In 1994 the Commission on Undergraduate Education undertook the first comprehensive study of Stanford’s undergraduate program in 25 years. The Commission’s findings led to many changes in the curriculum and to expanded academic opportunities for undergraduates, including freshman seminars, substantially increased support for undergraduate research, and revised foreign language, writing, and introductory humanities requirements. With these and other reforms, Stanford increased the rigor, coherence, and clarity of its undergraduate program, while engaging faculty and undergraduates with one another more deeply than perhaps ever before.

It is approaching 15 years since the current curriculum was designed. During this time, our world, our students, and Stanford University have changed – profoundly so in some instances. It is time to review our curriculum, to reaffirm or revise our goals for an undergraduate education, and to ensure our requirements reflect our stated goals.

Much has changed in the 15 years since the Commission. The growing social, political, economic, and ecological interconnectedness of the world certainly challenges us to look more broadly at what it means to be an educated citizen. How do these changes affect what today’s student needs from an undergraduate education? What do we want our students to gain from their time on the Farm? How do we best prepare them for local, national, and global citizenship? The first objective of the Task Force will be to address these questions and articulate an updated set of goals for a Stanford undergraduate education. The second objective will be to suggest how these goals might best be achieved and reflected in Stanford’s undergraduate curriculum.

The Task Force should examine Stanford’s requirements as part of the overall structure and fabric of undergraduate education, and seek to understand how these requirements work in relation to the academic preparation of today’s entering students, on the one hand, and the expectations of our disciplinary majors, on the other. At the conclusion of the process, the Task Force should make specific recommendations for affirming or modifying our current undergraduate academic requirements.

As part of this process, we expect the Task Force to appoint subcommittees to review the effectiveness of existing requirements (for example, the undergraduate writing and humanities requirements, the breadth and citizenship general education requirements, and the foreign language requirement), and other programs developed in support of undergraduate education (such as freshman and sophomore seminars). The subcommittees will work simultaneously, though not in lock-step, and will consult regularly with the Task Force as a whole. They will also coordinate their work with the committee overseeing Stanford’s reaccreditation review and with the Task Force on Diversity across the Curriculum, chaired by Richard Saller and Harry Elam.

We hope the Task Force will be able to commence work before the end of January and that it will meet regularly through this year and next. We hope also that its report will be finished in time to bring proposals for change to the Committee on Undergraduate Standards and Policies (C-USP) and the Faculty Senate in Spring and Fall 2011.