1. **Freshman Learning Communities (Clusters) Block Scheduling** (to be ready for Freshman Orientation summer 2011)

2. Sally Murphy, Director of General Education; Academic Programs and Graduate Studies

3. **Total funds requested:** $10,000 to be spent thusly: $2000 stipends to the two programmers who will take on this project above and beyond their already busy schedules as the PeopleSoft registration technicians; $6000 to cover expenses of an outside programmer who may be needed to train the programmers on the “no drop” modification currently running for remedial classes or on the block scheduling programming.

4. **Brief description of project:** This is a request for the money to fund modifications of the current PeopleSoft registration system that will allow the GE Office to schedule freshman students into their learning community (cluster) and remedial courses (both English and math). Students would be able to drop cluster classes only with permission of a freshman advisor. (This limit already exists for remedial courses.) Block scheduling will allow the GE Director and freshman advisors to enroll students in a block of required classes in order to maximize and/or even out cluster section enrollments each term, depending on departmental requirements. With drops restricted the vast majority of freshmen will complete all cluster classes in their first year (almost half of the lower division GE requirements are in clusters). The learning community course load ranges between five and nine units a quarter, freshmen will be able to register themselves in courses outside their cluster. Students required to complete both remedial English and remedial math courses may not have room for elective or major classes beyond their learning community and remedial requirements.

5. **Expected outcomes and target audience of the project:** There are two audiences of primary interest for this proposal: freshmen and academic departments with courses in one or more clusters. The expected outcomes for freshmen is that they will complete most of their GE Area A, all of Area G and 12 units in the discipline areas, science, humanities, and/or social science, in their freshman year, as anticipated in the original clusters design. Lower division GE course provide foundational knowledge and fundamental skills needed for academic success. Assuring freshmen receive a strong academic foundation will likely increase retention and improve chances for graduation. Nonetheless, for the last 12 years, freshmen have registered themselves for the courses they wanted and did not take courses they were less motivated to complete: typically Information Literacy (Area G), Communication (Area A1) or the full GS sequence (Area G), all important knowledge and/or skill areas.

The second target audience is comprised of the academic departments that participate in the clusters. Block enrollment will allow the GE office to work
with departments to plan their quarterly schedules more effectively and know the
term-by-term freshman enrollment they will have in each of their cluster courses.
Managing enrollments will help us to fulfill one of the promises of the learning
communities: departments will be able to predict their cluster enrollments before
registration even begins.

6. **Strategic impact/benefits:** Assuring that freshmen take required foundation
courses during their first year will have at least three benefits to our freshmen, the
most diverse class at CSUEB. First, completion of the learning community
courses will increase chances for academic success since they will have the
knowledge and skills expected by faculty in other GE and major classes. Second,
completion of cluster courses will limit the mistakes freshmen make by taking
courses that friends suggest or that sound fun but for which they are inadequately
prepared. Third, completing all the cluster courses will demonstrate to them the
progress they are making toward graduation, helping to keep them enrolled and
motivated. In addition, the skills and knowledge acquired by completing the
cluster courses some of them now avoid, for example, understanding the way
information is organized and how to conduct a literature search or ways to
identify scholarly websites; being able organize ideas, use evidence effectively
and give effective presentations; utilizing campus resources, developing strong
study skills, and knowing how to work well in teams, all will assist students’
success in other courses. Too often, I hear from graduating seniors requests to
enroll in freshman classes because they realize, belatedly, they really are required
for graduation. The Library faculty report that many upper division students who
belatedly take the information literacy course lament their failure to have taken it
as a freshman because “it would have helped me a lot”.

For departments, block enrollment will permit the GE department to provide more
accurate information on enrollments throughout the year in their cluster courses.
This information is crucial to planning departmental schedules. Using fall
enrollments and the IRA retention data, we should be able to give departments
clear numbers to plan with. The GE Director will work with departments to
distribute freshman enrollments evenly across 3 terms or concentrate enrollments
in specific terms of the department’s choice. Departments will also be able to
better determine “GE seats” to meet sophomore and upper division students’ need
for their classes.

7. **Timeline:** To be completed by July 1, 2011 for the fall 2011 entering freshman class.

8. **Potential barriers to success:** Cal Poly San Luis Obispo has already begun to use
block registration for their freshmen. Our programming staff has been in touch
with the programmers at Cal Poly to learn from them. Since changes to one part
of a system affect other parts of the system, it is hard to predict which bugs the
programmers will encounter. However, a year and a couple of months of
planning and work should provide sufficient time to complete the project in time
for 2011 summer orientation.