

Frequently Asked Questions about the Undergraduate Initiative

Q. What is the Undergraduate Initiative?

- A. Chancellor Dirks has made transforming the undergraduate experience one of his highest priorities. There are four components to the initiative: (i) creating a four-year liberal arts “College at Berkeley” as the undergraduate component of the College of Letters and Science; (ii) facilitating curricular innovation—including developing the Berkeley Curriculum—enhancing advising, and student support; (iii) renovating campus-wide instructional and student-learning facilities; and (iv) improving extracurricular and residential life. Broadly, the undergraduate initiative will provide students with an education and set of experiences that is better attuned to the challenges of the 21st century and will enhance students’ sense of community at Berkeley and beyond.

Q. Where did the broad plan come from?

- A. In the fall of 2014, Chancellor Dirks charged an Undergraduate Initiative Steering Committee, co-chaired by EVCP Claude Steele and VCUE Catherine Koshland, with developing a campus-level strategic plan to make Berkeley as highly regarded for its undergraduate education as it is for its faculty research. This committee was comprised of a broad group of faculty, students, and administrators.¹ Over an 18-month period, the Steering Committee developed the goals for the Initiative and its general design relying on input from a broad and diverse spectrum of faculty, students, and key staff. At all stages, there has been engagement with the Academic Senate (*e.g.*, the Divisional Chair and Vice Chair have been members of the principal committees and chairs and members of relevant Senate committees have also been involved) and with student government.

Q. Why this initiative?

- A. The Undergraduate Initiative seeks to make UC Berkeley as renowned for its undergraduate education as it is for its faculty research and graduate programs. The current undergraduate experience is something that faculty can be proud of and something our students treasure for the rest of their lives; yet, as good as it is, there are ways in which it falls short of what Berkeley is capable of. Additionally, improving the undergraduate experience is key to opening philanthropic opportunities that will benefit the entire campus and elevate the public’s perception of UC Berkeley.

¹ Membership of the Steering Committee (titles as of time of service): Gibor Basri (VCE&I), Scott Bidy (VC-UREL), Harry Le Grande (VC-SA), Panos Papadopoulos (Senate Chair), Ben Hermalin (Senate Vice Chair), Carla Hesse (Executive Dean of L&S), Anthony Cascardi (L&S Dean of Arts and Humanities), Bob Jacobsen (L&S Interim Dean of the Undergraduate Division), John Ready (Graduate Assembly President), Pavan Upadhyayula (ASUC President), and Professors Maura Nolan, Glynda Hull, Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, Ron Cohen, Abby Dernburg, Serena Chen, and Brandi Catanese.

Q. What is meant by a “College at Berkeley”?

- A. For students to experience a true liberal arts “College at Berkeley”, the Initiative proposes restructuring the Undergraduate Division of the College of Letters & Science to focus exclusively on student advising, curriculum coordination for entering students, classroom assignment, and expanding enrichment opportunities such as *On The Same Page* and the Office of Undergraduate Research. The aim is to allow students to more easily design a program of study, including choosing a major that meets their needs and in which they can succeed, and having access to the courses they need to complete that program.

While leaving the current governance structure and the other Divisions of Letters and Science intact, the Undergraduate Division will be redesigned to give its Dean the necessary time and resources to devote to fulfilling the mission of the College of Berkeley. In anticipation of this redesign, the current L&S Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Studies majors are being transferred to the Divisions of Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences; additionally, the College of Letters & Science is developing new administrative structures to better facilitate interdisciplinary programs for students.

The College at Berkeley will be centrally located on the main floor of Dwinelle Hall, thus restoring the coherence of the Liberal Arts core of the campus for undergraduates and give undergraduate education, more generally, a renewed sense of stature and centrality to the University’s mission.

Q. What will this mean for the other undergraduate Colleges at Berkeley?

- A. The Colleges of Chemistry, Engineering, Natural Resources, and Environmental Design will participate fully in the other components of the Initiative (see items (ii)—(iv) listed above).

The structure of the other four undergraduate Colleges does not fall under the purview of the Undergraduate Initiative. The Initiative will, though, propose mechanisms to achieve better coordination among all five Colleges to ensure the best undergraduate education and experience (see “Implementation” below).

Q. When we speak of a new “Berkeley Curriculum,” what is specifically entailed?

- A. Broadly, curricular changes will be aimed at ensuring our students master four core competencies: they will be ***literate*** (able to understand and reason critically with verbal arguments and communicate thoughts in clear and persuasive ways); ***numerate*** (able to reason quantitatively, to understand and use quantitative methods, to be an informed consumer and producer of data); ***creative*** (possess the requisite backgrounds and skills to be innovative, to imagine new ways of doing things); and ***investigative*** (able to formulate relevant questions and proceed to solve them). Moreover, the curriculum and other aspects of the undergraduate experience should help students develop dispositions that put them in good standing for the rest of their lives: ***open-***

mindfulness, a global perspective, a willingness to engage in the world around them, and ***to be disciplined in all senses of the word.***

To be more specific, while there are no plans to implement a common curriculum or “core courses,” current planning envisions the creation of a shared educational platform for all Berkeley undergraduates, by which we mean:

1. A more structured lower division course of study (first two years), in which students receive a strong common educational experience, along with necessary prerequisites, to prepare them for future study.
2. More opportunities to deepen knowledge and understanding by engaging in research and other creative endeavors, internships, and, for some, study abroad. Students will also be encouraged to consider minors and to build thematic “threads” around other courses (*e.g.*, courses that satisfy breadth requirements).
3. More opportunities to integrate the various components of their studies through a capstone experience, in which students engage in original research or other creative activity.
4. Reduction, rationalization, and streamlining of breadth requirements.
5. Review, rationalization, and streamlining of Major requirements.
6. Fundraising to enhance the curriculum in three areas: data science, global studies, and creative arts, design, and innovation.
7. Fundraising to strengthen our ACES (American Cultures, and Engaged Scholars) and ‘Big Ideas’ programs.

Q. Will the fundraising activities to support plans for the 21st century Berkeley undergraduate campus focus exclusively on the College of Letters and Science?

- A. No. The concept of the “undergraduate campus” is meant to include all academic facilities that support undergraduate instruction, research and learning, throughout the colleges and professional schools. It will include, therefore, all classroom buildings, teaching laboratories, student performance and maker spaces, libraries, and study facilities.

Q. Is there a connection between fundraising for the 21st century Berkeley undergraduate campus and the Berkeley Global Campus in Richmond?

- A. No, at least not in the near term. Fundraising activities to be developed for the Undergraduate Initiative will include, among other things, renovation and expansion of undergraduate facilities on the current Berkeley campus footprint.

Q. What about residential life?

- A. The campus will develop a ten-year master plan for improving residential life. This will entail building new residences and possibly remodeling old ones. Among the goals is to create spaces and living arrangements that strengthen communities among the students, integrate academic and residential experiences, and enhance advising and support. The number of resident advisors to support students will be increased as funding becomes available.

One way to integrate academic and residential life is to encourage or promote entering students living on the same floor or in the same general area taking one course in common. Such “floor courses” will be multidisciplinary examinations of important topics (*e.g.*, climate change) and serve to provide students with a broad introduction to a number of disciplines.

Q. What about other aspects of the student experience?

- A. By committing to “educating the whole student,” the Undergraduate Initiative will include a commitment to increasing scholarship opportunities and strengthening student-support services.

Q. How will those broad ideas be distilled into implementable actions and changes?

- A. The Chancellor has charged a decanal council, led by the Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education (VCUE), to design and oversee the relevant structures that will manage an improved undergraduate experience. As noted, the College of Letters & Science will reconceive its undergraduate programs as a four-year liberal arts “College at Berkeley.” This newly constituted College will coordinate the curricular and academic-advising aspects of the initiative. The Dean of the L&S Undergraduate Division will become the Dean of Undergraduate Studies for the College at Berkeley. S/he will have primary responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the lower-division components of the newly designed curriculum, for enhanced student advising and support services, and for academic orientation and enrichment programs for all entering freshmen and transfer students. The Undergraduate Dean will also be responsible for coordination of lower and upper-division curricula campus-wide, and to accomplish this will work with the academic deans and departments of all undergraduate schools and colleges (these are the Haas School of Business and the Colleges of Chemistry, Engineering, Environmental Design, Natural Resources, and Letters & Science).

Designing the specifics of curricular change at the lower division, specifically a greater commonality in experience, will be led by this decanal council in consultation with the relevant committees of the Academic Senate, in particular the Undergraduate Council (UGC), the Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI), and the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP). Other changes (*e.g.*, to breadth requirements) will involve consultation with the relevant curricular committees of the involved colleges and school.

At the upper division, deans will work with department chairs to ensure a review of major requirements and design appropriate capstone experiences.

Q. Who is on this decanal council?

- A. The council consists of the VCUE and the deans of the colleges and school that offer undergraduate degrees. The Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost (EVCP) and the Chair of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate are non-voting members. The deans serving on the council are the Dean of Arts & Humanities

(L&S), the Dean of Biological Sciences (L&S), the Dean of Chemistry, the Dean of Engineering, the Dean of Environmental Design, the Dean of the Haas School of Business, the Dean of Mathematical and Physical Sciences (L&S), the Dean of Natural Resources, the Dean of Social Sciences (L&S), and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies for the College at Berkeley.

Q. Is the Academic Senate involved and how does this initiative fit within the campus's tradition of shared governance?

- A. As noted, there has been involvement by the Senate throughout the process to date. Regental policy delegates control of the curriculum to the faculty; hence, the relevant Senate committees, as well as the curricular committees of the undergraduate colleges and school, will be involved. Furthermore, the decanal council will work in concert with the Senate's UGC, in a manner similar to how Graduate Division and its Dean works with the Senate's Graduate Council.

Q. What are the full resource implications of the Undergraduate Initiative?

- A. These are, as yet, unknown. Task forces are currently at work on reforming the campus's overall funding of educational support.

Some capital expenses can be anticipated to redesign space to better accommodate contemporary digital-age pedagogy, more opportunities for research and other creative endeavors, and to provide undergraduate students places to work in study groups and otherwise interact. Although changes to residential life could entail potentially significant capital expenses, recent experience with public-private partnerships (P3) suggests that new residences could prove a source of positive revenue for the campus. Improving advising will require investing in staff or reallocating staff positions to advising. Implementation of some parts of a new curriculum could affect faculty recruitment priorities and temporary teaching resources.

Because the College at Berkeley builds on an existing organizational structure the increment to direct administrative costs should be modest. To the extent that some functions previously administered in other Colleges can be transferred to it, there are potential administrative cost savings.

Q. How will these resource needs be met, especially in a near-term environment of very limited resources?

- A. Although some seed money will be spent to get the Initiative moving and to provide "proof of concept" for potential donors, the rollout of the Initiative will be closely tied to raising new monies to support the initiative. Hence, the Initiative will be dependent on the success of the next capital campaign, but it can also provide a focus to that campaign that will appeal to both new and existing donors. Major capital expenditures, especially building or remodeling residential facilities, will likely be done using a public-private partnership (P3) model. The campus will not take on new debt to finance such capital projects.

Q. How does the Undergraduate Initiative fit with other campus initiatives?

- A. Some other initiatives, such as the Data Science Initiative and the Arts & Design Initiative, will, as they develop, facilitate some of the curricular changes envisioned by the Undergraduate Initiative. The Berkeley Global Campus, with its international research and related alliances, could provide undergraduates with greater opportunities to engage in research and could facilitate greater international engagement via exchange programs.

Going forward, coordination among the various initiatives will be needed. This is a point the Academic Senate has made to the administration and the administration has, in turn, acknowledged.

Q. Berkeley is clearly in a situation in which it cannot afford to increase the breadth of what it does without seriously jeopardizing the excellence of existing activities. How can we provide reassurance that the Undergraduate Initiative is not coming at the expense of other important endeavors such as research and graduate-level education?

- A. Like all initiatives, going forward with many aspects of the Undergraduate Initiative is conditional on developing new sources of funding. It will neither be funded by taking resources from elsewhere nor by adding to the campus's existing debt burden. Moreover, there are ways in which the Undergraduate Initiative will benefit more than just undergraduate education: to the extent that the Initiative requires more faculty, it becomes an opportunity to maintain or even increase the faculty size by raising fully-funded positions (chairs); other philanthropic efforts that directly support undergraduate education could free up some decanal and departmental resources for other uses; improved classroom facilities benefit education at all levels; certain curricular changes may enhance demand for GSIs and, thus, provide additional support to graduate programs; and so forth.

Q. Given the number of capped majors and departments struggling with cuts in TAS funding, wouldn't we be better off enhancing undergraduate education by focusing funds and efforts to improve what we currently do?

- A. More attention to advising, curriculum coordination and classroom assignment, can, in and of itself, go a certain distance toward addressing issues of impactation. As noted in the previous answer, the Initiative is not envisioned as a competing demand on resources, but as a way to enhance the total amount of campus resources. Moreover, it is difficult to see how a successful fund-raising campaign can be built around simply replacing lost funding. Finally, although alleviating such existing pressures would enhance undergraduate education, they would not necessarily be sufficient to make it excellent or ensure that it is evolving to meet the needs of the 21st century.

*Questions or comments about the Initiative may be directed to:
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