Welcome to the first edition of our General Education newsletter! We will share some of the highlights of this year’s GE program and inform you about upcoming changes. In 2012-13 we offered a total of 432 GE courses, a record number (44!) of Pacific Seminar 1 sections, 41 sections of PACS 2, 31 PACS 3 sections, and more than 84 summer school courses. Fourteen students received awards for excellent performance in their GE classes, three students won paper awards for their essays written in Pacific Seminar and seven faculty were recognized with a Long Fellowship for innovative and outstanding instruction in the GE program. Five new GE courses were added to our breadth program. We held multiple faculty workshops on teaching writing and on the assessment of student learning. We began implementing the GE assessment plan, agreed to experiment with blended online courses, and further intensified collaboration with the University Writing Center. The ongoing faculty involvement in revising the content of our successful Pacific Seminars has continued to create flagship courses that have gained national recognition. Together with the Educational Resource Center, the School of Education and the Provost’s Office we designed a pilot program to teach developmental skills in writing and reading in conjunction with Pacific Seminar.

My first year as director of General Education has been a whirlwind! I love working with faculty from all across the University, meeting with students about GE classes, collaborating with the professional schools and with Student Life, and teaming up with faculty leaders from the PACS Planning Committees and the University GE Committee to create an innovative and challenging liberal arts experience for all students. As an associate professor of history, I have taught European history courses and Pacific Seminar for twelve years, and it was my love of teaching and seeing our students grow in general education classes that encouraged me to take on this new role.

Every day I experience the impact the Pacific Seminars and GE classes have on our students. The skills and knowledge gained in these courses prepare our students for lifelong learning and successful careers. This is what makes Pacific truly unique.

Thank you all for a great year and for your commitment to the liberal arts and general education at Pacific!

The Thomas J. Long Foundation Core Scholarship Program provides an incentive for students to perform well in their general education courses. Scholarships reward students who demonstrate academic excellence in their general education courses and who show leadership potential. For more information on how to apply, visit: web.pacific.edu/x9396.xml

2013 Student Award Winners: Austin Kimbrell, Brittany Klemm, Daniel Cuslidge, Danielle Dunne, Danielle Finnick, Dilraj Sohal, Jueun Kim, Kelina Orozco, Leslie Medrano, Nicole Chou, Rebecca Shimizu, Tayler Eppler,
Raymond College Alumni have created an endowment fund to reward student excellence in the Pacific Seminar Program. Faculty in each PACS section submit one student paper as part of the competition. A group of Raymond Alumni selects the three best essays. The winners receive monetary awards. The winners and their essay titles for Fall 2012 are: Michael Xu; “Repealing the 14th Amendment to Prevent ‘Anchor Babies.’” (1st place, Scott Evans’ section), Will Matthews III; “Taking the High Road: the Ethics and Legalization of Marijuana” (2nd place, Lawrence Thiel’s section), and Jason Leung; “Ending Global Warming” (3rd place, Scott Evans’ section). The Spring 2013 Essay Contest winners will be announced at the beginning of the fall semester.

For me, teaching PACS 2 was a unique, enlightening, and initially frustrating experience. There are not many schools which allow math guys to teach a writing course (in fact, the possibility of teaching PACS was one of the perks which initially drew me to Pacific!) Doing so forced me to rethink the way I might normally present material in a math class to foster a more discussion centered, inquiry based environment. After the first few weeks, I could tell that the students were losing interest and had no interest in critical analyses of Gallup poll methodology. So in a moment of frustration, I asked them “What are you interested in learning about? Statistics can be applied to anything and there is no point in wasting your time with boring applications. This is your education. You are paying for it. Take ownership of it and tell me what you are interested in learning about.” This was a definite turning point in the semester. As a class, they decided they were interested in the relationships between sleep, major, and GPA here at Pacific so we collaborated on a Google Forms survey, each student got 20 peers to fill it out, and we talked about survey methodology and data analysis in the context of this project. Suddenly, when they were allowed to investigate a topic of their choosing, they acted like a completely...
different class! The epiphany that students perform much better when they are actually engaged in the topic was not entirely new to me, but PACS 2 forced me to confront this issue in new ways. The influence crossed over into an upper division math class I was teaching this past semester and I hope to find ways of increasing the use of student led investigations in future courses as well.

The lessons I learned from PACS go beyond this, however. Teaching basic statistics in a third of a semester to students with a variety of different math backgrounds forced me to rethink the subject as a whole and examine the essential assumptions which students commonly struggle with in introductory courses. Next spring, when I teach the full semester version, I will certainly incorporate some of these insights, as well as some of the activities I created for PACS. PACS also broadened my perspective of the freshman experience here at Pacific. We actually had some honest discussions in class about how students feel about their education, the assumptions they have about college and its purpose, and the struggles they face as young adults in an accelerating and increasingly competitive society. All of these insights will undoubtedly be helpful in relating to my future students.

Ty Raterman is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and teaches PACS 2 and PACS 3.

I think of life as having chapters. When one chapter ends and a new one begins – as happens when one graduates from college – it’s healthy to pause and take stock. Pacific Seminar 3, which is titled “What Is An Ethical Life?” and taken during senior year, is designed to help students at this pivotal time reflect on their values, principles, and priorities—those they’ve embraced, and those they might yet adopt. I wish I’d taken it when I was a college senior! Like all sections of PACS 3, my section wrestles with the questions “Why should we be moral?” “What theory best explains what all morally right actions have in common?” and “Are there objective truths about morality?” But one great thing about teaching PACS 3 is that each professor gets to add her/his own twists. For example, in my section students engage with some provocative contemporary psychology research that shows how bad we are at predicting what will make us happy (and that tries to explain what will actually do so). Additionally, we consider whether empathy is the most important virtue, what sorts of wrongs should be forgiven, and whether someone who donates a kidney to a stranger is crazy or a moral exemplar.

All PACS 3 sections use films to raise questions; but I’d be surprised if mine weren’t the only one that included the Bill Murray comedy “Groundhog Day,” which I believe contains subtle but deep moral lessons. My students also each read a biography of their choosing and then write and present on what their subject’s successes and failures can teach us about how to live an ethical life; and this year the select-ed figures ranged from South African prisoner-turned-president Nelson Mandela to the raunchy young comedian Russell Brand!

Ty Raterman is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and teaches PACS 2 and PACS 3.
It Takes More than a Major

According to a survey commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), American employers are looking for the following skills in college graduates:

- Critical thinking
- Written and oral communication
- Complex problem solving
- Ethical judgment and integrity
- Intercultural skills
- The capacity for continued new learning

Nearly all of the employers say that these skills are more important than [a candidate’s] undergraduate major. 80 percent of employers agree that, regardless of their major, all college students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.

These are the skills today’s college students need to succeed in the innovation-fueled economy of the 21st century. The Pacific Seminars and GE courses focus on these skills and prepare students for life-long success as workers and citizens.

“Employers agree that having both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broad range of skills and knowledge is most important for recent college graduates to achieve long-term career success.”

Source: AAC&U www.aacu.org/leap/presidentstrust/compact/2013surveysummary.cfm

Pacific Seminar I: A Student Testimony

“When I first took the class [Professor Edie Sparks, PACS 1], I didn’t really believe the ideology that college causes you to question the things you were raised to believe in. But as the course progressed, I noticed that I started to spend my free time looking through countless YouTube videos about conspiracies, psychological disorders and many other topics. Although it may seem meaningless, I’ve never felt a passion for learning in my free time. But now, I love learning about different ideas and beliefs!”

Pacific Seminar II: Topical Seminars

Dr. Eileen McFall’s PACS 2 course is titled “No Kill Nation.” This course is a community-based learning section that explores the question of a good society from the perspective of how we treat companion animals. Students design and carry out projects, which have had a great impact on the community. One student painted a mural at the Lodi Animal Shelter to help increase adoption rates, another distributed flyers for the ACT Spay and Neuter Clinic, and one student applied to be on Mayor Silva’s commission on animal services. One project called Pawcific Loves Animals is focused on pairing Military Veterans with adopted pets. Dr. McFall wrote, “I think the many actions taken by students in this section...speak to the enormous potential impact of a first-year seminar class with the objectives of Pacific Seminar II.”
Pacific Seminar III: Student Thoughts

In the third Pacific Seminar in the series, students are required to write an autobiography. This assignment allows students to reflect on their years at Pacific and to comment on the usefulness of the Pacific Seminars. One student wrote in Professor Paul Turpin’s PACS 3 class, “[My] precollege environment... differed dramatically from that of what I have been surrounded by for the past four years. For starters, the overall level of moral development on college campuses is significantly higher than anywhere else. Social interactions in and of themselves serve as methods for furthering one’s own development, by learning through example from other individuals who are further along their path of development. The classes themselves also helped to shape my development, mostly through classes such as PACs 1, and my lower level general education classes. As reluctantly as I would like to admit it, both served to open my eyes to the sheer amount of diversity there is in both issues present in today’s society, and also ways in which to think about and solve these issues. The culmination of this process was through PACS 3, which really served as a focusing lens for recognizing all of the influences in my life, and how they either positively or negatively shaped who I am today, and for providing a technical understanding of why I take the actions I do, and how to improve upon them in the future.”

Writers, Every One of Them

If I were a bit more talented with needlework, I would make a throw pillow for the corner lounge of the Student Writing Center with the following stitched in Pacific orange: OUR JOB IS TO PRODUCE BETTER WRITERS, NOT BETTER WRITING.

There is a wonderful “culture of writing” on the rise at Pacific, and this vision of cultivating better writers is not unique to the writing center. The same pillow could be safely tossed into the multitude of Pacific Seminar courses taught each semester across campus. Serving as Pacific’s flagship General Education course, Pacific Seminar 1 and 2 are required of all freshmen and most transfer students, and they do an unparalleled job of fulfilling the first-year writing requirement. Writing is taught as a process as students are introduced to the common conventions and genres of academic discourse, as they work with their peers in writing workshops, and as they engage in formal and informal writing assignments. Each semester, more and more faculty are coming to realize that the true mark of success in these seminars isn’t in receiving a stack of well-written papers, but in witnessing this remarkable shift in students who stop seeing themselves as students with a writing task, but as writers with a student task.

The Student Writing Center is dedicated to working with staff and faculty in the Pacific Seminar Series and in all programs and majors to continue fulfilling this vision. From the undergraduate writing mentor to the Dean of the College, and all those in between, we are unified in our efforts to cultivate the culture of writing at Pacific as we keep those simple words stitched in the back of our minds, “Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing.”

Mike Peterson, Ph.D., Director of University Writing Programs.
New General Education Courses:

- PSYC 167 (GE I-A) Psychology and Law
- CHEM 24 (GE III-A) Fundamentals of Chemistry
- RELI 106 (GE I-C) Healing and Illness in the Ancient World
- MHIS 007 (GEII-C) Topics in American Popular Music
- INTL 93/HIST 93 (GE III-C) Big History

General Education at Pacific, 2013

University of the Pacific
General Education Office

Gesine Gerhard, *Director of General Education, Associate Professor of History and Associate Dean of the College*
WPC 118
Phone: 209-946-2146
Email: ggerhard@pacific.edu

Nancy Lund, *Administrative Assistant*
Phone: 209-946-2574
Email: nlund@pacific.edu