

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

# Liberal Studies Program Performance Review

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## Dean's Summary Report and Recommendations

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**February 8, 2012**

**Dean's Summary Report and Recommendations  
Program Performance Review for the  
Liberal Studies Department**

**B.A. and Minor in Liberal Studies**

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During the 2011-12 academic year, the Department of Liberal Studies, under the leadership of Dr. Jim Hofmann, Department Chair, engaged in the program performance review process by conducting a self-study that is summarized in the enclosed report. In November, 2011, two external reviewers, Dr. Dan O'Connor from CSU Long Beach and Dr. Michael Neubauer from CSU Northridge, and one on-campus reviewer, Dr. Jochen Burgtorf from the CSUF History Department, conducted a day long site visit. After reviewing the program's self-study report and interviewing the department chair, faculty members, the college dean, students and others, the reviewers prepared a joint report. [Note: The typical team of reviewers for an HSS PPR will have at least one reviewer from outside the CSU, usually from a UC campus; since UC campuses rarely, if ever, have Liberal Studies Departments, we opted for a review team with only CSU reviewers.]

To provide a context for this summary and recommendations, a 7-year history of the department's enrollments and other benchmark statistics are provided below:

Table 1.  
Liberal Studies FTES, FTEF and SFR from 2004-05 through 2010-11

LBST Year	FTES			FTEF Allocation*	SFR Budgeted*
	Target*†	Actual*	% Target		
2004-2005	391	385.4	98.6%	16.6	23.6
2005-2006	365	365.3	100.1%	15.2	24.0
2006-2007	370	370.3	100.1%	15.3	24.2
2007-2008	339	339.2	100.1%	15.3	22.2
2008-2009	325	301.1	92.6%	15.2	23.5
2009-2010	336	312.7	93.1%	12.6	23.0
2010-2011	298	281.9	94.6%	12.9	24.1

\* Data acquired from IRAS

† Note: The source of the target data for AY 08-09, 09-10, and 10-11 is H&SS Dean's Office archives.

The Liberal Studies Department was at its enrollment and FTEF peak at the time of the last Program Performance Review in 2004-05. Like Liberal Studies Departments in CSUs across the state, FTES numbers have steadily declined over the past seven years. This parallels the shrinking job markets for teachers during this current economic downturn.

Declining enrollments have resulted in decreasing faculty positions. In 2011-12, the department FTEF allocation is 11.0 despite there being 12 full-time faculty in the department. The department response to this reduction in faculty positions has been to “lend out” faculty to the Honors Program and to other departments. This solution to a temporary state of affairs is a good one as it preserves jobs and allows the department to stay within its faculty budget. Historical trends reveal that the demand for teachers is cyclical, and since the majority of the Liberal Studies majors plan to become elementary teachers, the number of Liberal Studies majors rises and declines following that same cycle. Approximately 20% of the roughly 300,000 current California teachers are 55 years old or older; as teachers retire, and the economy recovers, the demand for teachers will once again spark student enthusiasm for the Liberal Studies degree. I emphasize this because I want to be clear that the declining numbers do not represent short-comings inherent in this department or the degree program.

While the FTES achieved by the department declined by roughly 25% during the past seven years, the number of majors declined by roughly 50%. The enrollment slide did not match the reduction in the number majors largely due to the department’s nimble response in making changes in the balance of the core major-only classes and General Education classes. The self study shows that the number of sections devoted to Liberal Studies core classes decreased over the past several years while the number of GE sections increased. This speaks to the excellent leadership and management of this well-run department.

The table below summarizes the number of students declared as Liberal Studies majors, Liberal Studies minors, and the number of degrees awarded.

Table 2.  
 Number of Majors, Minors, and Degrees Awarded

Year	Majors AY Headcount		Minors AY Headcount	# of Degrees Awarded to Primary Majors	# of Degrees Awarded to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Majors
	Primary Majors	Secondary Majors			
2004-2005	1526.0	0	6	434	1
2005-2006	1397.5	5	5.5	352	4
2006-2007	1270.5	6.5	4	340	3
2007-2008	1200.5	3	3	330	0
2008-2009	1076.5	6	4	266	2
2009-2010	923.0	6.5	3.5	260	0
2010-2011	773.0	9	3.5	Not Available	Not Available

\*Source: IRAS website; annualized number of majors and minors

The number of students declaring a Liberal Studies major consistently decreased through the review period and the bottom may not yet have been reached. Per Institutional Research and Analytical Studies (IRS), there were even fewer majors in fall 2011 (701) than in 2010-11 (773). As can be seen in Table 2, the number of degrees awarded each year has declined to a similar degree. Few students identify Liberal Studies as a second major and very few students enroll in the minor. The IRAS website does not distinguish between students in the Elementary Education Plan and students in the Interdisciplinary Thematic Plan and so it is difficult to ascertain if there has been a change in the balance between these two tracks in the major.

### **Department Mission, Goals and Environment**

Since the last Program Performance Review, the department has streamlined its mission statement and created student learning goals and outcomes. The mission statement and learning goals are presented below.

#### ***Mission Statement:***

The mission of the Department of Liberal Studies is to provide its students with an educational experience that promotes interdisciplinary knowledge of major ideas in the humanities, arts, natural sciences, and social sciences, and advances critical reasoning and effective writing skills.

#### ***Goals and Learning Outcomes:***

##### ***1. Written Communication***

**Outcome a.** Write clearly and correctly.

**Outcome b.** Analyze and present ideas and subject matter coherently.

##### ***2. Knowledge***

**Outcome a.** Identify significant figures, concepts, themes and developments in the arts and humanities.

**Outcome b.** Identify significant figures, concepts, themes and developments in the social sciences.

**Outcome c.** Identify significant figures, concepts, themes and developments in the natural sciences.

##### ***3. Analysis***

**Outcome a.** Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the arts and humanities.

**Outcome b.** Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the social sciences.

**Outcome c.** Compare and contrast significant concepts, themes and arguments from the natural sciences.

##### ***4. Interdisciplinarity***

**Outcome a.** Explain interdisciplinary connections among and within the three subject areas: arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences.

## **Program Description and Analysis**

### ***Program Changes***

The department has submitted a proposal for a graduate program which has been tentatively approved by the university Graduate Committee and is on track for Academic Senate approval in spring 2012. While I support the program proposal and am hopeful that it will be successful, we must carefully consider when the program will open given the high costs of running a graduate program.

### ***Degree Structure***

The Liberal Studies degree consists of 27 upper division units taken within the Liberal Studies Department and 24 units that are generally earned through classes offered by other departments. All students take a carefully organized sequence of courses that first lay a foundation in the arts and humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences and then provide in depth exploration in each of these areas. The structure of the core Liberal Studies curriculum strongly supports the learning goals as seen in the curriculum map on page 8 of the self study. Students in the Elementary Education Plan (EEP) take 24 units from a list of classes that further broaden their knowledge in subject matter relevant to the elementary classroom and that relate directly to the California Subject Matter Standards for K-12 classrooms (e.g. classes in grammar, literature, mathematics, science education, arts education). Students in the Interdisciplinary Thematic Plan (ITP) select 21 units in consultation with a faculty advisor and 3 units are devoted to the senior project. The ITP in Liberal Studies is one of very few opportunities at CSUF for students to shape their education toward a specific objective.

According to the self study, the department plans to restructure both the EEP and the ITP so that students will take 30 units within the department, reducing the number taken outside the department to 21. There are also plans to restructure the ITP by allowing students a choice between a second senior seminar or completing a senior project.

Because the degree requirements are all set at the upper division level, students entering the university as freshmen do not have any classroom opportunities to connect with other students in the major or the faculty. Similarly, transfer students do not have experience in Liberal Studies classes while at the community college. This department is quite dependent on high school and community college counselors to direct students to the major.

### ***Demand and Enrollment Trends***

The Liberal Studies Department has done an excellent job managing enrollment. At the time of the last Program Performance Review, the vast majority of the department enrollments came from Liberal Studies majors enrolled in Liberal Studies core courses. Since that time, the department has developed and obtained university approval for new

GE courses at the freshman level. As can be seen in the table on page 9 of the self study, the number of GE sections and the corresponding FTES gained from GE has steadily increased throughout the period under review while the number of Liberal Studies core sections and corresponding FTES has decreased. If the department had not prepared for this downward turn in majors, we would have a significant enrollment problem. As mentioned earlier, while the number of majors has decreased by 50%, the FTES has only decreased by 25%. I attribute this to the chair's careful attention to enrollments and the nimble shifting of the schedule from almost all core major classes to a balance of major and GE classes.

The need to diversify the student population in the major is ever more urgent. As noted in the last Program Performance Review, the department is too heavily dependent on students who plan to be elementary teachers. The department has identified promoting specific advising tracks within the ITP as a priority and I agree that this is an important action to take.

### **Documentation of Student Academic Achievement and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

At the time of the last Program Performance Review, the department had a standing assessment committee, had established learning goals and employed a variety of means of assessing program learning outcomes that included both direct and indirect measures. The department has continued to make excellent progress in advancing its assessment program. Data collection has focused on the first learning goal, Written Communication, with faculty applying a common rubric to an assignment embedded in senior seminars. Results indicate that students who major or minor in Liberal Studies possess good writing skills and are able to analyze and present ideas clearly and coherently.

The department has made other significant advancements in the area of assessment. For example, they have developed a curriculum map that clearly shows that each goal is introduced, developed and mastered within courses required for all majors. They have also developed an assessment schedule to collect data through embedded assignments that address each of the learning goals over the next four years. At the end of the spring semester each year, the faculty will review the data and discuss the need for adjustments where necessary. I applaud these efforts.

### **Faculty**

Currently there are twelve full-time faculty in the department—one full professor, seven associate professors, three assistant professors and one full-time lecturer. Two faculty transitions occurred within the last year—the retirement of Dr. Ron Clapper, former Liberal Studies Program chair, and the transfer of Dr. Brad Starr from .5 in Liberal Studies/.5 in Comparative Religion to 100% in Comparative Religion. Professor Starr has been an important part of the department for many years, serving as the first chair when the Liberal Studies Program transitioned to the Liberal Studies Department. Per the self study, the next hire should be in the area of arts and humanities. While it is not feasible to hire during this time of depressed enrollments, it is good that the department has established plans for when the time is appropriate to hire.

The Liberal Studies faculty exemplifies collegiality, excellence in scholarly activity, and dedication to students. This is a model department with excellent leadership.

### **Reviewers' Report**

The reviewers' report is filled with praise for the department, faculty, and the degree program. They commended the faculty for the strong curriculum found in the Liberal Studies core classes, the Elementary Education Plan and the Interdisciplinary Thematic Plan. They observed that the students were intellectually engaged with the core content. The faculty have been exceptionally successful in developing a strong interdisciplinary program—something many departments aspire to but few achieve with such success. The reviewers note that the department has developed a strong assessment plan and encourage them to pay particular attention to the “closing the loop” step in the assessment cycle. The reviewers made several excellent, concrete recommendations that I encourage the faculty to consider and implement. Some of these appear in my recommendations below.

The reviewers' report rightly observed that the administrative support for this department is insufficient and that this results in an inordinate amount of work falling to the chair. I intend to correct this by making it a priority to replace the Administrative Support Coordinator as soon as possible. We will make every effort to provide a temporary Administrative Support Coordinator immediately and hire a permanent employee by the beginning of the fall semester.

### **Dean's Recommendations**

The faculty in the Department of Liberal Studies are to be commended for their accomplishments since the last Program Performance Review. Despite the challenge of declining numbers of majors, the department continues to weather the current downturn by adapting to the changing environment in a variety of positive and effective ways. I make the following recommendations in the spirit of contributing to the department's continuing health and vigor.

- 1. *Propose criteria that signal the department is ready to support the graduate program once it is approved.*** By their very nature, graduate programs require additional resources and generally rely on healthy enrollments at the undergraduate level to counterbalance the small seminars. I would like the department to propose a set of criteria that, when met, signal the department is ready to open the graduate program. Criteria that come to my mind, for example, include having an FTEF allocation that exceeds the number of full time faculty and meeting target for 3-4 semesters in a row. *I would like these proposed criteria communicated to me via memo by the end of the spring 2012 semester.*
- 2. *Consider ways to incorporate the preparation of teachers into the curriculum culture.*** I suspect this will not be a popular recommendation but I believe that it is important to intentionally integrate the preparation of teachers into at least one or two required core courses. The reviewers suggested that copies of the California K-8 Subject Matter Standards be purchased and made available in the common area where students congregate. This is an excellent recommendation. I would go

further and recommend that faculty teaching one of the introductory core courses use at least a few minutes at the beginning of the course to talk about the California Subject Matter Standards and the importance of subject matter knowledge for teachers, make reference to the goals of the Liberal Studies degree program and why these goals serve the needs of the future teacher so well. I am not suggesting that faculty discuss pedagogy; rather, I suggest that faculty help these future teachers understand why Liberal Studies is the ideal undergraduate preparation for teachers. It is my hope that this will have two effects: 1) It may help students better understand the relevance of the subjects they study in the major, and 2) It may reduce the number of students who transfer to other majors (most notably, Child and Adolescent Studies).

3. ***Enhance the department's relationships with community colleges.*** Since there are no Liberal Studies departments at our local community colleges, this is not an easy task. I recommend that the department take advantage of university activities that promote relationships with community colleges. For example, the Academic Advisement Center holds an annual conference for community college counselors—the department should seize any opportunity to participate in this conference. Similarly, the Center for Careers in Teaching (CCT) is a critical bridge between CSUF and the local community colleges. The department should make every effort to maintain a strong relationship with the CCT. The department should maintain current, attractive promotional materials that can be distributed to community college counseling centers.
4. ***Increase the number of Interdisciplinary Thematic Plan (ITP) students.*** The self study identifies the following as a department priority: “Promote specific advising tracks for the Interdisciplinary Thematic Plan version of the major using a revamped departmental website and other outlets.” I concur with this plan. Further, I recommend that the department develop a 5-7 minute promotional presentation that could be recorded in a podcast and sent to all students registered for the Liberal Studies freshman level GE classes and/or presented in person. The department could work with the Academic Advisement Center to promote the major to undeclared students. *I would like the department to develop an action plan that outlines what strategies it will use in 2012-13 to promote the ITP as well as a plan to assess the effectiveness of these strategies. Please include this action plan as part of the 2011-12 annual report.*
5. ***Continue the excellent progress in assessment.*** The department has achieved several key objectives in its assessment program since the last PPR. Clear, succinct learning goals and outcomes have been identified, a curriculum map developed, data collected and analyzed, and modifications made on the basis of what was learned. The department has focused its efforts on the goal of excellence in writing. As a result of its assessment data, the department has elected to use a common textbook across all sections of the writing course and in all of the core courses. I encourage the faculty to continue their efforts and move on to assess the other identified goals according to the schedule outlined in the self study.