

**California State University, Fullerton**  
**General Education Program Performance Review Site Visit**  
**Program Response**

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The GE PPR was based upon a site visit conducted on October 7, 2014. The external and internal reviewers, Drs. Lynn Mahoney and Lynn Sergeant, spent the day on the campus of CSU Fullerton and met with a variety of faculty and staff who have a role in General Education on our campus. Additionally, they reviewed the General Education Self-Study, GE Committee Annual reports (2001-2013), the 2008 GE Survey, UPS 411.200, UPS 411. 201 and information on Cal State Fullerton's web site, including the Academic Advisement Center's web pages. They submitted their Report to AVP AP Peter Nwosu on October 20, 2014.

In general, they commended the campus for the serious nature with which we have approached the creation, implementation and assessment of General Education. They commented that the campus community has made great strides over the past several years, despite challenges, to ensure a strong General Education program. They listed several hallmarks of our work, most notably the work conducted at the campus-wide conversation on General Education and its assessment during an Academic Senate/Academic Affairs retreat that took place in January 2014; the revisions to the GE Student Learning Outcomes; the creation of pilot thematic pathways at the lower division level in General Education; the administrative commitment to General Education demonstrated by the resources that have been allocated to create a new position of Director of Undergraduate Studies and General Education and the appointment of two Faculty GE Coordinator positions to facilitate pedagogical innovation and faculty development within the General Education Program; and the support to develop faculty and administrative expertise in General Education program development by sending a team to the AAC&U Institute on Integrative Learning and the Departments (July 2014), as well as a team consisting of faculty and Academic Programs personnel to the February 2014 AAC&U conference on General Education and Assessment.

Despite the good work that has been done, the reviewers believe that we must move forward on a number of issues that need immediate attention. In particular, they recommended that we focus on:

1. General Education, Disciplinary Knowledge, and the Degree Program
2. Support for General Education
3. General Education Program Assessment

**1. The relationship between general education, disciplinary knowledge, and the degree program.**

The current General Education system at CSUF is complex for students. In particular, compared to other CSUs, the notion of “double-counting” was highlighted as an area of concern by the reviewers as was the issue of “bottlenecks” within certain General Education categories. At CSUF there is a policy that there is to be no double counting of courses between the major and General Education. In reality, there are a number of exceptions to this policy. At this point in time, it is appropriate to revisit this policy and establish a consistent policy on double-counting General Education courses with major. We should look to what other CSUs have done in this area for guidance. The reviewers noted that by revising our double counting policy we will “...increase equity between native and transfer students and among the majors and colleges...” One solution to the issue of bottlenecks in certain General Education categories might be to call for the creation of more courses in GE categories that only have very few courses in them.

The reviewers indicated that it is perhaps time to examine the GE program at CSUF, especially its relationship to the degree programs. A number of CSUF faculty and Academic Programs staff members attended the 2014 Institute on Integrative Learning and the Departments, *Faculty Leadership for the 21st Century* hosted at CSUF. This presented a unique opportunity for faculty and Academic Programs personnel to engage in a student-learning based discussion of GE requirements that transcended the artificial boundaries between GE and disciplinary knowledge. The ideas generated by this conference can, and should, be further explored as a basis for thoughtful reform and redevelopment of the GE program at CSUF. The reviewers recommend that the Academic Senate Executive Committee and the General Education Committee work closely with the Office of Academic Programs to explore these ideas providing consultation opportunities with the campus as appropriate. We agree with such a and ask that the Academic Senate move these discussions forward early in the Spring 2015 semester.

Where is the coherence in our GE Program? The reviewers noted that we have made attempts recently at creating some of this coherence for students in both our lower and upper division General Education programs. At the lower division a GE Pathway pilot program was created for the 2014-2015 academic year and will include nearly 400 students. This is currently being expanded for the 2015-2016 academic year with hopes of including more than 2000 students. In addition, with some allowance for double counting, the upper division nine unit requirement presents the opportunity for coherence through either a Pathway, the opportunity to use one or more courses from those nine units towards the major or as the foundation for an academic minor. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences packaged courses together for incoming transfer students as a “pathway” to completing the nine unit upper division GE requirement as a pilot program in Fall 2014. The upper-division courses present departments, in particular, with a unique opportunity to articulate how their upper-division GE courses build on lower-division GE. In addition, these courses could potentially provide the campus with the opportunity to assess competencies “at or near graduation” as required by WASC.

## **2. General Education Program assessment**

The reviewers commended the campus for its work in the past on assessment in some GE areas. The work the campus did on assessing “writing across disciplines and over time” was well done. In addition, the General Education Committee is in the final stages of approving General Education Program Learning Goals mapped to the University-wide Student Learning Goals

(UPS 300.003), which are in turn mapped to the LEAP Outcomes. We now have a draft University Policy Statement that will be voted on by the Academic Senate during AY 2014-15. The new draft UPS is a single page in length and focused on program level goals and outcomes.

As the reviewers commented, the size of our General Education program means that we need to re-think how we assess our General Education courses, and potentially examine the magnitude of the program. The process that we now have for assessment, in their words, is not “sustainable or satisfactory.” In addition, it should be noted that there is a programmatic concern that we are not completely aligning our assessment of GE Outcomes with WASC Outcomes—either at the core competency level or at the “at or near graduation” point in time. Although courses are certified by the GE Committee, and recertification is currently underway for one GE category, there is little assessment of the learning outcomes being conducted. The reviewers recommend that the General Education Program work closely with the Assessment and Educational Effectiveness Committee to determine the best way to review General Education courses without creating an onerous workload for departments and faculty. The General Education program should look at the models created on other CSU campuses with large GE programs and evaluate the way in which they assess GE and see if that can be adapted for CSUF. One suggestion was that we should look at the assessment programs that are in place at other CSUs. Some programs no longer require that courses be recertified—accepting that once a course is certified for General Education it will continue to meet the standards of the Program. All courses within General Education are then required to complete assessment within the department program review.

### **3. GE support and infrastructure**

As the reviewers noted, there has been new support for General Education on the CSUF campus over the past two years. This support should allow for greater consistency from year to year in the management of General Education so that the faculty can focus on course certification and assessment of the General Education Learning Outcomes. For assessment in this area to be viable, it needs to be streamlined—direct, manageable, and not as massive as the GE program. The assessment infrastructure on campus has improved dramatically and there are now faculty in place to assist with assessment in the Colleges. The reviewers recommend that these liaisons assist with GE assessment as well as program assessment.

Advising is another program on the CSUF campus that is undergoing transformation. It is moving out from the centralized Academic Advising Center (AAC) hub to college based advising, retention and graduation specialists. This change presents an opportunity for General Education advising to move to the Departments and the Colleges so that it is closely aligned with major/departmental advising. Such a model will demonstrate to students (and faculty) the close relationship between the General Education program and their chosen major. As the reviewers suggest, the Academic Advising Center would play a primary role in the CSUF advising system as a hub for advisor training and support, as well as the location for advising undeclared students as well as for specifically identified groups of at-risk students who would benefit from university-wide advising. College and departmental faculty and staff advisors would receive training on GE Program advising and graduation requirements, as a condition of their work and integrate GE advising into their individual and group advising sessions. Within departments

advising will continue to occur in some departments via integrated advising in specific introductory courses.

## Summary

When the General Education program reflects connections across ways of knowing, seeing, and exploring across disciplines, and when integrated department, college, and university advising reaffirms those connections across GE and within the majors, students will better understand the role of general education in their chosen degree program.

Any changes we propose as a University community to reform our General Education program are necessarily constrained by EO 1065. This does not mean we cannot discuss the best way to provide and sustain General Education on our campus in a way that it supports students as they move through their degree programs. This model does not necessarily require that we cut General Education course offerings or the number of units in the General Education program.

Creating a coherent connection between courses in majors and courses in the general education by allowing clear university-wide rules on double-counting of general education courses within the major and by re-engaging faculty as advisors are important steps in supporting student success and improving time to degree. When students better understand the role of general education in their chosen degree program, through integrated department, college and university advising, they will be able to move beyond the vision of general education as a series of boxes to be checked in order to get to their major coursework.

We should now take steps to create a sustainable General Education assessment program, preferably one that builds on already-created Program Performance Review processes and infrastructures. The university should also begin a discussion that bridges the constructed line between General Education and departmental learning outcomes. An approach that better reflects students' holistic academic experience—that doesn't draw rigid boundaries between General Education and disciplinary learning—is likely to result in a sustainable structure and assessment program and enhance the quality of student learning in **both** GE courses and major courses.

As part of assessment, a longitudinal plan should be developed to assess writing—which we claim is embedded throughout the General Education program at CSU, Fullerton—using agreed upon tests, portfolios, capstones, internships and external validators. It is imperative for us to demonstrate through assessment that we have institutional intentionality toward calibrated measures of writing performance and proficiency. According to WASC standards, Written Communication is one of the five Core Competencies that must be embedded in GE and triangulated to assessments within the last 30-units at or before graduation. A deliberate plan for writing, which is a current CSUF focus, will not only meet WASC mandates, but will act as a litmus test for additional assessment strategies of the other four Core Competencies.

Finally, the support the University has provided to the administration of the General Education Program needs to continue. This includes the support that the University has demonstrated to Advising on campus by the hiring of retention and graduation specialists to be placed in each

college. These specialists will work with faculty to ensure that advising that integrates the degree program and the general education program takes place.