

THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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To: Vice Presidents, Academic Affairs

From: Anthony J. Moyer *Anthony J. Moyer*  
Associate Vice Chancellor  
Educational Programs and Resources

Subject: Guidelines for Breadth in New Bachelor's Degree Majors

I am pleased to forward to you a white paper outlining concerns about specialization in new bachelor's degree majors. The white paper was prepared in the Division of Educational Programs and Resources, reviewed by the Committee on Academic Planning and Program Review, and its promulgation was endorsed and supported by the Academic Senate in accordance with the attached Senate resolution.

The paper contains some guidelines that would be quite useful for campus faculty senates as they review projections for the Five-Year Academic Plan. It serves at the same time to describe an important concern of this office that has arisen over the past few years as proposals for increasingly narrow new majors have been received in connection with campus academic plan submissions. While the attached is not a policy document, it is our intent to refer to it in the review of the forthcoming Academic Plan submissions when proposals are received that do not appear to meet the "durability" criterion. We would therefore appreciate your distributing the document to faculty and administrators involved in the development and review of academic programs.

We are most appreciative for the assistance and encouragement of the Statewide Academic Senate in reviewing the document and supporting its dissemination.

Attachment

Distribution:

Presidents - w/a  
Associate Academic Vice Presidents and  
Deans of Academic Planning - w/a  
Deans of Undergraduate Studies - w/a  
Deans of Graduate Studies - w/a  
Chairs, Campus Academic Senates -  
Councils - w/a

CSSA Liaison - w/a  
Office of the Legislative Analyst -  
w/a  
Committee on Academic Planning and  
Program Review - w/a -  
Dr. Norman Charles, CPEC - w/a  
Chancellor's Office Staff - w/o

## POLICY GUIDELINES FOR BREADTH IN NEW BACHELOR'S DEGREE MAJORS

Each California State University annually updates its Academic Master Plan--a five-year projection of new degree majors. Recent plans have revealed a trend toward creating new bachelor's degree majors from fields previously offered as specializations within broader subjects. The trend is observable in professional and liberal arts disciplines alike. For example, unique degrees in Small Business Management, previously a subset of Business, and in Publishing and Editing, traditionally part of English majors, have been among those proposed. There is a potential problem if the increasing specialization works against achieving some of the other expressed goals for the bachelor's degree; if it limits students' options in a changing environment; and if, as a result, it does not serve students or society well.

The purpose of this paper is to address one aspect of specialization in bachelor's degrees, namely the development of new degree majors that are highly specialized in title, content, or both. The paper proposes some guidelines for campus use in reviewing Academic Master Plan proposals for bachelor's degree majors when those majors are in specialized subjects not generally or previously offered as majors in four-year colleges. Campuses may wish to add to these guidelines some of their own guidelines relating to specialization in options and concentrations.

### Reasons for Increasing Specialization

Advances in knowledge typically cause changes in academic discipline content and structure and sometimes lead to whole new configurations. Some changes are critical to the vitality of the academic enterprise. But it appears that the current trend has among its causes several that are unrelated to a conception of the best ordering of knowledge or optimal ways of imparting values, understandings, theory and competence. The kind of specialization currently observable in new majors (and sometimes in changes within existing majors) appears instead to result from artificial pressures. Some of the pressures arise from business and industry and from public officials concerned about the state of local or regional economies. Some arise from within the university by those anxious to provide an apparent variety of choice in curriculum without major resource expenditure or in response to enrollment pressures. But primarily the pressures are coming from students who associate

specialization of program title, content, or both, with enhanced employability or graduate school admission. In the fall of 1983, the annual ACE-UCLA national survey of freshmen revealed that the ability to get a better job was cited by freshmen more often (76.2% of respondents) than any other reason for attending college. Surveys of faculty have suggested a disjunction between faculty and students in this respect. However, there are genuine differences of opinion about the desirability of narrowing the focus of bachelor's degree majors. On the one hand, Bradford College president Art Levine has called the current curriculum a victim of the survival ethic. Others argue that most if not all important outcomes of college are independent of the major, and that any subject can be taught in ways that produce breadth and perspective.

#### The Problem

We assume that most students, while generally needing to update their specialized skills and knowledge from time to time, will nevertheless earn only one bachelor's degree in their lives. If we assume that the title and content of that degree continue to carry some kind of lifetime importance, then degree majors should be designed for comprehensiveness and durability--no matter how young or old the student. The comfort of knowing that there will be easy access to continuing education--the lifelong learning society--may lull us into neglecting responsibilities to ensure that the bachelor's degree major is as comprehensive and enduring as it can possibly be. Specialized programs that use identified occupations or skills as their titles and their knowledge bases may enhance immediate employability, but they probably do so at the expense of long term job satisfaction, adaptability, mobility, and employability. It may also be at the expense of limiting the broadening of perspectives which might enhance creativity or the ability to synthesize or to have enriched experiences in the work environment. Specialized programs not related to specific jobs may deny students both employability and breadth. This has always been the case, but it seems especially so given what we can reasonably expect of the future. The "post-industrial society," the "information economy," the "telecommunications age," and the "post-Gutenberg era" may be overused slogans, but they suggest something important about planning bachelor's degree majors: Imbuing the major with any kind of enduring value for students will require

more effort than ever. Even with that effort and with lifetime opportunities for continuing education, that durability is threatened. It has been speculated that within a few decades, everyone in the country will have access to nearly all accumulated information and knowledge. That is good news for those who value knowledge and learning. But even if general education programs succeed in imparting the understandings and skills needed by students to sort and use these quantities of information, we have not done enough for students or for society.

Steven Muller, President of the Johns Hopkins University, has wondered: "If we are serious about educating people to solve problems, is there anything left that enables people to integrate what they know, because we have compartmentalized knowledge so much? Are we in danger of having people who can manipulate data and hide it in compartmentalized ways?"

#### Some Topics for Discussion

While there are some convincing arguments for durability in the names and the content of bachelor's degree majors, there are some questions and issues which have no easy answers. Some question that the bachelor's degree will survive as currently structured, yet proposals for new majors appear regularly and must be reviewed conscientiously. If knowledge "keeps no better than fish," can we develop and state any reasonable expectations about the durability of the major for any given student? Can expectations about comprehensiveness be framed? What are our obligations to students, many of whom will not again be able or willing to invest the concentrated time required to complete a major? What guidelines will campus faculty use in deciding what kinds of majors should lead to the bachelor's degree? When majors are proposed which have not previously been offered at four-year colleges, what criteria shall be applied to determine their propriety? Can some common understandings, theories, and contexts be identified for these decisions? At least a short list would include the ability to develop and extend knowledge in the discipline--beyond existing limits.

#### Review Guidelines

Guidelines are needed for campus review of new academic master plan proposals, and those suggested here could be profitably refined after thoughtful campus discussion. The following guidelines are tentatively suggested for situations involving

the elevation of options or specializations to degree status or for cases where highly specialized degrees not usually offered in four-year institutions are under consideration. The guidelines assume that "broadly based degrees of high academic quality" remain the norm in The California State University, and that specialized degree programs are added only when there is compelling academic rationale to add them.

1. Are there alternative curricular structures that would better serve the purposes proposed?--i.e., should the subject be offered as a certificate, a minor, or an option or concentration? Is the subject matter sufficiently complex to consider offering the program as a master's degree only? Might it be appropriate as a post-baccalaureate certificate?
2. Is there a body of knowledge which has become so sizable that unique degree status is a consequence of advancement of knowledge?
3. If the proposed degree program is preparatory to a specific occupation:
  - a. Is the occupation likely to exist over the lifetime of the student?
  - b. What is the probable lifetime of the knowledge or information that will be imparted in this major? Is the answer one that is satisfactory to the University?
4. Is the preparation narrowly conceived? If so, are there ways that preparation (and title) can be broadened?
5. Is the major accurately named?--i.e., is the title so narrow that it unnecessarily restricts student employment opportunities and mobility?
6. Does the major use as its foundation and prerequisites the methods, processes, skills and knowledge of a core or basic academic discipline? If not, should it be offered at all?
7. Is the size of the major and degree of specialization going to be such as to call into question the broadly based nature of the bachelor's degree itself?
8. What provisions have been made to insure continued breadth in the major?

Division of Educational Programs and Resources  
August 1984  
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(Item 2)

ACADEMIC SENATE  
of  
THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY

AS-1535-84/AA  
November 8-9, 1984

GUIDELINES ON NEW BACHELOR'S DEGREE MAJORS

- WHEREAS, The Chancellor's Office has prepared "Policy Guidelines For Breadth In New Bachelor's Degree Majors" which offer campuses guidance on review of such proposals; and
- WHEREAS, It is now proposed to promulgate these guidelines but only after consideration by the Academic Senate of The California State University; and
- WHEREAS, The guidelines provide a thoughtful focus on the possibility that new bachelor's degree majors may be narrowly specialized, as a result of external or internal pressures, in response to short term job market demands or other popularization of subject matter; and
- WHEREAS, Traditionally the baccalaureate degree contains the broadening and liberalizing aspects of general education as well as the broad focus across the academic discipline of the major, including some opportunity for detailed study; and
- WHEREAS, Two recently published reports, "Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education" and "To Reclaim a Legacy," comment on the risks presented by increasing specialization in the major; and
- WHEREAS, Opportunity for narrow specialization is generally found at the graduate level or in the ability to add an option or concentration within the degree designation, the use of "special major" or through certificate programs; and
- WHEREAS, There is no question that new bachelor's degree majors are created in response to growth of knowledge and are or become in every way legitimate academic disciplines; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate of The California State University endorse and support the promulgation of the attached "Policy Guidelines for Breadth in New Bachelor's Degree Majors"; and be it further
- RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate CSU recommend that each campus use the "Policy Guidelines for Breadth in New Bachelor's Degree Majors" when approving new degree programs.

APPROVED WITHOUT DISSENT

March 7-8, 1985