

## *Compass Proposal*

**Abstract:** Sacramento State's faculty and administration recognize that profound national and global forces are reverberating in our region, demanding equally profound changes in our General Education program. Executive Order 1033, and expectations from our accrediting body, operationalizes what we must do to produce a brand of higher education appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our pressing goal is to improve student learning, retention, and graduation rates by revitalizing a General Education program designed for an earlier time. We are committed to maximizing high-impact programs already in place while designing new ones to respond to new challenges.

Freshman Seminar, Learning Communities, and the GE Honors Program are relatively new parts of our current program providing evidence of the faculty's commitment to transforming General Education. We have plans to develop and implement a series of other high-impact practices related to Civic Agency, Sustainability, Literacy, and Service Learning. Our participation in Compass can unify our local efforts, benefit us by collaborating within a network of like-minded institutions, and contribute to the growing body of knowledge about how to make higher education work better for all people.

Important voices and key players signed on to this proposal. These include the chair and members of the Senate General Education Committee, GE assessment consultant, university assessment coordinator, associate dean for GE, associate vice president for Academic Affairs, vice president for Student Affairs and the Provost. Other stakeholders, with long-stranding interest in the project of liberal education, pledge participation locally and as contributors to the larger effort.

### **Narrative**

**Introduction:** California State University, Sacramento has developed steadily since it's founding in 1947 as the city of Sacramento's only comprehensive university. In 2003 Time magazine named Sacramento the most integrated city in the country. This diversity is reflected in the student body. Fifty-five percent of our 29,000 students identify themselves as non-white and 33% consider themselves multi-ethnic. (<http://www.csus.edu/destination2010/main.stm>)

Sacramento State faces two related challenges, each a problem and an opportunity: 1) an increasingly complex environment shaped by sociopolitical, economic, technological, and demographic changes of regional and global proportions and 2) related state and local financial pressures upon the multi-campus system (CSU) and our local institution. Additionally, we are being asked by our accreditation body, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), to address several issues, the most pressing of which are assessment of learning outcomes for our students and improvement of our graduation rate. (<http://www.csus.edu/wascaccreditation/Draft%20WASC%20Educational%20Effectiveness%20Report%20November%202008.pdf>, [http://www.csus.edu/wascaccreditation/WASC\\_Final.pdf](http://www.csus.edu/wascaccreditation/WASC_Final.pdf))

Executive Order 1033 and its commitment to the LEAP Outcomes and assessment provide the launch pad to consolidate restructuring initiatives aimed at improving retention and graduation rates, particularly for students from low income and culturally and linguistically diverse families and first time college goers. E.O. 1033 also prompts us to develop coherent structures and practices that assess

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student learning and that use resultant feedback to make data based decisions about curriculum and instruction. The Compass Project offers an opportunity to meet these challenges and knit together promising practices in planning, implementation, and evaluation.

**Need:** Our current General Education (GE) model is over thirty years old, traditional in its vertical integration rather than interdisciplinary in character, congruent with expectations of a different time and student body. Its outline is from 1992 (16 years ago) and was revised in 2001-2002. Recent changes include the reduction of the foreign language requirement, GE overlap, administrative leadership and the development of the Baccalaureate Learning Goals. (<http://www.csus.edu/acad/ge/>)

Over the past decade, other modifications have been made that reflect a “tinkering” approach, although yielding significant retention and graduation benefits. These gains have been seen in the implementation several high impact teaching-learning practices including a required Freshman Orientation, a recommended Freshman Seminar, and the establishment of “Learning Communities,” linked courses usually including English and Freshman Seminar. The GE Honors Program initiative, the most interdisciplinary model currently in place, enrolled its third cohort this fall. (<http://www.csus.edu/lc/fsfac/>, <http://www.csus.edu/honorsprogram/about.html>)

The current program has excellent stewardship under the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education and the Faculty Senate General Education/Graduation Policy Requirements Committee (GE/GRPC). Oversight exists at varying degrees at the department level, albeit focused on compliance and less reliable assessment evidence as the recent Assessment Report, commissioned by the GE/GRPC indicates (<http://www.csus.edu/acad/ge/Documents/Report%20on%20Assessing%20Baccalaureate%20Learning%20Goals.pdfm>, <http://www.csus.edu/acad/GE/GE%20Program%20Review%20Report%20final.pdf>, <http://www.csus.edu/wascaccreditation/phase3.stm> )

The most recent GE Program Review and recommendations, coinciding with the development of the campus’ Strategic Plan and the President’s Destination 2010, and the WASC Interim Report, Identified several discontinuities that are in need of attention, investigation and reform. These are: retention and graduation; assessment structures to provide feedback both on student learning and to assist in making programmatic adjustments; faculty development with respect to GE Pedagogy and Advisement; development of interdisciplinary and thematic General Education “packages” that address the contemporary issues, competencies, and skills in preparing young people for the workforce, for post baccalaureate studies and life long learning. (<http://www.csus.edu/acad/GE/GE%20Program%20Review%20Report%20final.pdf>, <http://www.csus.edu/wascaccreditation/phase3.stm>)

There is a discernable disconnect at the level of the faculty regarding GE. Permanent faculty teaches approximately fifty percent of our GE curriculum; adjunct faculty teaches the remainder. A series of recent structured campus discussions and a GE Faculty reception, referenced below, evidence the lack of engagement of faculty in this critical enterprise, at the same time highlighting the challenges associated with faculty engagement in terms of understanding the aims and outcomes of GE and in terms of current pedagogy regarding a liberal education are increasing necessary given the increasing proportion of students who are “native” (from 30 to almost 60%) and the commitment to being a “destination campus” articulated by the President and evidenced by the construction of new on-campus residences and near campus apartments designed for our students.

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A major political challenge is that we have several separate learning outcome strands (developed independently of each other, and with partial compliance expectations) that may be troublesome to reconcile: the Baccalaureate Learning Goals, Area Objectives, and the LEAP outcomes. Support from the GE review and the WASC interim report will provide support for a successful outcome in the Faculty Senate. It will require joint work to address the juncture of the campus-developed BLGs developed within a relatively unsophisticated frame of reference for assessment, the objectives developed during the same time that reinforce the verticality of the curriculum, and the much more interdisciplinary and integrated LEAP outcomes. Since the Faculty Senate has jurisdiction over the curriculum, it will be necessary for a resolution to pass in this regard. The evidence from the GE program review, the assessment findings of GE, and the WASC interim report may provide sufficient incentive to support such a resolution, particularly if accompanied by support from key campus faculty so that the Senate feels informed and that it is acting in the best interests of the stakeholders in General Education. The Senate, and the GE Committee as well, will also need to be persuaded that moving from compliance (assessment plans exist and assessment of some sort is taking place) to examining learning linked to specific outcomes to determine “value added” of the GE program.

Another challenge is the “turf” perspective that is pervasive on this campus. A perennial question when considering GE reform is, “how will this kill us?” The message of our Provost, taken up by the campus slowly, but surely, that having a GE program that is powerful, contemporary, inviting, and memorable is supported by our Strategic Plan, Destination 2010, and the public conversations taking place currently and planned as part of the Compass Project. We believe that as the discussions continue, and are bolstered by experiences of our fellow campuses, and our budget transparency continues, that colleges and departments will understand how changes do not necessarily translate into FTES disaster, but offer FTES opportunities.

Despite the challenges indicated above, the need to provide a coherent General Education experience for students with clear pathways, clear outcomes and assessments that map on to those outcomes is evident to most stakeholders, even if there is discomfort in considering the work ahead. The Compass project will provide a connective network of support and inquiry for ongoing structures that show promise and have been recognized system wide (Freshman Seminar, Freshman Orientation, Learning Communities) and activities that individually represent best practices in varying stages of development from discussion and recommendation (Reconciliation of Baccalaureate Learning Outcomes, LEAP Outcomes, and objectives; development of Transfer seminar or similar experience; initiation of interdisciplinary and thematic GE packages) to planning stage (Freshman English Pilot, Sustainability, Civic Agency, and GE Reads common assessment) to guarantee thoughtful and successful implementation and data analysis to inform ongoing program improvement.

Our current strategies for re-mapping along LEAP lines have included public discussions in which the LEAP outcomes have been disseminated, general dissemination to the faculty at large via information sessions, the General Education web page, and dissemination and discussion of the outcomes in the contexts of the initiatives described above so that those programs are developed within the LEAP framework.

To these ends, the Faculty Senate Chair and Executive Committee, the General Education Committee and Chair, the Associate Dean of General Education, the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost have sponsored public discussions referenced above and developed a core group of engaged faculty and staff (key stakeholders in the GE programs) who have continued the discussions via the Blackboard online course platform, SacCT, currently with more than sixty subscribers. Key members of this group have committed to participating as members of the Team for this Compass Project. This core

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group has volunteered to participate in a workshop in spring that will focus on networking the GE initiatives and mapping out the process of operationalizing the LEAP outcomes as the overarching framework and modifying or repurposing the BLGs and objectives to reflect an interdisciplinary perspective on curriculum, instruction and assessment.

**Goals:**

Our goals are the following:

- A. Increase the engagement of GE Faculty
- B. Reconcile LEAP, BLGs, and objectives into a form that is easily understood and permit the development of common assessments in GE
- C. Develop common assessments and rubrics to pilot in Freshman Seminar (Sac Reads) and select Upper Division GE
- D. Design objectives and outcomes and professional development to infuse Civic Agency and Sustainability in the GE curriculum
- E. Design research questions, collect data on English Pilot, analyze and disseminate

Our Current Timetable is as follows:

Spring 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GE 1 day Workshop focus on Sustainability, Civic Engagement, First Year Experience</li> <li>• Plan Summer Institute with Center for Teaching and Learning</li> <li>• Presentations to Colleges and Departments</li> <li>• Rubrics for Sac Reads</li> <li>• Finalize English Pilot</li> <li>• Respond to GE Program Review Recommendations to Faculty Senate</li> </ul>
Summer 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summer Institute Center for Teaching and Learning</li> <li>• Summer Workgroups (faculty across the curriculum revisiting objectives to align with LEAP, designing model GE Packages)</li> </ul>
Fall 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot Sac Reads</li> <li>• English Pilot</li> <li>• Faculty workgroups share findings at 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Education Reception</li> <li>• LEAP Outcomes ratified by the Faculty Senate with recommendations for moving forward with objectives and common assessments</li> </ul>
Spring 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot Sac Reads</li> <li>• Review English Pilot Data and make recommendations to Provost</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
Summer 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disseminate progress and findings</li> <li>• Summer Institute on General Education sponsored by CTL</li> <li>• Summer Workgroups ((faculty across the curriculum revisiting objectives to align with LEAP, designing model GE Packages)</li> <li>• Participation at CSUS GE Conference</li> </ul>
Fall 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue English Pilot</li> <li>• Faculty workgroups share findings at 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Education Reception</li> <li>• Faculty Senate ratifies objectives, common assessments and criteria for inclusion of courses in the new GE</li> </ul>

**Team Characteristics:** The team is multidimensional in that it represents members of the divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, members of the GE/GRPC, faculty involved in the development and implementation of Freshman Seminar, faculty working on civic engagement and sustainability issues, a faculty member from the library, the campus Assessment Coordinator, and others as is indicated in the following description. This group is well positioned to address the range of concerns surrounding general education, learning, educational change, and outcomes assessment at Sacramento State in that the participants are influential by virtue of their unit (Student Affairs, Academic Affairs), their position,

As part of this commitment to retention and graduation, the Provost established a working group, chaired by Dr. Sheree Meyer, to address the CSU system's initiative related to English Composition, retention and graduation. This group is charged with examining Pre-baccalaureate composition course programs, developed in the 1960s by open-admissions universities, in terms of both goals and outcomes. It is responding to research and models within the CSU system that make a case that: flexible writing-sequence offerings may better serve diverse student populations than do static offerings; program development and assessment seem more consistent when writing sequences are streamlined; that the placement method that currently populates pre-baccalaureate courses may not be valid or pedagogically sound; and that current writing research calls into question the necessity of multiple levels of pre-baccalaureate preparatory courses.

Our Office of Academic Program Assessment (OAPA) under the direction of Dr. Terry Underwood (<http://www.csus.edu/programassessment/index.html>), together with the Director of Freshman Programs, Dr. Lynne Tashiro, and the General Education Assessment Consultant, Dr. Beth Strasser, and the Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Lori Varlotta, have been working on a set of proposals for common assessments that would link the First Year Experience with LEAP outcomes in the area of academic literacy. They, along with the Chair of the GE/GRP Committee, Dr. Janet Hecsh, are preparing to pilot Sac Reads as a common assessment tool to assess literacy.

Dr. Mary Kirlin (Public Policy and Administration) and Dr. Virginia Matzek (Environmental Studies) are engaged in initiatives aimed at infusing skills and abilities in the areas of sustainability and civic engagement. They are working in concert with AASHE, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (<http://www.aashe.org/profdev/curriculum.php>) and Association of State Colleges and Universities, The American Democracy Project (<http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/>) and various campus organizations to provide professional development for faculty as they repurpose their courses and map on to the interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary approach to liberal education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Director of the Center assists them in this work for Teaching and Learning (<http://www.ctl.csus.edu/mission.htm>), Dr. Kimo Ah Yun, and his staff, currently planning the 2009 Summer Faculty Institute with a strong focus on General Education.

Other members of the team include the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Greg Wheeler; Dr. Roberto Pomo, GE Honors Director; Reza Peigahi, Instruction Librarian, member of the GE/GRPC and recipient of the campus' 2008 Outstanding Teaching Award; Noelle McCurley, Academic Advising Coordinator First Year Programs, Dr. Chris Taylor of Astronomy, Dr. David Leon, Chair of Ethnic Studies, Dr. Daniel Melzer, Reading and Writing Coordinator, and Dr. Jackie Donath, Chair of Humanities and author of our current WASC report.

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**Campus Contribution:** As noted in our team description above, we are a diverse group who have developed a culture of collaboration that we believe is a model for institutions undergoing structural change. Also indicated above is our participation in national initiatives related to civic agency, sustainability, and service learning and our faculty, many of whom are on our team, are part of ongoing research, development and dissemination projects in these areas.

Our discussions and preliminary investigations show that academic literacy for first-generation students in higher education is largely untouched ground. The research on secondary reading, however, has a long history, and strategies that are known to be effective among high school students are available, if not often applied. However, we know very little about the ways in which students in their first two years of college develop as mature readers, nor do we know much about how to structure learning opportunities to promote accelerated growth. The English Pilot under development and the proposed GE READS offers promise not just as a way to assess locally for local improvement, but as a foundational element in a line of research that several (many) faculty might engage in.

Our institution can make several important contributions to the tri-state collaborative and to the CSU. Our Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and our GE/GRPC Chair belong to the CSU GE Affinity group (<http://survey.csuprojects.org/ge>) and have made contributions in terms of sharing our experience and look to continue this and to accelerate it with our work on this project. We have hosted system wide seminars and conferences on Freshman Seminars and Learning Communities and are eager to share this expertise, along with our research inquiries into the expansion and modification of Learning Communities, in particular, in serving first generation students and increasing retention and graduation for this demographic group.