 24 units are core and 12 units are elective.

Suggested Categories of Core Courses

1. Living Art and Culture: Interpretive and Aesthetic Understanding
2. Self and Society
3. Mathematics, Culture and Society
4. Ethics
5. Living Systems
6. Understanding the Physical Universe
7. Science, Technology and Society
8. The Life and Works of Rizal