

On the Development of Social Science I

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Today, allow me to describe my experience as the convenor for Social Science I (Foundation of Behavioral Science), with the end in view of identifying challenges and facilitating factors which may be of help to the present convenors of the General Education (GE) program. Specifically, I will focus on the conceptualization and administration of the course. In my academic lifetime, I have witnessed and participated in three revisions of the GE program, not to mention the one I took as a student. Therefore, we can imagine a point in the future when the present GE curriculum will be revised.

First, let me acknowledge the strong financial support provided by Central Administration for the development of GE courses during that time when we were tasked to develop Social Science I. Certainly, funding was more than adequate. New items for faculty involved in teaching the new courses were made available. Corollary to this was funding for training workshops both at the system and constituent university levels. Conferences on the GE were likewise funded and a budget for refurbishing facilities and purchasing audiovisual equipment was made available. As a faculty member involved in the program then, it was clear to me that UP was very serious about the GE program, the so-called "heart and soul" of UP education. This was the context in which the GE program, including Social Science I was developed. The availability of funds was a major facilitating factor.

The social context at the national level influenced the conceptualization of the course. It was post-EDSA I and the re-examination of values was the prevailing need and sentiment. Also, the earthquake in 1991 highlighted the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to social issues and problems. Thus, even if the original instruction from central administration was to develop a course integrating psychology, sociology and anthropology, the team realized that other social science disciplines had important contributions in analyzing comprehensively existing social issues. Aside from the three disciplines mentioned, demography, linguistics, and geography joined the team. While this enriched both content and method, the challenge was how to teach each other since our respective training was disciplinary. To achieve an integrated multidisciplinary approach, we conducted training workshops. More importantly, as part of the training, we embarked on team-teaching and were allowed full teaching credit for the course as the team of three faculty attended and participated in every meeting. This took place in the first year. Eventually, we guest-lectured in each other's courses.

In the course of developing Social Science I, we had lively debates but we finally arrived at a consensus as we had to have a syllabus before the systemwide training workshop. For all of us, listening to each other enriched our perspective and respect for each other's field of expertise. Part of the instruction provided by central administration was to involve senior faculty—the Social Science I Committee consisted of Associate and Full Professors across the system. Hence, the debates which initially seemed like an obstacle eventually contributed to a more integrated course.

We agreed on the core concept and sequence of topics based on the objectives below:

1. To understand the basic concepts that govern the relationship between the individual and society;
2. To develop critical thinking; and

3. To appreciate and apply such understanding to the analysis of issues and problems in society in general and the Philippines in particular.

The central theme was to study the individual adaptation in society and how development as a product of social, cultural, economic and political forces in the environment. In this way, a multifaceted and holistic understanding of man and society could be achieved. To actualize the stated goals, the lecture-discussion method, debates, field trips, and film-showing were all utilized. The UP administration funded the development of instructional materials and eventually the evaluation of the course.

Finally, let me address the relevance of social science in the GE curriculum. Social issues are multifaceted, contextual, and developmental. One must address the history of the problem while analyzing the present context. Social Science offers an integrated approach to the study of the human condition. It may be best appreciated not only in terms of the content covered by the course, but more so in terms of how much the student has moved towards the acquisition of attitudes and values that would allow him to reach his full potential as a human being, in a society of fellow human beings. Respecting other perspectives while developing his own well-thought out view on social issues, would hopefully allow him to arrive at a personal and civic life based on ethical principles. The development of an attitude of curiosity, skepticism, and openness combine to support the objective of having an analytical and critical approach toward readings and observations. When this becomes a habit of thought, the student can easily apply this to the myriad of problems encountered in research and everyday life. Hopefully too, this leads to an appreciation of creativity, excellence, and personal integrity. This implies that teaching in the social sciences does not only emphasize content, but more importantly how that content has been arrived at. Equipped

with these thinking tools, attitudes and values, the every changing and ever challenging social consequences of nature and man-made problems can be dealt with, anytime, anywhere.

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