

CSUN Provost/Faculty President's response to AA 2005-35
Brief Sketch for Oct. 5 meeting

Cal State Northridge, began a University-wide conversation about improving retention and graduation rates when President Jolene Koester identified it as one of four priorities of her new administration in 2000. A Graduation Rates Task Force, co-chaired by the provost and faculty president, was created in 2001 to study and recommend strategies to address this issue. The campus has, in its continued commitment, enacted many of the recommendations of the Task Force; others are in progress. President Koester in her Fall 2005 Convocation address, challenged all members of the campus community to take individual responsibility to not only help students meet high academic standards but also to encourage and enable them to move toward graduation in a timely manner.

In the context of this framework, the University reports several notable accomplishments:

General Education: The new GE program, approved Spring 2005, becomes effective in Fall 2006. This model supports the campus philosophy of broad and diversified general education while decreasing the number of units from 59 to 48 (Title V included). It renews emphasis on the need for Intensive Writing and adds a requirement for Information Competence. Under a new category of "Lifelong Learning," the GE program encourages students to develop an appreciation for the importance of knowledge acquisition beyond graduation and formal education. Under "Comparative Cultural Studies" it affirms the campus' belief in the importance of exposing students to rich cultural diversity. The new GE program will allow students to move toward degree completion more quickly and, without sacrificing the breadth of experience, leave room that was previously lacking in their programs for experimentation through free electives.

First Year Experience: Under this broad umbrella, the University has begun several new initiatives while continuing to improve and expand existing programs, such as University 100 and Summer Bridge. A critical aspect of the work being accomplished under the FYE banner is the understanding that informs these programs: Academic Affairs and Students Affairs both play crucial roles in student success and jointly oversee the activities. Our newest, most "experimental" program is the "Freshman Connection," begun this Fall. Two cohorts of students (approximately 100 business majors and 100 undeclared majors) experience three of their classes together (Developmental Writing, University 100 and either an introduction to psychology or to sociology course). Only in its fourth week, the Connection is too new for drawing conclusions about its eventual value, but early reports suggest that its goal of "making community" seems to be working.

Degree Audit: DARS, pervasively used by advisors in advising and for grad checks, has been simplified and made more user-friendly, more attractive and interactive. Studies are planned for the next year to determine whether these changes have resulted in greater independent use by students in their academic planning. In January 2006, the campus will begin its rollout of a new academic planning module that will allow students to plot their academic careers, calculate units remaining as well appropriate/required courses.