TO: The Academic Senate
FROM: The Committee on Budget and Resource Allocation (COBRA)
SUBJECT: 13-14 COBRA 5: Addressing Large Classroom Issues
PURPOSE: To establish faculty priorities and a process for consultation in addressing large classroom issues and the resolutions thereof

BACKGROUND:
Because COBRA is the Academic Senate committee responsible for making recommendations “concerning principles and policies governing the development, improvement, and use of the academic facilities of the University and the allocation of funds and human resources directly related to the instructional program,” Dr. Bridget Ford visited the COBRA meeting of March 12, 2014 to discuss the report she prepared on issues regarding large lecture rooms in Meiklejohn Hall that deter collaborative learning and high-impact instructional practices (see attached).

With a Chancellor’s Promising Course Redesign grant, Dr. Ford and her colleagues are currently addressing a U.S. survey course, American Institutions, required of all students for graduation and deemed a “bottleneck” to graduation by the Chancellor’s Office. This is a face-to-face course and the goal is to redesign the course to help a large population of new CSUEB students achieve success and learn skills that will help them to be successful in further coursework at CSUEB. The Promising Course Redesign faculty team strongly advocates the use of cooperative learning strategies in the classroom. The most significant barrier to the redesign of the course has proved to be the physical classroom. She took this matter to the Information Technology Advisory Committee and, at their recommendation, to Jim Zavagno, Associate Vice President of Facilities, who visited her class and noted the difficulties. She then came to COBRA because it is the body that deals with academic facility issues. Brad Wells (Vice President of Administration and Finance) and Jim Zavagno then visited COBRA on April 9, 2014 to discuss the interaction of faculty and administration on this and other building issues.

From a broader perspective, this course is not the only mega-section at CSUEB that is currently the recipient of a Promising Course Redesign grant nor the only course taught in large classrooms (Meiklejohn Hall, VBT, etc.). Knowing that these classrooms need re-structuring for new types of learning strategies, these key issues require consideration:

First, in various speeches, from his induction speech to his convocation address, President Morishita has made ongoing references to the need for faculty to teach
differently, embrace new pedagogical techniques, and generally re-configure their teaching to meet the educational needs of today’s students.

Second, some class sizes are growing as caps on enrollment rise steadily.

Third, those designing and/or building classrooms are often bound by traditional views of a large classroom. For example, in AE 142, a new MondoPad has been installed, but the layout of the classroom is not conducive to group work.

Fourth, CSUEB’s large classrooms have particular barriers to teaching and learning, as Dr. Ford’s report indicates. In smaller classrooms it is possible to institute “work-arounds.” In larger classrooms, where desks and/or chairs are permanently secured, this is not possible. Additionally, in the Meiklejohn classrooms Dr. Ford describes, the acoustics do not allow for whole-class discussion, and the lack of WiFi limits access to course materials among students and reinforces reliance upon traditional content sources.

**ACTION REQUESTED:**
COBRA recommends that the Academic Senate approve the following:

1. that high priority be given to renovating existing large classrooms to support collaborative learning for students in courses, especially those deemed “bottlenecks” by the CSU Chancellor’s Office;

2. that, in future, classrooms be designed, re-designed, or renovated with timely and appropriate input from faculty who teach in various styles to ensure the most flexible options possible; and

3. that, based on its charge to make recommendations regarding academic facilities, building projects would be referred to COBRA, which would recommend suitable faculty and students to participate in these processes.
STATEMENT OF NEED FOR REPAIR, RENOVATION, AND UPGRADES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL SPACE

Drs. Bridget Ford, Dee Andrews, and Khal Schneider
Department of History
March 10, 2014

Name of Space:

Large lecture rooms in Meiklejohn Hall, but especially 2064 and 2032

How space is used for instruction:

Spaces are used for “mega-section” US history survey courses, enrolling approximately 120 students per class. We now teach 2,045 students in a single year in US survey courses, with more than 1,200 in mega-sections meeting in Meiklejohn Hall’s lecture rooms. Of these, 258 earn a repeatable grade every year. We are trying very hard right now to diminish those repeatable grade numbers with a Chancellor’s Promising Course Redesign grant. We believe we can make a significant difference in retention and timely graduation rates by improving the course experience in these US history survey courses.

We are shifting to active and project-based learning in these survey courses. Students now work in teams in nearly every class meeting, and whole group discussion takes place in nearly every class. Therefore, the lecture halls need significant improvements in order to facilitate student learning within our large meeting spaces. The lecture halls are designed for instructor lecturing; as this mode of teaching diminishes, we need to create suitable spaces for students to do collaborative work, and report back their findings and interpretations in a meaningful way to the whole class. This work then needs to be captured and shared so that new knowledge generated during class time circulates and may be reviewed. Moreover, faculty need a way to ensure that course materials or content is available inside of classroom meetings for student investigation.

Projects needed:

1. Course content/materials access:
   a. High-definition projectors for overhead screens
   b. WiFi access throughout rooms, rather than only at very back of rooms (this has been requested, and is in process now).
   c. Mondopad or Teamspot software and hardware (or similarly appropriate content display, create, and share software) for the following purposes:
      i. Presentation of course content in class
      ii. Creation and display of student work within class
      iii. Collection and retention of student work for further review and iteration in between class meetings.
   d. Outlet wiring so that students may charge any devices, such as tablets or laptops, during two-hour class meetings
2. **Acoustics:**
   a. Microphones or other suitable amplification for whole-class discussion with frequent student participation.
   b. Moderation of disruptive noise, such as frequent scraping of metal chairs on concrete.

3. **Lighting and workspace:**
   a. With 120 students working in teams, we must use the very back of the lecture hall space, which is currently shrouded in darkness. Full lighting needs to be available at entrance doors.
   b. Also in the back of the room, students need some additional tables in order to work in a circle. We can get twelve teams working in the main seating area easily, but the remaining four must sit in a circle in the rear of the rooms, without lighting or tables, and I think these teams suffer a bit for this lack of accommodation.

4. **Whiteboards on side walls:**
   a. I would love to have sixteen or so whiteboards that students can write on and provide brief responses, answers, findings, etc., (hanging along the side walls) so that we can have simultaneous display of student work. This is critically important in a large class, because it is impossible to sit through sixteen separate team reports. It simply takes too long and students check out of the learning. But if we have simultaneous reporting of findings, we can move swiftly into comparisons between conclusions and whole class discussion. Whole class discussion is absolutely essential if we are to move towards effective active learning.

**How this project will help instruction:**

Meiklejohn’s lecture halls are optimally designed for lecturing. Contemporary teaching is moving in new directions, though, towards diminished lecturing and more active learning on the part of students. In consequence, students need to have content in front of them to review and investigate, and they also need a way to efficiently capture and share their work both in class and for later review (to develop essays, prepare for exams, or develop their projects in other, iterative ways).

We do not currently have adequate means to place content in front of students for active learning projects in Mieklejohn. The overhead screens are generally too far away for detailed examination of images, and text is too hard to read on the overheads, especially from the back of the room. They certainly do not meet accessibility requirements today.

We currently are using a scribal culture for active learning projects. While we can make the system work for now, it is inadequate to a modern, digital age. The content developed by students in class—that is, their conclusions, findings, mode of analysis, etc.—sits inside a folder, on paper, and is generally non-circulating. Also, during class, one student must act as a “scribe,” and this reduces the collaborative nature of student work, so that those who do not write are often let off the hook for producing meaningful work.
In a classroom devoted to active learning, students must be able to report to the entire class. Our lecture halls have abysmal acoustics, so that students cannot hear one another speak, and instructors cannot hear the students. The classrooms simply were not designed for this. Some modification must take place if in-class discussions are to have meaning and depth, and so that students can also learn from one another and share insights.

We believe this in-class experience is essential to creating a valuable learning community and a social experience that can help retain students and encourage their timely graduation. The power of the large lecture course lies not only in the expertise of the instructor but also in the built-in community that classrooms provide. In attending class, students have a rare opportunity to regularly gather with relative strangers to consider and solve complex problems. Our classes also reflect the cultural, racial, and socio-economic diversity of this campus and the Bay Area. This means students bring a wealth of perspectives to class that, when deliberately incorporated into the class structure, is a valuable asset to the course.

A main element of large course design today is to replicate smaller scale classrooms, where discussions occur more naturally, by creating teams of students for in-class discussions. In our team-based model, students work together to comprehend and analyze course material and to craft shared solutions to historical problems—that is, to collectively answer open-ended interpretive questions. Students do not simply passively receive the lecture; working in teams, students must be ready to make the case for their own interpretations, to weigh them against those of their teammates, to have previously-held ideas challenged, to reason with one another using evidence, and to intelligently engage with complex and difficult problems.

But it is very challenging to accomplish these goals without having the ability to hear each other, or share the content and materials that make up the history of our past.

**General cost:**
Unknown.

**Attachments:**
Student Learning Outcomes for History 1101 and 1102 with active learning and collaboration as key components.

Promising Course Redesign Narrative Description
A NEW GATEWAY TO COLLEGE SUCCESS: CIVIC PURPOSE AND ACTIVE LEARNING IN US HISTORY COURSES
Promising Course Redesign, 2013-2014
Revised Student Learning Outcomes for History 1101 and 1102
CSU East Bay

Upon completing History 1101, a student should be able to:

Describe and practice the skills of civic participation through investigation of United States history to 1877, with close attention to the origins, amendment, and interpretation of the U.S. Constitution and federalism, and the rights and obligations of national citizenship.

Describe the origins of American social, political, cultural, and economic institutions and how they have changed over time.

Compare and contrast diverse Americans’ ability to define and enjoy the rights, privileges, and obligations of citizenship.

Read and interpret a variety of sources, recognizing major ideas and forming meaningful conclusions.

Express and communicate complex ideas, both in writing and in speaking, drawing upon varied evidence.

Collaborate with peers to evaluate difficult historical problems, demonstrating a capacity to tolerate differences of interpretation.

Listen actively, paraphrasing or summarizing others’ ideas fairly, and integrating these discussions into other course content, including readings and presentations.

Recognize the power of historical perception to understand our present lives, and gain familiarity with history as an academic subject at the college level, testing traditional or conventional understandings of the past in light of informed analysis.

Upon completing History 1102, a student should be able to:

Describe and practice the skills of civic participation through investigation of United States history from the Civil War era to the present, with close attention to the relationships between California and United States governments, and the rights and obligations of state citizenship.

Describe American social, political, cultural, and economic development and influence abroad, identifying major turning points and eras.
Compare and contrast diverse Americans’ ability to define and enjoy the rights, privileges, and obligations of citizenship.

Read and interpret a variety of sources, recognizing major ideas and forming meaningful conclusions.

Express and communicate complex ideas, both in writing and in speaking, drawing upon varied evidence.

Collaborate with peers to evaluate difficult historical problems, demonstrating a capacity to tolerate differences of interpretation.

Listen actively, paraphrasing or summarizing others’ ideas fairly, and integrating these discussions into other course content, including readings, presentations.

Recognize the power of historical perception to understand our present lives, and gain familiarity with history as an academic subject at the college level, testing traditional or conventional understandings of the past in light of informed analysis.
A NEW GATEWAY TO COLLEGE SUCCESS: CIVIC PURPOSE AND ACTIVE LEARNING IN U.S. HISTORY COURSES

CSU Chancellor’s Office Promising Course Redesign Initiative
California State University, East Bay
Department of History
Drs. Bridget Ford, Dee Andrews, and Khal Schneider
February 16, 2014

Why did you redesign your course?

We teach lower-division United States history “survey” courses fulfilling the CSU’s American Institutions Requirement that every single graduate of our public university system should be able to describe the origins and practice of representative democratic government. In 2010, amid severe university budget cuts, our class enrollment cap increased from fifty to 120 undergraduates. In consequence, our small department teaches more than 2,000 students every year in university-wide required courses typically populated by freshmen and sophomores. Because of these great student numbers and the widespread reach of our courses among native undergraduates, we believed we could play a critical role in improving the university’s retention and graduation rates.

While student success in our courses is a foremost concern, we also realized this was an opportune moment to consider far-reaching issues related both to our teaching effectiveness and to the practical as well as civic purposes of our classes. Our goal of increasing student success therefore became entwined with other aims, including harnessing the power of the face-to-face classroom to improve student engagement and ensuring our relevance to the university’s mission, the rapidly shifting demands of the workforce, and the civic well-being of our communities and nation. Ideally, we wanted to make sure our courses prepared thoughtful, literate, engaged citizens ready to take on the great challenges that inevitably confront and test each generation. But we understood that only those courses actively engaging students and carrying them through to a satisfying end (and a passing grade) could achieve that lofty goal.

What did you change through the redesign?

To redesign our course, we undertook three major changes. We reconceived our courses as: 1) a critical college “gateway” experience rather than as separate stand-alone classes; 2) an exciting laboratory for the face-to-face practice of democracy; and 3) an active learning opportunity, defined by team-based classroom strategies for student debate and complex problem solving.
Why will the redesign lead to better learning?

**Gateway Course:**
Our Promising Course Redesign transforms U.S. history survey courses into a genuine gateway experience for undergraduate students. By “gateway,” we mean an in-class experience in which freshmen and sophomores—who make up the vast majority of our students—acquire the fundamental skills, socialization, and habits for success early in their college careers. History involves the disciplined study of the past, and the skills students must deploy in our classes can be applied in nearly every other university course or degree program. These universal skills include: challenging problem solving and analysis of evidence, interpretation of sophisticated narratives found in assigned readings and presentations, and effective communication of complex ideas. To support students’ growth in these practices, we also deliberately inculcate effective study habits and promote students’ ethical development. As a consequence, when students successfully complete our classes, they carry a rich fund of skills and a cultural competency into future courses. Success in our courses should therefore positively affect retention and graduation rates across the university.

**Practicing Democracy:**
Our redesign developed from our belief that face-to-face history lecture courses give students essential and irreplaceable perspective on and practical experience in a diverse democratic society. In undertaking our redesign, we saw two great strengths in the make-up of our classes. First, the power of the large lecture course lies not only in the expertise of the instructor but also in the built-in community that classrooms provide. In attending class, students have a rare opportunity to regularly gather with relative strangers to consider and solve complex problems. Secondly, our classes reflect the cultural, racial, and socio-economic diversity of this campus and the Bay Area. This means students bring a wealth of perspectives to class that, when deliberately incorporated into the class structure, is a valuable asset to the course. A main element of our redesign is to replicate smaller scale classrooms, where discussions occur more naturally, by creating teams of students for in-class discussions. In our team-based model, students work together to comprehend and analyze course material and to craft shared solutions to historical problems—that is, to collectively answer open-ended interpretive questions. Students do not simply passively receive the lecture; working in teams, students must be ready to make the case for their own interpretations, to weigh them against those of their teammates, to have previously-held ideas challenged, to reason with one another using evidence, and to intelligently engage with complex and difficult problems. In history, the complex problems at stake are the questions that define American society. As such, history courses can prepare thoughtful and engaged citizens, attuned to the diversity of human experiences in the present and in the past, and capable of constructing valuable intellectual communities with peers and fellow citizens of varied backgrounds.

**Active Learning:**
Rather than look upon our large class sizes as detrimental to active learning, we tacked in the opposite direction: We believe that the great numbers of students in our lecture rooms could generate energy, immediacy, and a kind of dynamic face-to-face
engagement infeasible through an online class setting. Compelled to solve meaningful but thorny problems in socially diverse groups, as our redesigned classes demand, students are confronted with a learning experience of great value to workforce settings and to our democracy.

From the first day of our classes, we establish learning communities—peer-to-peer and instructor-to-students—to foster active learning and accountability in this dynamic setting. Borrowing the insights of a formal practice known as Team-Based Learning, we create working teams in which students meet frequently to investigate historical problems with contemporary relevance. Debate, discussion, and active collaboration therefore enjoy equal weight in the classroom as a mode of learning alongside traditional lecturing and more reflective work. Besides peer-to-peer work, in which students discuss and explain course concepts and check mastery of material, we have also built into our regular classes brief meetings between teams and course faculty to diminish students’ feeling of anonymity in the large classes and to build stronger personal relationships with instructors.

Because students still express a desire to hear the views of their professors expressed in class (even if more briefly than in the past), we have preferred to remain flexible about the exact proportions of lecturing relative to active learning, giving individual professors room to experiment and judiciously vary class meetings. In our experience, any single classroom practice, if pursued too doggedly, has the potential to stunt students’ engagement.

In our redesigned courses, we also use regular assessment, including frequent quizzing or testing and graded assignments, to check student progress. We then quickly record scores and grades into our Learning Management System, Blackboard, so that students can immediately review their performance. Using our LMS features, we can next assess student behavior and study skills: Are they coming to class? Are they taking their regular quizzes? Are they reviewing materials and grades posted on Blackboard? Paying close attention to this behavior, we reach out to absent (both physically and virtually) or struggling students in weeks two and six of the quarter to let them know we are available for consultation outside of the classroom and to reinforce regular attendance at class. Students may also choose to bundle inexpensive (even free) self-assessment software applications with their textbooks so that they can check mastery of assigned readings before taking graded quizzes or tests. Technology therefore plays a critical role in our redesigned courses, but it operates in the background of our face-to-face classrooms, and is always mediated by the personal touch of the instructor.

To increase the success of students’ active learning and to support faculty, we have created an infrastructure around our classes through advising—both in person and electronically. For example, master’s degree students in history now serve as course readers, working approximately ten hours per week to provide supervised undergraduate advising, respond swiftly to student queries, update the Blackboard grading center, and organize course materials. Because master’s degree students are not far apart in age from many of our undergraduates, and because most have recently graduated from CSU East Bay as history majors, this faculty support strategy doubles as a form of invaluable peer-
to-peer mentoring for our history survey students. Moreover, we are cultivating closer
ties with campus academic advisors in order to share with them our course objectives and
strategies for student success so that in their face-to-face conversations with advisees,
they can help prepare students for our classes. So that students can understand course
expectations before they walk into the class on the first day, we have produced six “Short
Guides for Student Success” that briefly treat conduct, organization, reading, working in
teams, test taking, and writing for undergraduates. Normally, students are overwhelmed
at the start of a new quarter, and often fail to consult guides until they are already
struggling in the class. By then, such students can understandably feel the effort may not
be worth it. If we can communicate expectations and offer very short guides to them in a
moment of relative quiet before the start of a quarter, we believe it will have greater force.
As part of our Promising Course Redesign work, we are also in the process of designing a
website with individual student narratives explaining strategies for doing well in the
classes, as well as links to our faculty-produced “Short Guides” and sample syllabi.

Together, this personal and electronic advising will create an invaluable infrastructure
around the history survey courses so that students are fully apprised of the nature of our
expectations and do not feel blindsided by a challenging syllabus on the first day of class.

**Course and Student Background**

*What courses are you redesigning?*
We have redesigned HIST 1101, “History of the United States to 1877,” and HIST 1102,
“History of the United States from 1877.” These courses fulfill Categories 1 and 2 (US 1 & 2) and Category 3 (US 3) of the CSU American Institutions Requirement (AIR), which is found in Title 5, Section 40404, of the California Administrative Code and in CSU Chancellor’s Executive Order 405. AIR courses are not included in General Education at CSU East Bay. The only prerequisite for AIR courses is matriculation at the university.

*Who are your students?*
The CSU requires AIR for all recipients of the bachelor’s degree, so nearly all native students take these courses, along with many transfer and international students. Exceptions are students who may complete Advanced Placement tests, transfer students who have approval for one or more AIR courses from other institutions, and students who successfully test out of one or more AIR courses.

Between Winter 2013 and Fall 2013 (three regular quarters and one summer session), in
twenty-four sections of History 1101 and 1102, our department taught 2,045 students,
with a majority (1,206 students) in what are termed “mega-sections,” or classes with
more than one hundred students. Of these 2,045 course enrollees, 278 (14%) were
denoted as international students. Drawing from undergraduates’ self-reported data, we
understand the ethnic and racial backgrounds of students in our courses generally as:

- 0.3% American Indian/Alaska Native
- 32% Asian
- 13% Black
25% Hispanic/Latino
2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
7% Two or More Ethnicities
6% Unknown
15% White

We do not currently have data about student majors, but given that approximately 15% of all CSU East Bay freshmen and sophomores are enrolled in our classes in any given quarter (excepting summer), we would assume significant fluctuation in choice of majors. Extrapolating from the numbers of baccalaureate degrees conferred at CSU East Bay, approximately 35% graduate in a wide range of arts, letters, and social sciences fields, 28% as business majors, and 31% in science fields.

One point of comparison seems striking though: CSU East Bay conferred baccalaureate degrees upon 2,808 students in 2012-2013. The number of students enrolling in our History 1101 and 1102 across an academic year—2,045 undergraduates—approaches that figure. Currently, our department has nine full-time, tenure-track faculty.

**What knowledge do students bring to your redesigned classes?**

From recent developments in K-12 education, especially the impact of the federal “No Child Left Behind” statute, we know that students’ previous work in the discipline of history includes extensive experience with “standards” testing: history as fact more than history as analysis or way of thinking. Informal focus groups of approximately seventy undergraduates conducted in Winter Quarter 2014 suggest that our students’ previous history classes, mainly in middle and high school, were organized around subject matter “units” and involved both multiple-choice and writing assessment. Our investigations suggest that students in our survey classes have not enjoyed significant exposure to multicultural or California topics.

We believe, too, that our students want to become historically literate citizens, competent in their knowledge of the United States’ founding and development. An example: One enthusiastic undergraduate did not know that President Lincoln had been assassinated, and was stunned to learn of this tragedy in a recent exchange with one of our faculty. It is unclear whether his reaction was due to embarrassment or a sense of loss. Although this last example is fairly innocuous, such striking gaps in historical knowledge can bring devastating consequences. At San Jose State, when students displayed a Confederate flag in a dormitory, near-at-hand witnesses failed to raise alarms about the well-being of a freshman assigned to live in that particular suite. According to news reports, these witnesses expressed bewilderment about the flag’s historical significance. Our students do not want to be on the wrong moral side of history, but they often lack basic knowledge that could inform important decision-making in the present day.

We want our students to actively understand “the historical development of American institutions and ideals” not simply as a mandate, but as an essential ingredient in their success in college, as a memorable experience in face-to-face learning, and as a means to become thoughtful and literate citizens.
Accessibility, Affordability, Diversity

The technologies we employed are part of the regular class enrollment Learning Management System, Blackboard. Instructors post assignments, supplemental readings, and announcements on Blackboard. It is free to enrolled students and is compliant with accessibility guidelines in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C § 794 D). We have explored additional adaptive learning tools and are in the early stages of evaluating their usefulness. These are principally resources that come bundled with standard textbooks. Since we cannot presume that all of our students have access to the same technology (for example, digital tablets or smart phones), the essential requirements for adopting any new course technology will be that it is widely accessible and free of additional cost. We have also employed a team-based learning model in which groups of students meet regularly during regular class time to discuss course material and solve complex interpretive problems. Group discussions around a selected document, map, image or passage from the course textbook is a “low tech” redesign strategy, but large class sizes (120 students) put a premium on face-to-face interaction with peers and the instructor. The technologies we’ve chosen come with the enrollment in the course (Blackboard). There are no additional technology costs borne by the students.

Our classes reflect the cultural, racial, and socio-economic diversity of this campus and the Bay Area. The wealth of perspectives they bring to the class makes class discussions a valuable and necessary tool. Our redesigned courses feature regular team-based discussions: small groups of students break out from the larger lecture to discuss a specific problem, document, or text passage. These discussions give students opportunities to re-engage with material that might have been unclear when they read it on their own and to ask questions in settings more comfortable than the larger lecture. We know that while many of our students would excel in a traditional lecture course with little supplemental guidance, most of our students benefit from additional attention to diverse learning styles, closer guidance with difficult concepts, and more scaffolded course assignments. We hope that team-based learning can provide the kind of guidance that will help students with limited college preparation, underdeveloped reading and writing skills, and difficulties relating to adjusting to a new cultural setting, as much as is possible in a large lecture hall, find a way to engage with and understand the course material.