

## **Let's Unite! / SAVE GE \ Reject 21 on the 20th!**

### **Statement of UP SAGIP GE**

Members of the University Council (UC) of UP Diliman will decide on the proposed General Education (GE) reforms on March 20 (Monday). With the proponents of the 21 unit GE Program (GEP) hell-bent on having it approved, there is a clear and present danger that the shortest and most abbreviated University-level GEP in the whole country may be imposed on UP Diliman. The joint ad hoc committee to review the UPD hybrid GEP and the UPD GE committee made recommendations on GE reforms last January 10 while the UPD Executive Committee also had its own last February 13. Both agreed to a minimum of 21 GE units as required courses but as regards the elective or program-prescribed ones, the joint committees proposed 6-24 units (i.e., 27 units minimum and 45 units maximum); and the UPD Executive Committee, 0-24 units (i.e., 21 units minimum and 45 units maximum).

It is just common sense that the purpose of any GEP Reform should be oriented towards improving its ability to achieve its primary objectives. These are as follows: 1. Broaden intellectual and cultural horizons; 2. Hone critical and creative thinking; 3. Develop a passion for learning and scholarship; 4. Cultivate a high sense of intellectual and moral integrity; and 5. Foster a commitment to nationalism and social justice. These objectives were developed with a deep sense for UP's crucial role as a National University within the Philippine context. These were not distilled from any simple considerations of marketability and competitiveness but are founded on UP's commitment to social change and its responsibility to the national community.

Do the proposals to drastically and blindly reduce the GEP to either a minimum of 21 or 27 units allow it to more effectively reach its stated objectives for all UP students? On the one hand, the reduction of class hours to less than half will obviously reduce the time and opportunity of UP students to engage with and immerse themselves in these GE objectives. On the other hand, the proponents of a much reduced number of GE units clearly do not have any concrete and tested proposals which can reasonably offset the potential negative effects of this massive truncation of the UPD GEP. They cavalierly treat the objectives of the GEP as if these were passé and without relevance. Rather than working towards a more rational calibrated adjustment of the GEP based on a balanced assessment and a true concern for its improvement, they are trying to force a shift which indiscriminately throws the baby out with the bath water. Just to pick out some examples from well-known universities in Asia and the US, The University of Hong Kong (HKU) has 54 units, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) has 42 units, and Tsinghua University (China), 70 units. In the USA, Stanford has 36 units, Yale has 33 units, and MIT, 51 units. Moreover, there is no reason why the UPD GEP should be truncated so radically especially when the actual outcome of the K to 12 Program is still a big question mark.

The mode of delivery of GE subjects in UPD is currently a hybrid model consisting of a mix of core subjects and free electives distributed among three domains. The proposals reduce the number of elective courses to a minimum of six or none at all. This means that it is not only the richness of content but also the potential diversity of GE subjects which will be adversely affected by the drastic reduction of GE. If, for example, the colleges in the science and engineering disciplines decide to implement a 21-unit GE program, almost half of the UP Diliman student population (around 46 %) will be unable to choose any elective GE courses. The proponents of the zero

elective option are therefore basically calling for the abolition in their colleges of the hybrid system and a return to a fully prescribed GE Program without any evidence or proof that this latter is indeed a superior model. Core subjects included, various colleges and departments in UPD have developed 37 RGEP subjects in the Arts and Humanities domain (CAL, CMC, ARCH, CFA, MUSIC, CIS), 18 in Math, Science and Technology (ARCH, CS, ENGG, CHE) and 19 in Social Sciences and Philosophy (ARCH, CSSP, ASP, ECON, CIS, ENGG). These courses were developed with the firm advocacy, support and sponsorship of their respective departments. Aside from its impact on the viability of the hybrid system, proponents of the zero electives option demur any impact on budgets, faculty loading and employment on the teaching staff (particularly those who do not have tenure).

UP Diliman should strive to have the best GE Program in the Philippines. History shows that it should take pride in its tradition of liberal education. The proposals for this drastic reduction show, at the very least, a lack of concern for evidence and argument and a deep disregard for the values of liberal education so essential to this university.