

ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT

GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

2007-2008

Committee Members:

Brian Baker, Ethnic Studies

Bruce Bikle, Criminal Justice (*co-Chair*)

Larry Boles, Speech Pathology and Audiology

Jackie Donath, Humanities and Religious Studies

Jennifer Lundmark, Biological Sciences

Roberto Pomo, Honors Program (*co-Chair*)

Individuals Interviewed

Joseph Sheley, Provost

Ming-Tung Lee, Associate Vice President and Dean of Academic Programs

Janet Hecsh, Chair General Education and Graduation Requirements Policies Committee

Richard Kornweibel, Faculty Emeritus, History

Gregory Wheeler, Academic Affairs, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies

General Education and Graduation Requirements Committee members

Jane Bowers, Interim Provost, John Jay, College of Criminal Justice

Jo Service, Dean of Academic Program Planning (retired), California State University

Documents Reviewed

General Education Program Review Reports, 2001, 2006

External Consultants' Report, Jane Bowers and Jo Service, 2007

Summary of Commendations and Recommendations:

Commendations:

The Review Team wishes to commend the many people involved with the General Education Program at Sacramento State. Greg Wheeler and the General Education Office continue to do superior work in the administration and oversight of the various elements of the program.

The University General Education/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee and various sub committees are clearly invested in the success of the program and want to see meaningful improvements that will increase student knowledge and success.

The departments and faculty of the University involved with the design, management and delivery of the General Education Program courses are the real heroes of the day. Their tireless activity to improve student learning outcome is the real “glue” that holds the program together.

Recommendations

We have listed our recommendations below in no particular order, understanding that it is the role of the faculty of CSU, Sacramento to accept or reject them and to set academic priorities for the institution. We have, however, clustered the recommendations by area. We also recognize that some of the recommendations are implemented with more ease than others. The more ambitious changes we recommend can best be achieved incrementally through a process of consensus-building over time.

Assessment of the Program:

1. Establish a process for assessing student learning outcomes of the GE program as a whole and acting on the results of that assessment.

Compliance and Procedures:

2. Bring the upper-division GE requirement into compliance with CSU Executive Order No. 595.
3. Seek additional means of ensuring program coherence and academic community by reducing the number of courses that are accepted as satisfying GE requirements.
4. Explore the potential of the student administration software in CMS to facilitate timely GE advising by faculty and Student Services advisors and to improve the practicality of deliberate sequencing of GE courses.
5. Find a way to lay out the GE and graduation requirements simply and graphically, as a kind of roadmap that might fit on a single sheet.

Program Improvement:

6. Reconsider the proposal to subsume the second-semester composition requirement in Area A3.
7. Consider structural changes to the upper-division GE requirements.
8. Consider making Freshman Seminar mandatory for first-time CSU Sacramento freshmen (i.e., their only choice in Area E).
9. Increase the scope and impact of GE faculty advisement.
10. Launch a faculty development initiative focused on GE.
11. Consider creating a transfer seminar and mandatory transfer orientation and advisement.
12. Increase Summer Session offerings of Upper Division General Education courses.

Overview:

The General Education Program at the California State University, Sacramento has received extensive review by both internal and external committees as well as within the formal Academic Program Review process. These reviews have often stated that while the program is to be complemented for its broad array of course options, and for the general high level of support from the faculty, the program seems to lack coherence and continuity.

The most recent Program Review, completed in 2001, made a number of significant recommendations for the improvement of the program, and ten of the fourteen recommendations were implemented. The Team recognizes that the changes recommended for a program as large and complex as General Education are difficult, in some ways unsettling (particularly in lean budget cycles), and time-consuming.

As this report is finalized we recognize that California State University, Sacramento, is entering another lean budget cycle that could lead departments, colleges, the Faculty Senate and its committees and others to “tuck in” and try to weather the financial storm by doing little or nothing that upsets the current processes and structures that underpin our General Education Program.

The guidance provided by the University Strategic Plan, the increasing transparency of the budget process, allied with the goal of student success and concerns for faculty workload may provide a more welcoming environment for the recommendations listed in this report.

The Review Team is committed to these recommendations and its members stand ready, both as a group and individually, to work with various units of the University to improve the General Education Program.

Recommendations:

The Program Review Team is fully aware of the potentially significant programmatic and budgetary ramifications of any changes to the General Education Program. The recommendations noted below, if implemented, will shift resources, priorities and activities in departments and colleges. These sorts of concerns have prevented meaningful change in the program for several cycles. Members of the current team initially raised concerns about their sense that all the work associated with a self study and program review would not lead to any real results. The issue of the possibility of improvement and innovation in the General Education curriculum was the focus of one of the first Team meetings. In light of this history and present realities, the Team reaffirms the principle that reflection, openness and transparency must guide any action on these recommendations, both on the part of those who favor change, and those who are satisfied with the current program.

The General Education Program Review Team is also aware of several issues currently facing the University that center around the recruitment, retention and graduation of students. The Strategic Planning Committee work completed in the fall of 2007 has placed student success as the number one priority of the University's efforts for the next three to five years. The University's goals, our expectations for student learning and General Education as the "center" of the University's curriculum add greater significance and immediacy to the Team's sense that there is a pressing need to re-envision and revise the current program.

The General Education Program Review Team makes the following recommendations:

- 1. The General Education Program should establish a process for developing and assessing student learning outcomes of the program as a whole and prepare a plan for improvement based on the results of those assessments.**

While General Education courses are individually assessed (often with more rigor than the courses receive in departmental review) during the regular cycle of GE Area review, aside from a basic evaluation of the efficacy of the university graduation requirement in Race and Ethnicity, neither the GE Areas, nor the program as a whole, have been evaluated for educational effectiveness within a broader, University context.

Such assessment activities seem central to the maintenance and support of this important component of the University's educational mission. In light of recent changes to the University's Strategic Plan and proposed budget allocation processes; data-driven, learning-centered assertions, or findings will be necessary to enable the General Education Program to receive necessary resources.

A review of the program as a whole should be coordinated by the Faculty Senate General Education Policies/Graduation Requirements Committee in concert with the

Faculty Assessment Coordinator and the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs.

The Team recommends that this review does not have to be created out of thin air. The University's Baccalaureate Learning Goals statement, approved by the Faculty Senate in 2004, provides a clear framework of desired learning skills and dispositions for a Sacramento State graduate, regardless of their major. Five of the six categories of learning delineated in the Baccalaureate Learning Goals align with the General Education Program's current curriculum and structure. The Program Review Team urges the General Education Policy/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee and the Faculty Senate to support the development of an assessment plan and resulting data that must be used by both advocates of change and those who support the current program in any discussion of the program's strengths and weaknesses. The time has come to frame a conversation about general education with data that provides meaningful information about student learning.

2. The University General Education Policies/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee in consultation with the University Academic Policies Committee and the Registrar should bring the campus' upper-division GE requirement into compliance with CSU Executive Order No. 595.

E.O. 595 requires that the Upper Division General Education courses may be taken no sooner than the semester the student has completed 60 units. Current practice at Sacramento State allows students to use upper division courses taken at any time to fulfill requirements and is in violation of policy. The General Education Program Review Team suggests that the campus move immediately to notify students, advisors, and student services personnel of the need to achieve compliance with this system requirement. A "phase-in time" of one semester should be considered to allow students adequate time to adjust their schedules. Students who have already taken courses out of sequence should be allowed to retain those credits for graduation and to ensure their compliance with the campus's General Education Program and Graduation requirements.

The Review Team suggests that CMS be programmed to facilitate compliance with the provisions of E.O. 595 by not allowing students to register in upper division General Education courses until the 60 unit requirement has been met. The Review Team suggests the development of a clear set of guidelines (developed by Academic Policies Committee in consultation with the Registrar and/or Academic Advising) of what sort of circumstances would justify an "override." Courses taken with override should not count for the Upper Division General Education requirements.

3. The Faculty Senate should consider restructuring the General Education Program by reducing the number of courses that are accepted as satisfying GE requirements.

Once the General Education has undergone a learning-focused, outcome-based assessment cycle, the Team urges the GEP/GRC to consider how to best utilize the resources that are available in the General Education Program. Additionally, a review of the sort proposed in our first recommendation should facilitate discussion of Area learning goals and the most effective ways to promote real student engagement with the subjects, skills and ways of thinking which underpin a liberal education. It could be that such a conversation would lead to a recasting of the methodologies and subjects of some of the GE Areas. While this recommendation will no doubt create some uneasiness in departments who depend on GE courses for significant portions of their budgets, the idea that in the near future GE courses might need to demonstrate a new and different set of learning goals should be seen as an opportunity and not be overly threatening.

It is the Team's fondest wish that following such a review, the General Education Policies/Graduation Requirements Committee would be able to designate specific courses and other curricular structures (such as interdisciplinary clusters) that have the potential to meet clearly-articulated, publicly-shared, learning-focused General Education Program goals. Again, the Program Review Team urges the GEP/GRC to build an assessment framework, course proposal procedures and a review process that is responsive to the California State University Sacramento State Baccalaureate Learning Goals.

It may be that as a new set of learning goals and potential new course configurations are discussed, the GEP/GRC, Faculty Policies Committee and Academic Affairs should consider the development of criteria for faculty participating in the General Education Program. Such a step could offer important support for program coherence as well as encourage interdisciplinary collaboration in the General Education Program.

4. The University should explore the potential of the student administration software in CMS to ensure timely GE advising and as a support for transparency and consistency in the rational sequencing of GE courses.

CMS Student Management Software should be configured to facilitate access to information on classes, schedules and GE area course options that are useful for both advisors and students.

The full potential of CMS in terms of GE advising and student support has not yet been fully developed. As a result, all faculty and departments have a responsibility to engage students in meaningful advisement including General Education and

graduation requirements. Support of this initiative by CMS technology is crucial to its success.

5. The General Education/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee should develop materials that organize the GE and graduation requirements simply, effectively and graphically.

Past program reviews have suggested that the sheer number of courses in the Program, and a lack of clarity about specific campus requirements, makes advising students difficult. The result is confusion and frustration on the part of students, Sacramento State advisors and those on community college campuses about our campus' General Education and graduation requirements.

The current General Education Worksheet, provided by Academic Advising and published in the Student Registration and Advising Handbook, provides students with a road map, but is sometimes difficult to use because of the need to refer to long lists of courses that satisfy each area. A more interactive, on-line General Education advising worksheet, that can be used by students and advisors that ties the courses that meet each GE Area's criteria to catalog descriptions of the course and the class schedule could improve both the efficiency of advising and course choice and the level of information available to students and advisors. In an ideal world, these worksheets could be stored in "My Sac State" for student and advisor referral.

The way in which advisors characterize the process of General Education also has an effect on students' understanding of the program and its goals. Our advising effort needs to emphasize meaningfulness of the program and encourage students to see the courses they choose as a part of an important and thoughtful learning experience, and not simply a "ticket punching" exercise.

6. The University General Education/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee, in consultation with the Curriculum Policies Committee and the English Department, should reconsider possibility of subsuming the second-semester composition requirement in Area A3.

This recommendation has been made in past General Education reviews but has stalled in the Faculty Senate. The Program Review Team feels that the proposal needs to be revisited in the context of newly articulated Area learning goals and assessment planning.

At first glance, the addition of a graduation requirement for a second semester of writing seems to provide support for a strengthened focus on written communication at Sacramento State. As revealed in the General Education Self Study on page four, the truth of the matter is that few students actually take second semester writing coursework at Sacramento State. Because the completion of the A3 requirement through enrollment in an appropriate English course from a community college may substitute for a second semester of composition, even students enrolled at Sacramento

State often take an A3 course at the community college which also fulfills the campus requirement for a sophomore level composition class.

If improved writing instruction and competency are the desired outcomes, the realities of the current system appear to provide little support of those goals.

One suggestion the University General Education Policies/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee might investigate is the efficacy of organizing the GE pattern so that writing and critical thinking skills are explicitly included in all general education courses and evaluated as part of program, area and/or course assessments.

The Program Review Team acknowledges that this recommendation would certainly have budgetary impacts on departments that teach General Education Area A3 courses and the English Department. Any discussion of this proposal must include frank and sympathetic discussions of the complications which could attend implementation as well as the potential educational implications of such a change.

7. The University General Education/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee should consider structural changes to the upper-division GE requirement in order to offer a more focused and integrated “capstone” to this wide/ranging Breadth portion of the University curriculum.

The Program Review Team feels that this recommendation has the potential to make the greatest change in the educational effectiveness of the General Education Program, an opinion supported by almost everyone with whom the Team consulted.

Put simply, the current pattern’s basic requirement for three upper division courses perpetuates an approach to General Education on our campus that reinforces the cafeteria structure of study outside the major and exposes the lack of a thoughtful educational foundation or specific learning goals for this component of the curriculum. This structural weakness is even more distressing when one realizes that many students transfer to Sacramento State with most, if not all, of their lower division GE courses completed. Upper division General Education courses are really the University’s only opportunity to provide an integrative, distinctive California State University, Sacramento experience to our students.

There is some work currently being undertaken to create a series of linked upper division GE courses in the University; the Honors Program may well provide a good template for future course development in this area. The Program Review Team recommends that the General Education Policies/Graduation Requirements Committee and the Honors Program work together to evaluate the Honors Program efforts in this area from both a student learning and process basis. Based on the results of such a collaboration, the GEP/GRC could propose changes to the organization and delivery of the campus’s upper division requirements.

8. The University should make the Freshman Seminar course mandatory for first-time CSU Sacramento freshmen.

Results of the evaluations of the Freshman Seminar program over the past several years indicate that the program is successful in helping students grasp the ideas of an integrated learning experience that should come with a college education. This data matches the experiences of other universities nationwide. Approximately 51 percent of entering freshmen are currently enrolled in the Freshman Seminar.

9. We recommend that the University increase the scope and impact of GE faculty advisement.

This recommendation is intended to intersect with recent adjustments to the University policy on advising (FS 07-72/APC). Advising of students has become a major portion of the retention and completion goals of the University Strategic Plan. Put simply, the idea that academic advisors in the departments and programs need to be aware of and supportive of the GE program is critical to the success of these efforts.

Traditionally, many departmental and College advisement efforts have focused primarily on the major requirements. In keeping with the newly revised University policy on advising, all segments of the University need to provide holistic advisement, integrating information on specific major courses and General Education course options.

Implementation of this recommendation must include adequate training for faculty advisors in the department to successfully do this work.

The Team encourages the GEP/GRC to consult with the Office of Academic Advising for information about the level of training and support needed for faculty to provide integrated advising to students.

10. We recommend that the University launch a faculty development initiative focused on General Education.

If we are to have a multi-disciplinary General Education Program, it is clear that the development of faculty as multidisciplinary teachers is crucial. We have several programs on campus (STEM and the Honors Program for example) that demonstrate the richness of a multidisciplinary approach to the curriculum. Such an initiative should extend over a number of years and should build on the evaluation of the first efforts.

Faculty development should also incorporate discussions and workshops on pedagogy as well as faculty communication across disciplines and departments. Included in this

faculty development initiative should be a comprehensive advising training series for faculty. Finally, faculty development needs to strengthen faculty use of appropriate technology in the delivery of General Education courses. The resources of several offices and current programs could be meaningfully focused on this sort of effort—Writing Across the Curriculum, CTL, faculty mentors, college deans; such as Associate Dean Wheeler, and Academic Affairs at-large could also be important partners in this activity.

New faculty recruitment should inform potential employees of the expectation of participation in General Education for those faculty members interested and equipped to engage in the program.

To the extent possible, General Education courses should be taught by full time and tenure line faculty. Faculty teaching in General Education should not be penalized in the ARTP process at any level (department, college or campus) for active participation in the creation and delivery of General Education courses.

11. The University should mandate transfer orientation and advisement and pilot a single unit transfer seminar.

As a result of collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, the University's commitment to and success with both Freshman and Transfer Orientation has improved. Mandatory advisement of Freshmen is now in place, and efforts have been made to include more transfer students into the advising efforts, but these students are not all given advising at the beginning of their Sacramento State experience

Given that transfer students come from one or several very diverse institutions, their advising needs are idiosyncratic and complex. Additionally, many transfer students feel that they as a result of their community college attendance understand their place in the academy. Mandatory advisement for transfer students, while perhaps difficult to implement, could help meet the University's Destination 2010 goal of a "welcoming campus," while ensuring that transfer students have the information necessary to make effective course choices. Such a program could also offer insight into efforts which would support the Strategic Plan's goals for recruitment, retention, student success and graduation.

The creation of a Transfer Seminar is a bit more problematic. The addition of more requirements to graduation would not be met with approval from any constituency. The Review Team discussed the idea of a one credit course offered three times per semester that would enroll all of the new transfers each term. Such a course could meet every three weeks, thus allowing the instructor to take on three classes of students. In an ideal world, these introductory one credit offerings would be tied to the remaining eight credits of upper division courses required in General Education.

A one unit course would not significantly burden the student, and would provide an opportunity for faculty and professional staff to work with these students in the context of retention, advisement and General Education.

12. The University should offer more upper division General Education courses in the Summer Session.

While increased availability of all General Education courses in the summer is desirable with regard to assisting students with scheduling, experience has shown that the lower division courses taken in the summer are frequently taken at the Community Colleges because tuition is lower. In the case of upper division courses, however, Sacramento State is the primary---almost exclusive---source for these courses. Providing an array of upper division General Education offerings, including the transfer seminar noted above would be useful to students.

Implementation

The General Education Review Committee suggests that the scope and depth of the program changes enumerated above are such that the University as a whole needs to grapple with the suggested changes. To that end, the Program Review Team hopes that the General Education/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee will develop a plan for implementation of these recommendations that will include the opportunity for interested members of the University Community to join ad-hoc or issue-oriented committees that will be working on the details of these recommendations.