

California State University, Fullerton
General Education Program Performance Review Site Visit
Lynn Mahoney, PhD
Lynn Sargeant, PhD
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The Review Process

This review is based upon a site visit conducted on October 7, 2014. During the site visit, the review team met with the Associate Vice President for Academic Programs, Dr. Peter Nwosu, the Director of Academic Advisement, Dr. Bridget Driscoll, members of the Academic Senate Executive Committee, the Faculty GE Coordinators, Drs. Brent Foster and Irena Praitis, the Chair of the GE Committee, Dr. Greg Childers, the GE Senate Exec Liaison, Dr. Emily Bonney, members of the GE Committee, the Director of Assessment and Educational Effectiveness, Dr. Su Swarat, and the Director of Undergraduate Studies and General Education, Dr. Alison Wrynn. In addition, the team reviewed the following documents: 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.

It is clear from the site visit, annual reports and the Self-Study that the faculty, staff and administrators at Cal State Fullerton take general education very seriously and have put in countless hours to ensure a quality GE program. The faculty commitment to the work of the GE Committee is particularly noteworthy, especially as much of the work occurred during a period of tremendous budget challenges, administrative and leadership changes, and a year of furloughs.

During this period, Fullerton made impressive improvements to its GE program:

- Aligned its GE requirements with GE requirements in California's community colleges.
- Adopted revised GE student learning outcomes.
- Reviewed all GE courses for recertification.
- Maintained an inclusive process based on shared governance to manage the GE program.
- Continued to support faculty initiative by reviewing courses new to GE despite a growing committee workload and a year-long moratorium.
- Maintained a commitment to relatively small GE classes with a student: faculty ratio under 40.
- Streamlined the approval process, including creation of an electronic submission form.
- Created advising tools that enabled student understanding of changing GE requirements.
- Articulated student learning outcomes for developmental student advising
- Created a new position of Director of Undergraduate Studies and General Education.

- Created two new Faculty GE Coordinator positions to facilitate pedagogical innovation and faculty development within the General Education Program.
- Developed and launched two thematic pilot programs as a basis for assessing possibilities for broad General Education reform: GE Pathways to Success (lower division) and H&SS Pathways (upper division GE within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences).
- Began a campus-wide conversation on General Education and its assessment during an Academic Senate/Academic Affairs retreat scheduled for January 2015
- Committed to developing faculty and administrative expertise in General Education program development by sending a team consisting of members of the Senate Executive Committee and Academic Programs personnel 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.

The positive cumulative effect of these changes cannot be overstated. Greater alignment between CSU GE and community college GE facilitates transfer, reduces time-to-degree for transfer students and enables Fullerton to better meet its mission serving California's students. The intentional focus on student learning outcomes also represents a best practice in general education, reminding all that GE is not about "checking off boxes" but about engaging students in a liberal education which culminates in a well-educated, well-prepared citizenry. The persistence of relatively small classes during challenging budgetary times is particularly noteworthy.

The depth of commitment to shared governance and faculty participation in the oversight of general education is also praiseworthy, as is the attention to faculty and committee workload as all work to enhance student learning. Efforts to streamline the submission process and attention to the work involved with assessment are also highly commendable.

Cal State Fullerton's GE Program and those responsible for it have much of which to be proud. With the important work of realignment and revised student learning outcomes behind it, Fullerton now needs to turn its attention to the following areas that require attention, some immediately:

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

Given how much Cal State Fullerton has accomplished in GE, the reviewers are confident that success in these areas can be accomplished quickly.

1. General Education Program Assessment

Both the self-study and the site visit underscored the urgent need to effectively assess General Education at the program level. While laudable efforts have been made in previous years, most notably to assess the Core Competencies (Area A) and Area C.4 (Origins of World Civilizations) and D.2 (World Civilizations and Cultures), results have

been limited. In large part, this was because the initial development of GE Learning Goals (UPS 411.201) resulted in an overly detailed and cumbersome set of goals and outcomes that focused on the course and category level, rather than programmatic assessment. Initial efforts to assess GE based on these learning goals focused on Written Communication (A2). Assessing student writing “across disciplines and over time” is critical and was done well. Additionally, combining classroom assessment with NSSE data made for a comprehensive look at student writing instruction. Much of this success resulted from the use of a faculty learning community model—the bringing together of faculty to discuss instruction, create rubrics and assess student learning. While this approach seems to have been successful in Written Communication, it is not entirely clear if it was successful in Oral Communication (A1) or Critical Thinking (A3). Efforts to develop a similar assessment process for Scientific Inquiry and Quantitative Reasoning (B) or other more discipline-based GE categories (C and D) may be more challenging, although the History Department was able to pilot and roll out a successful assessment for C.2 and D.4 (World Civilizations).

After several attempts, it became clear to the campus that GE assessment based on UPS 411.201 would not be sustainable or satisfactory. In response, during AY 2013-2014, the Academic Senate, its General Education Committee, and Academic Programs launched a new effort to develop a sustainable GE assessment model that does not overwhelm faculty, staff and administrators. In Fall 2013, the newly constituted Assessment and Educational Effectiveness Committee began to develop a new University Policy Statement to guide assessment at CSUF. This policy, UPS 300.022, was approved in March 2014 and now serves as the guiding principle for all assessment on campus. In Fall 2013, the General Education Committee developed a set of GE Program Learning Goals mapped to the University-wide Student Learning Goals (UPS 300.003), which are in turn mapped to the LEAP Outcomes. The draft GE Program Learning Goals were then discussed at the 2014 Academic Senate/Academic Affairs retreat on General Education and Assessment. In Spring 2014, the GE committee took the feedback received at the retreat to revise the GE Program Learning Goals and to develop Student Learning Outcomes for each of those goals. The end result is a draft University Policy Statement that will be voted on by the Academic Senate during AY 2014-15. Unlike UPS 411.201, which is 14 pages in length and focused on category and course level assessment, the new draft UPS is a single page in length and focused on program level assessment.

Both reviewers agree that assessment models that emphasize faculty learning communities or extensive portfolio collection and evaluation are not easily adapted to large universities in which there are hundreds of GE courses taught by hundreds of faculty, many of who are part-time lecturers. While some universities have decided to restrict the number of courses approved for GE to enable this form of assessment, students and faculty described the wealth of courses as a strength at Cal State Fullerton (GE Survey, 2008). The reviewers encourage CSUF to reflect on the effort that would be required to implement the form of assessment used for Written Communication in GE categories that include multiple departments and many faculty and to develop, on the basis of UPS 300.022 and the draft GE Program Learning Goals, an assessment process for General Education that is appropriate to a large university with a large number of GE

courses, sustainable over time, and manageable in terms of faculty and staff workload. Consideration should be made to integrating GE assessment and the student learning outcome assessment that is currently occurring in departments. By building on existing assessment infrastructures, rather than creating a stand-alone GE assessment program, Cal State Fullerton may find its efforts more sustainable. In addition, such an assessment structure would facilitate the integration of the General Education curriculum into the degree programs housed within the departments.

2. GE support and infrastructure

- a) While the Self-Study noted that GE assessment would be shifted from the GE Committee to a recently created Committee on Assessment and Educational Effectiveness, subsequent policy and process changes have led to a more faculty and program-centered plan for assessment. Significant changes in the assessment infrastructure at CSUF during AY 2013-14 and AY 2014-15 included the hiring of a new Director of Assessment and Educational Effectiveness, the creation of a dedicated and adequately staffed Office of Assessment and Educational Effectiveness, and the creation of 10 faculty Assessment Liaison positions. Notably, the creation of the faculty liaison positions represents the first substantial recognition at the university level of the need to invest in faculty participation in the assessment process through the provision of release time or additional pay. These positions will provide critical support to assessment committees and departments as they create, teach and assess GE courses. By drawing from the Cal State Fullerton faculty ranks, they also create potential leadership positions for faculty. As the university works to align GE and departmental assessment, these positions could also lend support to the Performance Program Review process. Finally, managing assessment at a large university requires administrative support for senate committees.
- b) At present, General Education advising is broadly considered the responsibility of the Academic Advisement Center (AAC). The AAC works very hard to provide effective and efficient advising to CSUF's 32,000+ undergraduate students. In particular, the AAC works to support General Education advising as part of New Student Orientation (~4500 freshmen in Summer 2014) and to support Undeclared students. However, this advising model reinforces, rather than minimizes, the division between General Education and learning within the major. In addition, it places a substantial burden on the small number of professional staff advisors within the AAC. The reviewers suggest that CSUF revisit its advising model to minimize the distinction between major advising and GE advising and, ideally, move toward integrated degree program advising. In this model, professional staff advisors within the AAC would collaborate with college and departmental faculty and staff advisors to support student learning throughout their degree programs. The AAC would play a primary role in the CSUF advising system as a hub for advisor training and support. College and departmental faculty and staff advisors would receive training on GE Program advising as a condition of their work and integrate GE advising into their individual and group advising sessions. The AAC would continue to be a location for

advising for undeclared students as well as for specifically identified groups of at-risk students who would benefit from university-wide advising.

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

- a) Based on the GE Committee's Annual Reports it is clear that a large amount of time has been devoted to the issue of "double counting." In contrast to other universities within the CSU system, at CSUF there seems to be a very intentional and rigid "line" drawn between GE and major courses. Concerns about "double counting" have created and perpetuated inequities between programs and between native Cal State Fullerton students (those who started as freshmen) and transfers. High-unit majors (engineering, sciences, nursing, etc.) have GE exceptions to the 51 unit program. This has resulted in a complex set of exceptions that require a website devoted just to identifying what exceptions are allowed for which majors. Moreover, even that website conceals the complexity of the current system. The inequities in the current system are compounded by the fact that transfer students who arrive GE certified (and native freshmen who complete their GE at a community college) are allowed much more double counting than native students who complete their GE at Cal State Fullerton. This adds even more complexity to the GE program and inherently privileges transfer students. The reviewers urge Cal State Fullerton to revise its Double Counting policies to increase equity between native and transfer students and among the majors and colleges, to focus on Student Learning Goals and Outcomes, and to emphasize the totality and unity of the degree program, including both General Education and major requirements.
- b) At 51 units, the Cal State Fullerton program is one of the larger GE programs in the state. In part, this reflects both the history and the values of the campus. Nevertheless, the reviewers encourage Cal State Fullerton to reflect on ways to more effectively integrate General Education and disciplinary student learning outcomes to enhance both the development of the skills associated with a liberal education and mastery of a discipline. While some breadth is a hallmark of a good GE program, the integration of GE skills and disciplinary content, particularly at the upper division, provides students with an excellent opportunity for, in AACU's words, "synthesis and advanced accomplishment." Cal State Fullerton's hosting of the 2014 Institute on Integrative Learning and the Departments, *Faculty Leadership for the 21st Century* 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. Because the General Education Committee is already responsible for key tasks essential to maintaining the program, including course review and recertification, the reviewers suggest the creation of an *ad hoc* committee on General Education and the Degree Programs. Such a committee might include representatives from the Academic Senate Executive Committee, faculty with particular expertise in General Education, and key personnel from Academic Programs, such as the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Faculty GE Coordinators.

- c) In addition, some mention was made in the self-study of bottleneck courses in some GE classes, including human anatomy & physiology, math and political science. While much of this is likely driven by the consequences of years of budget cuts, some of it might also be driven by the burden placed on some of these courses (particularly biology and math) by being both GE and high-demand lower division prerequisite courses for STEM and health-related majors. As budget and facilities allow, the campus should seek to address these challenges by curricular changes or through scheduling more sections in bottleneck areas.
- d) Finally, breadth is a hallmark of general education. The long list of courses available to Cal State Fullerton students seems to be appreciated by students and faculty (GE Survey, 2008); the opportunity for students to explore new areas of knowledge is particularly valued by faculty. Missing, at present, is a sense of the coherence of the program, of the difference between lower- and upper-division GE, and of the relationship between the General Education program to the degree program as a whole and to learning in the disciplines. All Cal State Fullerton students are required to complete nine units of upper-division GE. In theory, this both creates a shared intellectual framework for all CSUF students and presents a unique opportunity to distinguish a Cal State Fullerton graduate. However, at present the possibilities of this requirement are not well developed. Initial efforts to create integration, such as the H&SS upper division GE Pathways pilot project, need further development and support. Opportunities abound to develop advanced skills, build tangible GE pathways, and integrate GE skills and advanced disciplinary knowledge through this requirement. 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 to develop the “well-rounded citizen, not only of the region and the nation but the world as well” as articulated in Cal State Fullerton’s mission.

Summary

Cal State Fullerton’s commitment to general education is extremely laudable, as evidenced by the Self-Study and the Annual Reports of the GE Committee. Equally praise worthy is the Academic Advisement Center’s efforts to make the program and its requirements easily understood by students. Realignment and the focus on student learning outcomes, in particular, give the program the potential to be a benchmark program for other CSUs and universities. With this hard work behind it, the university should now take steps to create a sustainable GE 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 GE and departmental learning outcomes. An approach that better reflects students’ holistic academic experience—that doesn’t draw rigid boundaries between GE 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.