"Give Students a Compass" Meeting March 8-9, 2013
Summary of Key Themes

General Education (GE) as Preparation for Career and Service

Herb Childress discussed how GE is essential to prepare students to deal “wicked problems” – complex dilemmas that are difficult to define, can’t be solved by subdivision into parts, have no right answers and no immediate or ultimate test of solutions, and involve ethical decisions. Professional careers and the responsibilities of citizenship involve “wicked problems.” Both require content knowledge (covered in the major), logistical knowledge (developed in internships), and strategy and purpose (best addressed through interdisciplinary liberal education).

The Value of Ongoing Intersegmental Collaboration

There is high value to continue to build intersegmental relationships. While it is not easy, there are many benefits of ongoing conversations for students and institutions. What helps sustainable collaboration is overcoming embedded assumptions, listening carefully to each other, sustained work, and mindfulness. It’s important to recognize and respect differences in structures, cultures, and protocols across the segments. Encouraging interaction between students at local California Community Colleges (CCCs) and California State Universities (CSUs) is positive, especially for the CCC students.

GE Thematic Pathways/Integration

Thematic pathways across multiple GE areas are very promising. Those that worked well and were sustainable had clear structure and included themes such as social justice, sustainability, and global studies.

Ways to strengthen this approach include: identifying paths that appeal to students, trusting faculty to drive the process, and providing administrative support, resources, and faculty development. It’s often a good idea to build the program incrementally. The thematic pathways could also be incorporated in developmental classes. To create incentives for students, one could offer a minor, a GE certificate of completion, and/or priority registration. It is also important to create opportunities for students to integrate what they learn across courses through high-impact practices like capstone courses, common readings, service-learning, or undergraduate research.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

There is a push to measure student learning by outcomes (evidence of student work) rather than seat-time (as monetized currently), but it requires a lot of work and faculty collaboration upfront to create rubrics and proficiency levels. There are few resources to support this work. Policy makers often focus more on persistence rates rather than on quality of learning.

Some promising work being done includes connecting student learning outcomes across multiple levels (student, course, program, and institution), at the institutional level, using interdisciplinary teams to develop rubrics, having faculty leads/coordinators facilitate development of common outcomes for thematic GE pathways, and providing training on norming rubric scoring.
There is a need to develop ways to track and manage assessment results. Institutional research offices need to help with identifying appropriate measures. Student information systems at the institution and system levels are difficult to change, so it is difficult to document and evaluate student learning outcomes.

**High Impact Practices and Pedagogy**

There is substantial evidence that incorporating high impact practices into GE is effective in improving learning, increasing persistence, and narrowing achievement gaps. To encourage more widespread use of these practices, it is useful to start with something manageable, market the benefits to stakeholders (including students). These pedagogies focus less on content specifics and more on problem solving from different perspectives, but they help students better understand how GE is relevant to their lives and careers. For the institution, it is essential to identify which high impact practices work well in the local context. They should be embedded into the strategic plan. It is also important to provide resources for coordinating those practices and for faculty development support.

**Faculty Development**

The overarching aim of faculty/professional development is to enable faculty to live up to their institutions’ stated goals of developing deep thinkers and lifelong learners. Faculty engagement leads to student engagement. It should involve the same practices we believe are good for students, such as sharing work through ePortfolios, “flipping” professional development, and reflection. One of the most promising ways to promote these practices is through Faculty Learning Communities.

Professors and adjunct faculty need to work together to infuse change into their curriculum, such as how to incorporate high impact practices, develop interdisciplinary courses around “wicked” (complicated) problems, and use ePortfolios. They also need a place to adopt new habits of mind, to rejuvenate, to do the work of being a life-long learner, and to have a space to make mistakes and try again.

**ePortfolios as a High Impact Practice**

Bret Eynon presented compelling evidence from LaGuardia Community College that having students create an integrative ePortfolio increases their engagement, persistence rates, course pass rates, and critical thinking. However, scaling the use of ePortfolios requires extensive professional development and support. Some special faculty development issues include: 1) training on how to create and assess the reflective writing that accompanies ePortfolios, 2) time and patience for iterative development, making mistakes, and addressing grounds for opposition; and 3) building ePortfolios into faculty polices for retention, tenure, and promotion.

**Student Voices**

A panel of students from 4 institutions explained that they did not see much connection between their GE courses and their majors or life goals. They urged meeting participants to make GE more relevant. In subsequent discussion, participants noted that we have collectively failed to communicate the purpose of GE effectively to students and other audiences. Kathy Booth presented the findings of a study conducted by the RP Group which asked 900 students from 13 CCCs about what they need to succeed. The key factors identified were being: directed; focused; nurtured; engaged; connected; and valued. To
provide support for student success, whether in GE or other coursework, requires us to bridge the gap between academic affairs and student affairs. That often means bringing support services like advising and tutoring into the classroom.

Evidence and Policy Change

There is room for some flexibility within existing GE policy to make exceptions. The CSU Chancellor’s GE Advisory Committee can allow innovation and experimentation, but they require evidence to evaluate whether those innovations are effective. It was suggested that strategies to improve GE be linked to the Student Success legislation in the CCCs, the Graduation Initiative in the CSUs, and the intersegmental Associate Degrees for Transfer created in response to SB 1440. Also, the Academic Senates should consider how to integrate the LEAP essential learning outcomes into the curriculum.

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