

## **UC Merced**

### **AIARU: Panel 3 - General Education and the Research University**

#### **Title**

Transcript & Video

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0xf3f96b>

#### **Author**

Block, Gene

#### **Publication Date**

2009-11-13

#### **Supplemental Material**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0xf3f96b#supplemental>



**Academic Innovation and the American Research University  
Symposium**

University of California, Merced  
November 13, 2009

**Panel #3: General Education and the Research University**

[Gene Block, Ph.D.](#)  
Chancellor, UCLA

**UC MERCED  
PROFESSOR OF  
ECONOMICS,  
SHAWN KANTOR,  
PH.D.**

If we could get started, please. And so our last panel of the day is going to deal with General Education and the role of, the role of general education in a, in a research University setting and Chancellor Gene Block from UCLA will preside over the session.

**UCLA CHANCELLOR  
GENE BLOCK, PH.D.**

Good afternoon and Chancellor [Steve Kang], thank you for inviting me to UC Merced. It's a pleasure being here again. I've been here before but it's always a pleasure coming back. So first I have to give you a little bit of a description of, this is going to be a slightly different panel, and I'll explain why.

In my research areas, I study biological clocks, and I study alertness and shift work performance, and I study the brains of mammals and how your brain controls your sleep-wake cycle. Interestingly, after lunch, there's a time called "post-lunch dip," or "postprandial dip" in which you get very tired and, and your eyes are open now, but they won't be in about 10 minutes. And an interesting thing is if you have lunch, lunch causes even further, you know,

fatigue. But it's actually not lunch. It's actually for many people--not everybody but for most people--there's actually a dip in performance midday that occurs and it shows up in your ability to add random numbers or pay attention to detailed information. And of course, you know, Latin cultures have been smart about this. And they, they take a cultural phenomena, the siesta, and they map that right on to a physiological reality, and in fact it's very smart not to be having seminars this time of day.

So given that we are now faced with a very severe physiological problem, I'm going to apply good circadian principles to this particular seminar, and treat it more as a workshop where we're going to have to, we're going to have to urge engagement of the audience to keep you awake, because if you think you may be called upon, you'll certainly stay alert. But I'm not going to call on you but we're really going to try to end formal, to the extent there are formal presentations, we're going to try to end those, really, within about 35 minutes. I know we've said that this morning and they run late. They tend to. But I'm going to be, I'm going to be strict about that and we're really going to have, we're really going to try to keep these short.

And I'm going to be very short in my introduction. You know, so general education at research universities, contemporary research universities, is a constant discussion that goes on. And every university solves the equation, disciplinary focus, general education in different ways.

So when I was at the University of Virginia for a very long time, this discussion was, was ongoing and it's still ongoing. And there, of course, you always referred back to Thomas Jefferson for, for guidance. And of course 'cause people look back at Jefferson's writings and on one hand they saw his discussion about the practical sciences, that we've got to educate, we have to educate Virginians for

the, in the practical sciences and they said, "Aha! Disciplinary focus, you know, specialization." At the same time, you talk about the importance, and in those days it was just gentlemen, but Virginia gentlemen having a broad education. And folks in support of GenEd [General Education] said, ah, broad education, liberal arts education. So no, one ever really was successful using Jefferson, actually, as a source in deciding how much GenEd there needed to be at the University of Virginia and that's an ongoing discussion.

At UCLA, it's an ongoing discussion as well. But I must say, and proudly so, 'cause it's not my work, we're much further at UCLA, I feel, in this discussion because, in fact, we've got some wonderful GenEd programs in place.

So for the University of California, the tensions within the university, the different models of the university are, of course, not new. And I've been reading Clark Kerr [Former President, University of California] which many of you have read, many of Clark Kerr's lectures, and he says, of course, that you know, that the "...American university, however, is not Oxford, nor is it Berlin; it is a new type of institution in the world. As a new type of institution, it is not really private and it is not really public; it is neither entirely of the world nor entirely apart from it. It is unique." [Kerr, Clark. *The Uses of the University*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001. Print.] So, Kerr had some great, as you've probably read his book, there's some great essays in here about the, as true today as when they were written, some of them written, I think, in the early 1960s.

So our format will be as follows: We thought we'll take a comparative approach and speak briefly about four or five different institutions and how they're coping with GenEd--general education--including, including Merced, and then we're going to actually try to focus on, on Merced. And so there

will be four presentations--but very brief presentations--and then we're going to ask some of our other panelists to comment on those presentations, try to tie that together with what we learned this morning, and then really open it up for discussion of the whole, the whole group of us. And I've got some select questions in case you get slack in your enthusiasm and engagement.

So first, let me start off, I think the first--we're going to start off with the oldest institution. We're going to move through from oldest to newest. And the oldest is--let me just take a look here. We're going to have Professor Viney speak about traditions in the British traditions, actually, I believe, in Cambridge and Oxford. I'm looking for-- And I'll turn it over to you, sir. You can speak from either come up, or--Please.

**UC MERCED VICE  
PROVOST FOR  
UNDERGRADUATE  
EDUCATION AND  
PROFESSOR OF  
ENGINEERING,  
CHRISTOPHER  
VINEY, PH.D.**

See Christopher Viney Transcript

**BLOCK**

Now we are going to move up several centuries because our next oldest institution is Davis. And we have Chancellor [Linda] Katehi to say something about GenEd and Davis, and perhaps at the University of Illinois where she was provost for several years.

**UC DAVIS  
CHANCELLOR  
LINDA KATEHI,  
PH.D.**

See Linda Katehi Transcript

## BLOCK

Thank you. Thank you. I think this issue, again, of professional education at the same you try to provide general education is something we struggle with, whether it's nursing, or engineering, any of the professional schools; this is a, a constant struggle. I am going to try to be quick because I do recognize 88% of you have your eyes open still and I recognize you're expecting to have a discussion section so I'm going to move along very quickly. I'll say a little bit about UCLA. When I was at [the University of] Virginia, we looked at UCLA as our best in class in general education, in fact looked carefully at what was going on at UCLA, in part because UCLA was driven by their earlier WASC accreditation to actually become fairly innovative in their, in general education. I must say as much as we complain about these re-accreditations, they do force occasionally real innovation and I think in the case of of UCLA, the folks in charge at the time did, did actually develop a GenEd system. And I say system because it's quite, it's quite a number of pieces to it that I think really serve the students well.

Importantly, what the GenEd requirement does is it allows us to imbue what I'll call UCLA values into the educational program in a way you can't do with disciplinary training and that is, you know, our concern again about understanding diversity, of civic engagement through service learning, and opportunities you can get in your GenEd courses as something we can't do with our disciplinary focus. Also to be able to understand how the different disciplines, what's considered evidence, what's considered proof, in different disciplines is something that is important for students. And GenEd provides that. So I'd say there's within a university, a research university environment, there's some great things you can do with GenEd because you can get your students, you can put them on some common footing with some common values in a way that is difficult if you don't do that. In fact, even our engineering students have to take

GenEd requirements that are similar to the GenEd requirements that the students at the college take.

So what's the value added? One of the issues is what's the value added for students, faculty, and the university in implementing a GenEd curriculum? I'd say for students, one thing is this common framework; you can present a common set of experiences which makes it easier for them to discuss their experiences in the first years when they're getting to know the university, improves their skill. So I mean, there's a lot of focus on writing and, and read--comprehension and I think it improves their skills. And about 50% of our freshman enroll in something called our "Freshman Cluster Program" which are year-long interdisciplinary courses that are really amazing. And I want to take some of these and I think I'm going to frighten faculty if I walk in the lecture hall and listen.

But there's one on the U.S. in the 1960s, which is a year-long course from an economics perspective, a political science perspective, a sociological perspective. Faculty from all over campus come together to teach these classes. They are dazzling! And all the topics are interesting, so I think there's something very special. So GenEd's become exciting at UCLA rather than something that's just viewed as a requirement. For the faculty, two things, two benefits. One is engagement with undergraduates and I think many of the faculty say they've enjoyed really getting to know undergraduates through teaching these lower division courses that, and especially the year-long courses where they really get to know the students. The other thing that's happened which we see several examples of, is where this interdisciplinary teaching has led the faculty to start talking and create interdisciplinary research institutes. So this is, in one of these cases where the teaching effort has led and actually catalyzed research collaboration. So there's actually, I would not have

guessed that happens, but now we have a couple of examples where teaching the class initially as a cluster course eventually led to research programs.

In fact, we have, we have a couple of them now, interdisciplinary research networks created through that. And for the campus I think it's kept the discussion going about the importance of GenEd. We've been, you know, participants in the Boyer Commission and sort of the aftermath of that and all of the ongoing discussion. And, as I said, from the University of Virginia, it looked like UCLA really were leaders in this area. And so it has been a great experience to adopt a program in general education, and I think that's very valuable.

I'm going to move on quickly now to what I hear about Merced and where the thinking is at Merced. And I'm going to ask Professor [Gregg] Camfield to make some comments.