

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, EAST BAY**

**DESIGNATION CODE: 2007-08 CAPR 18**

**DATE SUBMITTED: April 7, 2008**

**TO:** The Academic Senate

**FROM:** The Committee on Academic Planning and Review (CAPR)

**SUBJECT:** Five-Year Program Review for General Education

**PURPOSE:** For Action by the Academic Senate

**ACTION REQUESTED:** Acceptance of the Five-Year Program Review of General Education and approval of the continuation of the program

**Executive Summary**

The General Education program serves nearly all undergraduates on campus and encompasses up to 40% of a students undergraduate curriculum. A prominent feature of the General Education program at CSUEB is the First Year G.E. Learning Communities which have received national recognition. These learning communities consist of a set of thematically linked and integrated classes that students take within a cohort model during their freshman year. The aim of these learning communities is to help students just leaving high school to make the transition to a large urban university by establishing a group of peers who interact throughout the year. Additionally, thematically linked courses provide a coherent learning experience that can model the complex problems these students will likely face when they leave the classroom. A cornerstone of this model is the faculty who teaches within the program, actively advises these young students, and collaborates to create a sequence of cross disciplinary integrated courses.

The main conclusion of CAPR's review was that the program was not garnering the necessary institutional support needed to maintain and grow a high quality program. Therefore CAPR made several recommendations regarding resources allocation, including *i*) developing a method of compensating faculty for the extra work involved in teaching in the first year program, *ii*) creating a mechanism that leads to greater faculty involvement in the direction of the General Education program and provides greater peer support for the director, and *iii*) recommending that the Associate Vice President of Academic Programs and Graduate Studies evaluate the staffing needs of the program.

**CAPR RECOMMENDATION FOR CONTINUATION OF THE PROGRAM**

CAPR recommends the continuation of the General Education Program with the expectation that the program will work with the administration to find additional resources to support the recommendations of this committee and will report on those findings in the annual reports submitted between five year reviews. The date of the next Five-Year Review is 2011 – 2012.

## **CAPR Report**

### **1. BACKGROUND**

#### **1.1 Overview description of program**

The General Education (GE) program serves nearly all students on campus and is designed to supplement the depth of study found in the major with a breadth of study in a number of diverse disciplines. The general goal of the GE program is to prepare students to be active, contributing citizens of their local, state, national and international communities. The program constitutes 40% (72 units) of a student's undergraduate coursework, on a par with the major. Many of the academic programs on campus contribute to providing GE coursework. The requirements of the GE program at CSUEB broadly mirror those found at other institutions: students take courses in Communication in the English Language; Natural Sciences and Mathematics; Fine Arts and Letters; Social Sciences; Performing Arts and Activities; and General Studies.

Unique features of the GE program at CSUEB are the First Year Learning Communities. Entering freshman join a cohort of 30 – 100 students who take a common set of classes throughout their first year. These communities, also known as clusters, consist of thematically linked and integrated classes in humanities, social sciences, and the sciences. Additionally, classes in communication, English, information literacy, and general studies are part of the cluster. Students participating in their first year learning communities complete one third of their total general education requirements. The benefit of these communities is that they help students just leaving high school to make the transition to a large urban university by establishing a group of peers who see each other in several classes throughout the week and all year long. Additionally, thematically linked courses provide a coherent learning experience that can model the complex problems those students will likely face when they leave the classroom. This program has received national attention, having been selected to participate in both the National Learning Communities Project and a national study by researchers at Syracuse University. The study examines barriers to and support for students attempting to achieve a baccalaureate degree.

The present incarnation of the GE program is a result of major changes made by the academic senate in 1996-97. As a result of a WASC review that concluded that the program lacked “clarity, relevance, and meaning” resulting in “little sense of a unified and integrated academic experience for undergraduates,” the Committee on Instruction and Curriculum (CIC) led a campus wide effort to reexamine the program. One of the major outcomes was the development of the cluster system, which originally encompassed both the freshman and sophomore years. These changes were instituted in 1997-98 and were reviewed by CIC in 2002-03. At that point, the sophomore clusters were eliminated, an upper division science GE requirement was added, and a CIC subcommittee was created to develop learning outcomes for all GE requirements. The committee also strongly recommended that each cluster show collaboration and have a plan for integrated learning that was supposed to be supported by workshops for instructional faculty with stipends, administrative and clerical support, enhanced teaching

units, and PT&R credit. CIC reviewed the program's educational effectiveness as part of the WASC process in January 2007.

### **1.2 Overview of the documents submitted to CAPR**

As required, the report to CAPR included:

- A Self – Study
- A plan for the program for 2007 – 2011
- Report of the Outside Reviewer
- Program response to the outside Reviewer's Report

## **2. FIVE-YEAR PROGRAM REVIEW/SELF-STUDY**

### *Summary of last review*

This is the first time that CAPR has reviewed the GE program. CIC also reviewed the program in Jan 2007. The major program changes resulting from that review were the elimination of sophomore clusters, the addition of an upper division science requirement, and the recommendation that learning outcomes be developed for all GE requirements.

### *Assessment*

The program has made significant strides in measuring student learning over the past five years. In 2005-06, faculty pilot-tested strategies for direct measurement of student learning in a number of areas: lower division sciences; humanities; and social sciences. Below, the results of assessment efforts are summarized for the different GE requirements.

- Oral Communication (A1) – no assessment results.
- Composition in English (A2) – student writing is the most thoroughly assessed component of general education. Entering students scoring less than 550 on the SAT exam are required to take the English Placement Test. A little less than half of the students taking this exam require remediation. The Writing Skills Test (WST) serves as a useful assessment tool. Historically, students who go through their first year learning communities pass the WST at a higher rate than the overall student body. However, in 2005 students in the learning communities did not outperform the general student body. This may be correlated to the fact that collaborations between composition instructors and discipline instructors in the freshman learning communities had been almost completely severed by 2005, due to the lack of institutional support for instructor collaboration and planning. Writing is also assessed at the end of a student's freshman year with the College Student Experience Questionnaire. The responses of students completing their first year learning communities indicate that they are significantly more aware of the requirements for sound academic writing and have more writing experience than their national comparison group.
- Critical Thinking (A3) – No direct measures of student development in their critical thinking are available. Students responding to the College Student Experiences Questionnaire report about the same confidence in their critical thinking skills as the national average.

- Natural Sciences (B) – In the 2005-06 academic year, a faculty learning community was created to design a procedure for assessing student learning outcomes in the sciences. A rubric was developed in the fall and piloted in the winter and spring. The data the faculty report demonstrate that most of the students taking science courses achieve the learning described by the rubric's indicators for the learning outcome. However, approximately one quarter of the students did not reach an acceptable level of performance on one of the indicators.
- Quantitative Reasoning (B4) – Entering students scoring less than 550 on the SAT exam are required to take the Entry Level Math exam. Of the students that take this exam, 40-50% requires remediation, which is in line with the CSU-wide average. There are a variety of classes that students can take to fulfill this requirement. Only one of these courses assesses students' quantitative reasoning skills. Students report gains similar to their national counterparts in their abilities to reason using mathematical concepts and methods on the College Student Experiences Survey.
- Humanities (C) – In the 2005-06 academic year, a faculty learning community was created to design a procedure for assessing student learning outcomes in the humanities. A rubric was developed in the fall and piloted in the winter and spring. As was seen in the sciences, most students demonstrated learning described in the rubric for the learning outcome assessed. Again, about one quarter of the students did not reach an acceptable level of performance on one of the indicators.
- Social Sciences (D) – In the 2005-06 academic year, a faculty learning community was created to design a procedure for assessing student learning outcomes in the social sciences. A rubric was developed in the fall and piloted in the winter and spring. As above, most students demonstrated learning described in the rubric for the learning outcome assessed. Once again, about one quarter of the students did not reach an acceptable level of performance on one of the indicators.
- Information Literacy (G4) – Most students fulfill this requirement by taking Library 1210, which is a part of the first year learning communities. Students are given a pre- and post-test on their ability to locate, evaluate, and use information. Significant improvement is observed each year.

### *Program Outcomes*

The goals of the General Education Program are: to improve lower-division students' academic success, increase retention, provide the skills and attitudes required for a life of learning, and help freshman students connect to each other, the faculty, and the university. The progress made toward achieving these goals is outlined below.

- Building Community – The lower-division general education clusters are designed to build community among students and connect them with the faculty. It is worth noting that freshman make up less than 10% of the undergraduates at CSUEB, and the average age of a freshman is 18, while the average age of the undergraduate student body is 27. Students finishing the clusters were surveyed about their experiences with faculty. The results suggest that CSUEB students connect with their faculty at or above the national average and that the freshman

component of the General Education program has been successful in supporting students' connections to the faculty.

- Diversity – Assessment of the degree of support given to developing an awareness of the complex issues related to diversity is based, in part, on self-reported data. Students were asked on the College Student Experiences Questionnaire about their awareness of issues related to human differences and similarities, their experiences of others unlike themselves, and the social, educational and political issues related to the diversity of humans. The data suggest that CSUEB students are far more active in making connections with those who differ from them than their cohort around the nation. Given a majority minority campus population, these data are not surprising. The data also show that the University needs to provide more opportunities for students to move beyond acquaintance to serious engagement with each other on issues that arise from our diversity. Additionally, in 2005-06, a Faculty Learning Community designed a rubric to assess student learning on one of the student learning outcomes for the required course examining the contributions of cultural groups and women to US history and culture. These data indicate clearly that a significant majority of students taking courses that emphasize the contributions of women and minority groups to US history and culture achieve the learning described by the indicators of the learning outcome.
- Retention – The rate at which students return to CSUEB in their 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> years after initially enrolling has been tracked since the early nineties. Second year retention was nearly 80% in the early nineties and trended downward until 1998. Fall 1998 was the first year of CSUEB's freshman learning communities and also the year that the CSU required students to enroll in and pass remedial courses during their first year of college. In subsequent years, the retention rate has trended upward, and is now above 80% for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year retention. Third and fourth year retention rates follow similar trends.

#### *Comparative review*

The general education requirements at CSUEB are consistent with those mandated by the State (Executive Order 595).

#### *Other program achievements*

CSUEB's General Education program has been a national model for first year learning communities. The program was selected as one of fifty campuses to participate in the National Learning Communities Project. Additionally, in the spring of 2003, the campus was selected as one of twenty-five Universities to participate in a study to examine the barriers to and support for students attempting to achieve a baccalaureate degree. In this study CSUEB was further singled out as one of five campuses to be selected as a case study. Furthermore, the Director of the GE program has served as a resource faculty to help faculties at other colleges and universities develop learning community structures that serve their students.

### **3. OUTSIDE REVIEWERS REPORT & THE DEPARTMENTS RESPONSE**

#### **3.1 Outside Reviewer's Report**

Dr. Emily H. Wughalter, Professor of Kinesiology at San José State University, served as the outside reviewer. Dr. Wughalter was the Director of the Metropolitan University Scholar Experience Program and Associate Dean for First Year Experience in the Office of Undergraduate Studies at San José State University from 2001-2007. She visited the campus on April 20, 2007 and met with campus faculty, staff, students, and administrators involved in the General Education program.

Dr Wughalter provided a thorough review of the program which she summarized by saying "...the General Education and First Year Program has implemented an outstanding experience and created an integrated and supportive general education curriculum and first year for CSUEB students. The assessment data of student learning outcomes support the goals of the program and the University. The value of the General Education Clusters must be embraced by the whole institution in their general commitment, and through adequate resource allocation." Her detailed recommendations for the program are summarized below.

#### *Institutional Support*

- The University should make general education a priority with increased attention from the President, Provost, Deans, and faculty.
- The University should provide sufficient resources to continue to implement national assessment instruments as well as assess local issues at CSUEB that may not be assessed by national surveys.
- The general education and first year program needs better printed and web-based information explaining the program to students and faculty alike. The first year program is a gem at CSUEB and should be marketed by the University as such.

#### *Faculty Support*

- Increase interest and competition to teach in the general education program by making it attractive to full time tenure track faculty.
- Provide incentives for full time tenure-track faculty participating in the General Education Cluster program, e.g., a one course release after participating in 4 clusters; additional stipends to faculty participating in a General Education Cluster and General Studies Seminars because extra hours are needed for the integration of cluster courses, and for on-going advisement and mentoring of students through graduation.
- Reduce cluster class size to no more than 30 students per class.
- Increase faculty recruitment strategies; possibly develop a faculty recruitment brochure on the benefits of teaching General Education Cluster courses, including: recruiting majors; designing and teaching a course with a specific theme; and faculty development involving new pedagogical strategies.
- Enhance the value of teaching in a General Education Cluster by writing it into PTR and providing feedback about participation especially for assistant and associate professors in the form of official written acknowledgement.

### *Curricular Support*

#### ***Clusters***

- Increase the number of full time tenure track faculty teaching in general education clusters
- Increase the integration of co-curricular elements with first year activities
- Investigate a better system of e-portfolio other than using the Blackboard component and extend the e-portfolio from entrance to graduation
- Re-link the critical thinking course to the Cluster in the third quarter
- Revive sophomore clusters as an option; review student interest and impact

#### ***General Studies – The Freshman Seminar***

- Develop better connections among General Education Clusters and the General Studies Seminar for improved integration.
- Provide incentives for graduate students teaching the General Studies Seminar as the course load is larger than a regular load.
- Rethink the general studies requirement: do all students need all three quarters of general studies skills?

### *Staff Support*

- Elevate the position of Director of General Education and First Year Programs to a management position.
- Add a staff member SSP level to assist the Director of General Education and First Year Programs in a variety of activities, possibly including the scheduling of clusters and the implementation of new recruitment strategies.
- Elevate the current staff support from SSP II to SSP III to make it equal with professional advisors, to match specifically the job the incumbent is now being asked to perform, and for the skills the incumbent continues to develop and implement.
- Add a staff member to support the Program Director.

### **3.2 Response to the outside reviewer's Report**

*Institutional Support:* The program agrees with the reviewer and looks forward to working with faculty and administrators to accomplish these goals.

*Faculty Support:* The program agrees with each of these recommendations. Despite the success of the freshman year program, the administration, during the first eight years of the program, did not provide on-campus support for the value of the clusters. Departments, protecting teaching in the major during a time of faculty loss, delegated lower division GE classes to their lecturers. There is little incentive for full-time faculty to teach GE courses since there is no apparent value given for teaching non-majors. Moreover, teaching in the freshman learning communities takes more time and effort to achieve the degree of collaboration required for the learning community to gel. That extra work, teaching freshmen and working with colleagues, has, until this year, been uncompensated and unrecognized as valuable university work. This year, the faculty who

participated in summer cluster workshops created integrated course plans that integrate learning in all the courses in the cluster and were compensated with a \$1000 stipend.

*Curricular Support (Clusters):* The program agrees that tenure track faculty is vital to the success of the cluster program. This past summer, workshops were held in order to increase co-curricular elements within the clusters. At this time, the Blackboard portfolio is what is free, protected, and will stay with the student. Other software options will be investigated. This year, GE will pilot a third quarter linked Critical Thinking course. Reviving sophomore clusters is an on-going issue of interest on campus and will be determined by the faculty.

*Curricular Support (General Studies):* General Studies' instructors were involved in the summer cluster workshops in an effort to establish better integration within the cluster, as suggested. General Studies' classes provide one of the only teaching opportunities for many graduate students. Each lasts 7 or 8 weeks and faculty are paid at 1.3 WTU's per class. The pay is minimal and the work is, probably, more intense than a regular lecture class. The program is open to rethinking pay, if finances permit. The program has carefully considered the general studies requirement. It is true that a number of freshmen believe that they do not need the General Studies/freshman seminar. However, data from the Lumina study suggests that as students get further and further away from their freshman year, their recognition of the value of General Studies grows significantly in recollection. It is also the locus of developing year-long portfolios, program assessment, and advising. We are currently exploring alternatives for freshmen in spring quarter. We will offer, as a choice, a special section of General Studies for students on academic probation after fall quarter. We have also piloted a special section on student leadership. The General Studies faculty has suggested special sections for students interested in service learning. At this time, we will offer, in the winter quarter, opportunities to take General Studies and complete honors projects, with particular emphasis on developing the CSUEB Ideagora. Depending on the success of the offerings this winter and spring, we will solicit ideas for additional specialized spring sections.

*Staff Support:* The role of the Director has changed dramatically from its initial purpose of implementing the lower division cluster program. It has accreted many additional responsibilities in those 10 years. The office's duties have likewise expanded. We do not have adequate support to manage the work successfully. The hope is that as the University engages in serious strategic planning, the institutional role and responsibilities of the Director of GE and the GE Office will come under review.

- *Elevate the position of Director of General Education and First Year Programs to a management position.* In general, each CSU has both an administrator (Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Associate Dean/VP for General Education and First Year Initiatives, etc., and a faculty chair of a standing GE committee). This structure seems to recognize the range of tasks, skills, and perspectives required for a successful program. However, since curriculum is a faculty purview, the person in the position should hold faculty status. Whether that continues to be an important factor is no longer clear. There is no question that the tasks are more than the current staff can handle with full effectiveness.



- *Add a staff member SSP level to assist the Director of General Education and First Year Programs in a variety of activities, possibly including the scheduling of clusters and the implementation of new recruitment strategies.* The director cannot do all the tasks that should be done for GE successfully. An assistant for some of the work is vital.
- *Elevate the current staff support from SSP II to SSP III to make it equal with professional advisors, to match specifically the job the incumbent is now being asked to perform, and for the skills the incumbent continues to develop and implement.* A promotion/reclassification is definitely warranted.
- *Add a staff member to support the Program Director.* This recommendation is not necessarily the answer the GE program would like to consider. Another option is to explore the possibility of creating a faculty “intern” or Faculty in Residence position—to begin developing faculty in each of the colleges who understand GE policies, issues, and responsibilities. Not only would that improve communication about GE and graduation requirements with faculty in the colleges, it would go a long way to assuring a pool of faculty able to take on the role of GE Director. Thought must be given to who will fill the role when the current Director returns to the classroom.

#### **4. PROGRAM’S FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN (2007 – 2011)**

During Academic Year 2007-2008, the Committee on Instruction and Curriculum will review the student learning outcomes, curriculum, courses, pedagogies, and assessment protocols of CSUEB’s General Education program. Any new or revised requirements will be determined by actions of the Academic Senate. Issues that face the program in the next five years include:

- decisions on program assessment policies, measures, and strategies
- support for faculty teaching in the freshman learning community program
- discussion of the relationship between general education credit courses and upper division courses for the major
- reflection upon assessment data to refine GE expectations and learning outcomes
- direct measurement of additional GE breadth requirements

One particularly important problem facing the program over the next five years deserves special attention: the preponderance of part-time lecturers teaching in freshman learning communities. In 2006-07, 52% of all cluster courses in science, humanities, and social science (not counting linked courses in English composition, communication, information literacy, or the freshman seminar) were taught by lecturers. Removing special clusters designed for science majors, this number goes up to 67%. The goals of learning communities include 1) creating connections with faculty to assist in major selection, general advising, and retention, and 2) integrated learning. In fact, the recommendations of the last curriculum review made a strong argument that the University should provide incentive and support for faculty teaching in the clusters to strengthen the interdisciplinary connections in the learning community. When the program relies primarily on lecturers, both goals are undermined: lecturers, even long-time 1.0 lecturers are less likely to be available to students for building academic

relationships. They do not provide the advising nor do they supply the perspective on the major that a full-time tenure track faculty person can provide. Contractually, lecturers cannot be asked to spend non-class or office hour time on work that is not independently compensated. This significantly undermines the connections between and among courses in the cluster. At this point, neither the GE budget nor the University, through other compensation, provides any incentive for lecturers or full-time tenure track faculty to do the extra work required to teach in freshman clusters. Finally lecturers are sometimes appointed just before classes begin, resulting in their not being aware that their courses are part of a cluster and making it impossible for them to interact with other faculty in a meaningful way.

## **5. CAPR ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAM'S FIVE-YEAR REVIEW**

The Director of the General Education program is to be commended for submitting a thorough review of the program to CAPR. The documents reveal a vibrant, well planned, program that provides a breadth of study to students' undergraduate education. In particular, the program's emphasis on helping freshmen transition into the University through the first year program deserves praise. Unfortunately, the attention given to this program by faculty and staff has not been matched by a commensurate degree of institutional support. Outlined below are several recommendations, most focused on ensuring that the program has adequate resources.

1. The program needs to mount a broad campaign to educate students, parents, the community, and the faculty about the GE program at CSUEB. The current website does a poor job of this. Incredibly a description of the First Year Program is completely absent from the University's catalog! As the outside reviewer noted, "The First Year Program is a gem at CSUEB and should be marketed by the University as such." It is unlikely that such a campaign can occur within the confines of the current resources of the program, but will depend on additional staff support (see below) or the engagement of University Advancement.
2. For a program that has such a broad impact on the University, there is relatively little regular faculty input outside that of the director. CAPR considered several ideas to alleviate this problem and also with the aim of providing the director with additional peer support. One idea was to create a GE advisory board composed of faculty from the different colleges and the library. This board would meet quarterly with the director to consider current and future GE policies and practices. However, CAPR was unsure whether faculty members who met only once a quarter would be sufficiently involved in the program to aid the director. A second idea that received strong support in CAPR was the creation of a Faculty-in-Residence program for General Education. The program could be comprised of two to three faculty members from across campus who would receive between two and three courses of release time for a one year term. These faculty members would serve as "interns" to the director, working on special projects and advising GE students, and in the process learning about GE policies, issues, and responsibilities. In addition to supporting the

director and injecting a greater diversity of faculty views into running the GE program, the participants would form a broad pool of faculty members who would be prepared to take on the role of program Director in the future. This type of program would require approximately 24 WTU of release time per academic year. Ultimately CAPR decided that the program itself was best suited to decide the form that such faculty involvement would take. Nevertheless, CAPR strongly recommends that institutional support be made available for these activities.

3. One of the most outstanding issues the GE program is facing is how to fairly compensate faculty members who teach classes that are part of the First Year G.E. Learning Communities. Some of the main goals of these communities are to enable students to create connections with the faculty who can assist in selecting majors, general advising, and overall support student retention. Additionally, the communities are highly integrated sequences of courses across multiple disciplines that require significant collaboration with other instructors. More often than not, these classes are assigned to part-time lecturers that may not have the time or knowledge of the University to serve in all of these roles. CAPR considered various ways in which to encourage more tenure track faculty to teach cluster courses and to compensate them fairly for doing so. For example, faculty could be rewarded 4 WTU of release time for every three cluster courses taught. Alternatively, one faculty teaching in a cluster could be rewarded 4 WTU of release time for coordinating and taking on the primary advising role for students in the cluster throughout the year. Once again CAPR decided that it was best if the program itself devised an appropriate compensation mechanism. Nevertheless, CAPR strongly recommends that institutional support be made available to provide additional support for faculty teaching in the First Year G.E. Learning Communities.
4. The outside reviewer made several recommendations concerning staff support. CAPR recommends that the Associate Vice President of Academic Programs and Graduate Studies meet with the program Director to determine what additional staff resources are needed.
5. The program has made good progress in developing learning outcomes for all GE requirements. It has also begun to develop tools to assess these outcomes. The program needs to consider how it will expand its assessment efforts systematically into all GE areas while respecting the rights and responsibilities of departments and faculty members to determine the best methods of carrying out this assessment.

## **6. CAPR RECOMMENDATION FOR CONTINUATION OF THE PROGRAM**

CAPR recommends the continuation of the General Education Program with the expectation that the program will work with the administration to find additional resources to support the recommendations of this committee and will report on those findings in the annual reports submitted between five year reviews.

## **7. DATE OF THE PROGRAM'S NEXT ACADEMIC REVIEW**

The date of the next Five Year Review of the program is 2011 – 2012.