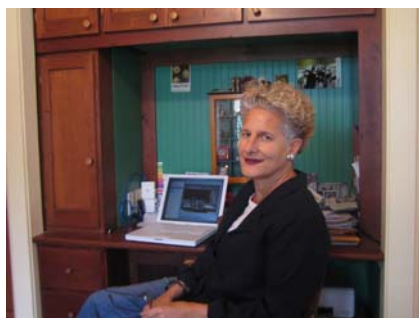


GENERAL EDUCATION NEWS

From the California State University, Sacramento Office of Academic Affairs

Notes from the Chair

By Janet Hecsh, Associate
Professor of Teacher
Education and Chair of the
General
Education/Graduation
Requirements Policy
Committee



It is fall again, and I am pleased to report that we in the GE/GRPC have been busy since the last time you read *Notes from the Chair*. In looking over where we have been and where we are heading, I offer the following perspective.

Academic Year 08-09 was a full one for GE. Our GE/GR Program Review is officially complete. We reflected on the recommendations and submitted our responses to the Faculty Senate in April. We held forums, recognitions, meetings, and hosted a SacCT site titled “Courageous Conversations” about GE. We applied for and received a \$25K grant for General Education renewal and revitalization to support FYE initiatives, faculty interest groups focused on reading comprehension and program evaluation and other GE related

activities. Both the GE/GR Program Review and WASC Review recommended establishing a coherent link between learning outcomes, objectives and program assessment with a focus on making use of the results of program review in program modification and improvement. As part of following through on these recommendations, we are currently advocating for updated Baccalaureate Learning Goals that embed the GE Outcomes outlined in the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative. These are notable accomplishments and I am very appreciative of the support from the GE/GRPC, from Associate Dean Greg Wheeler, and all GE faculty, staff and advocates.

That said, as I consider this fifth column for GE News, I’m reflecting on the many conversations I have had over the past five years about General Education with faculty and students at Sacramento State, across the CSU system, and in the larger educational milieu in the United States. As I look over my calendar, I count more than forty individual one-on-one interviews, at least ten meetings with small groups, and four or five meetings with larger, conference size groups. Adding these up, I have had interactions with more than one hundred people, and multiple conversations with at least

twenty. Many conversations; one topic: General Education. While always informative, sometimes spirited and frequently funny, these discussions have been characterized by tensions; tensions between the known (what we have), and the unknown (what we might imagine and work toward); by faculty views of learning and student views of learning; traditional views of pedagogy (held by some faculty and some students) and contemporary views of pedagogy (held by other faculty and other students); and, between what being an educated person in the 20th century required and what it may/or may not require today. And this is the tip of the tension iceberg. Underneath these polite, philosophical, and thoughtful discussions is fear. Fear of losing “market share,” fear of “corporate takeover,” and fear of the unknown, which I admit freely, is scary.

Leaving the tensions and fears aside for the moment, several themes have surfaced. One relates to choice. Instructors, often citing their own experience, profess that one can never have too much choice and, further, that their undergraduate experience was much richer for the broad choices they had. Student perspectives contrast with this view. They do appreciate choice, but prefer to have a

custom program choice. They have come from high schools with pathways, “houses” and clusters focused on various interests and, while they appreciate choice, they value availability of sections and a simple roadmap even more. They also value courses that include service learning and connections with contemporary issues and problems.

A second theme, coherence---actually the lack of it in our current GE, is also prevalent in these discussions. The way we currently “authorize” GE is via a compliance model and it is largely faculty driven. Faculty want to offer a course, they want to guarantee enrollment, so they will “hedge” by meeting the GE requirements and a savvy group of faculty, a department, or a program, will organize courses in each of the designated areas, to ensure FTES flow to that unit, sometimes competing with similar courses in their own colleges? This results in plenty of choice---for faculty who may even overvalue it, and for students who don’t appreciate it. But does it reflect care and consideration of the program as a whole? What learning outcomes are reflected in a piecemeal GE that fits courses into slots and offers 40% of the required curriculum as a series of boxes checked off, a bunch of things one does to meet requirements, courses chosen because one can double, triple or quadruple “dip?”

What can we make of our thinking about GE? How do we move forward despite our fear? How do we respect each other’s

principles while refining our focus to meet the challenges of recruiting, retaining and graduating students---many of whom are the first in their families to attend college?

First, we can take advantage of the many resources, models and ideas generated by others addressing this challenge. Second, we can recognize the challenges and tensions, and the underlying fears and concerns, characteristic of such “courageous conversations.” And third, despite these fears and concerns, we can remain committed to continuing the conversations and the activities that will lead us beyond the challenges using the resources from the Compass Project and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. These activities will revitalize our Sacramento State GE program in ways that draw freshmen into customized pathways, that engage transfer students in an upper division residency GE having a Sacramento State signature, and that provides all students with a coherent, relevant, and intellectually challenging learning experience.

Ethnomathematics in GE

By Daniel Orey, Professor of Teacher Education and Core Faculty Member, Independent Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership



Professor Orey in Nepal.

During the Spring 2009 semester, Daniel Orey gave a STEM sponsored lecture related to Ethnomathematics. At the end of his talk, the audience was treated to the research created by his EDTE 18 students. These activities will be archived on a future website and will be available for instructors to use, extend and further develop.

Primarily designed to encourage students to see math differently, EDTE 18 is a GE AREA B5 course. Orey does this by exploring interactions between mathematics, cultural anthropology, and mathematical modeling, tools acquired while serving as a Fulbright Scholar to Brazil and Nepal, and a CNPq scholar in Brazil. Students learn to *mathematize* common objects as found on campus, the most notable of them are:

1. An Elliptical function found in the bicycle tunnel near the J Street entrance to the campus;
2. Finding the tallest tree on campus;
3. The slope function as demonstrated by exterior stairs in Mendocino Hall and Parking Structure I;
4. An exploration and census of circles found on campus;

5. A statistical survey comparing who and what majors walk on two of the major walkways across campus; and
6. The mathematics of the Guy West Bridge.



Students taking measurements on the Sac State campus.

After only two semesters, some curious and unintended outcomes have already occurred. Most notably a few math majors became interested in anthropology; and a few anthropology majors became interested in mathematics. As well, students began to see the campus differently, and continue to share ideas for further study, as a recent email from an EDTE 18 alum stated, “Orey, I was walking across campus the other day and spotted that red sculpture the other group studied, and I noticed later another large circle sculpture by Shasta Hall, your next group may want to check it out!”

To see young adults learn to be creative with mathematics and to change the way they see and do mathematics, and be empowered because of it, has been the most rewarding aspect of teaching this new course.

Professor Orey wishes to thank the GE team, and the Departments of Mathematics and Teacher Education for the support and true spirit of collaboration in developing this

course. The third offering of EDTE 18 will be in Spring semester 2010; your support in encouraging students to join us is most appreciated

**Music for the iPod Generation:
Introductions to a Complex Art**
*By Ernie M. Hills,
Professor of Music and
Department Chair*



A student in a GE Music course.

The Department of Music has long kept its primary focus on providing an environment to foster the development of professional musicians through a multitude of high-quality performance activities. But we’ve also built a vibrant and diverse set of General Education offerings that help students from all over campus get a glimpse into our mysterious art form. Our courses help develop students from casual listeners into curious and engaged music consumers.

Classical Music:
For those looking for a hands-on approach, Basic Music (MUSC 8) teaches students to read music and play the recorder. Our traditional Music

Appreciation course (MUSC 18) covers the western classical tradition from the Medieval to the present day. Students learn of great composers, the development of the orchestra, and how music and culture interact throughout history. In both courses, students attend live performances given on campus and write concert reports about their experiences.

World Music:
For music from the rest of the globe, our World Music course (MUSC 9) gives an overview of music from every continent. More advanced courses focus an entire semester on music from Asia (MUSC 119A), Africa (MUSC 119B), and Latin America (MUSC 119C). Again, concert reports are a fundamental assignment as students use our World Music Concert Series as a local resource.

Other Music:
Four upper division courses focus on unique aspects of our musical world. American Popular Music: Jazz (MUSC 118B) and the History of Rock Music (MUSC 118C) both explore the colorful history and current state of these genres. The American Musical Theater (MUSC 127) is a study of Broadway Musicals while American Society and Its Music (MUSC 129) covers the diversity of the American people as shown through many musical genres. Both 127 and 129 are Writing Intensive courses.

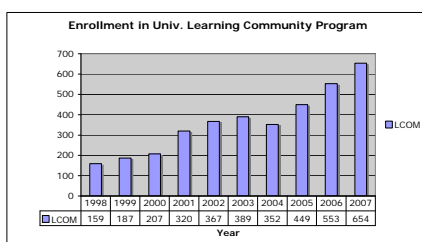
In all courses we try to lead students away from the comfort of their iPods and into the

concert hall. Performances by our music major ensembles provide much of these experiences and help the general student relate to serious music making. Our GE courses seek to lead thoughtful students into a broad understanding and appreciation of our complex and wonderful art.

The University First Year Experience Program

By Lynn M. Tashiro
Professor of Physics and
Director of University
Freshman Programs

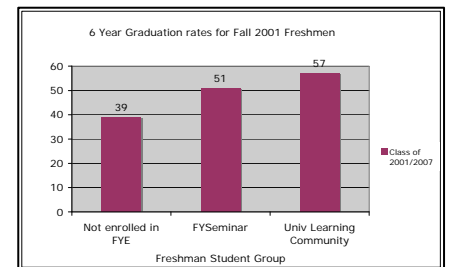
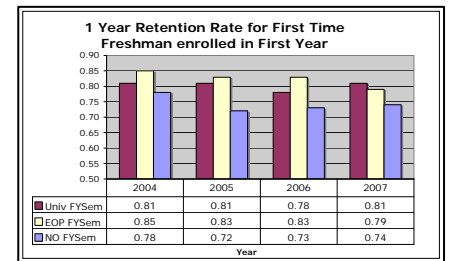
The First Year Experience (FYE) Program is one of the best kept secrets on campus! Perhaps it is because Sacramento State has historically been a transfer student campus with a relatively small population of freshman students. However, this statistic has been steadily changing and this Fall 2009 we welcomed the largest freshman class in the history of Sacramento State, 3076 freshmen. The FYE program began its existence in 1998 under the name of Freshman Programs; since then it has undergone steady expansion nearly doubling the number of faculty and students that participate in the last six years. The graph below illustrates the steady growth of the FYE University Learning Community program.



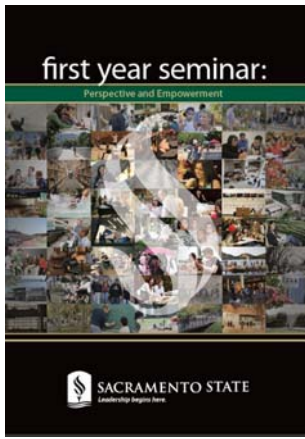
The First Year Experience Program consists of two overlapping components, the First Year Seminar course and the University Learning Community Program. The First Year (FY) Seminar course is a 3 unit Area E GE course that explores the process, meaning, rights, and responsibilities of becoming an educated person. Each section of FY Seminar enrolls a maximum of 25 students and in fall 2009 58 sections across 21 departments were offered. The University Learning Community Program consists of clusters of two or more courses that are thematically linked. Cohorts of 25 FY students enroll in all classes in a learning community. Some, but not all, Learning Communities contain an FY Seminar and all courses in the Learning Communities satisfy either a GE or academic major requirement.

The effectiveness of the FYE program has been documented using Office of Institutional Research data, which shows a consistent pattern of success over the past 10 years. Better retention rates and higher 6-year graduation rates characterize students who participate in FYE programs.

The data below shows that both EOP and non-EOP students who enroll in FY seminar are retained at a higher rate (between 4 and 11% higher). Also, the 6-year graduation rate is higher (between 12 and 18%) for students who participate in FYE!



The success of the FYE program is a result of the work done by faculty who teach the FY seminars and Learning Community courses and the student peer mentors who provide advising and help integrate our first year students into the Sacramento State Community. Exceptional faculty prepared to teach freshman students create learning environments that enable first year students to not only survive, but to thrive. Partnerships with Student Affairs, the Community Engagement Center, EOP, the Career Center, Learning Skills, and Associated Students Inc., provide the well-rounded integrated approach necessary to retain first year students. Most recently our collaborative efforts have produced a custom textbook, "First Year Seminar: Perspective and Empowerment" that is being used in all of our FY Seminars.



Although the focus of FYE is academic, co-curricular activities are an important part of the college experience. Funds from external grants allow FYE to provide at least one co-curricular activity for each FYE freshman cohort. Student participation in these activities is transforming Sacramento State from a “commuter campus” to an intellectual community that exists beyond the classroom walls. Examples of popular FYE co-curricular activities are the ASI team building “Ropes” and “Rafting” courses and the One Book Program.



FY Seminar students climb the high ropes.



Honors 1 Students and Associate Dean Greg Wheeler make their way down the American River.



FY Seminar students participating in the University One Book Program meet the Author, Julie Otsuka, of “When the Emperor Was Divine.”

Sadly, current and proposed budget cuts for next year are predicted to reduce the FYE program by 50%. A reduction in the number of students FYE serves will not only affect students in the Fall of 2010 but will continue to impact the retention and graduation rate of these student 6 years into the future. FYE has steadily grown to meet the priorities of the University Strategic Plan to “Implement a strategically focused, campus-wide effort to improve recruitment, retention, and graduation rates” and use “evidence-based decision-making” for “purposeful planning.” It is with much frustration that we struggle to keep the dismal budget from destroying a successful program that has taken a decade to build.

GE NEWSLETTER

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