Give Students a Compass
A Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success
“General education courses have become the doorway into college for the great majority of the nation’s students, including the underserved: first generation students, ethnic and racial minorities, and those from low-income families. These courses therefore play a huge role, not just in how well students actually learn in college, but also in whether or not they even stay in college.”

Carol Geary Schneider
President, AAC&U

“In its first phase the Compass Project focused attention on the needs of CSU students to see the purpose and relevance of general education -- the courses required of all students, regardless of major. We’ve seen that to move this work forward, a more integrated, meaningful GE transfer curriculum is called for -- one that will improve student success not only for those already in the CSU, but also for the hundreds of thousands planning to transfer in.”

Professor John Tarjan
Chair, Academic Senate, CSU, 2008-2010
Chair, Chancellor’s General Education Advisory Committee, 2010-2011
"California’s young adult population is increasingly composed of groups, particularly Latinos, that historically have relatively low levels of educational attainment."

_Closing the Gap_
Public Policy Institute of California
April, 2009
“Economists increasingly worry that America’s postsecondary education system cannot keep up with historic increases in the demand for college-educated workers.

“The worry is justified. Demand for workers with college educations will outpace supply to the tune of 300,000 per year. By 2018, the postsecondary system will have produced 3 million fewer college graduates than demanded by the labor market.”

Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018
Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce
June, 2010
Where Do CSU Degrees Come From?

40% of CSU graduates begin at the university conferring the degree.

60% of CSU graduates begin somewhere else -- usually a California Community College.

Source: CSU Office of the Chancellor, 2008-09 Degrees Conferred.
“Currently fewer than 50% of our students graduate in six years. Every interrupted education is a lost opportunity for the student, the student’s family and community, and the state.

“Historical changes in California’s population compel us to better serve the students we’ve most often failed: underrepresented minorities, the economically disadvantaged, and the first generation to college -- at a time when the intellectual demands of the world have never been greater.”

CSU Office of the Chancellor
Graduation Initiative Systemwide Plan
April, 2010

Source: IPEDS, 2009

Systemwide 6-year Graduation Rate: 48%
“While methods for computing transfer rates vary, several recent studies found rates in the CCC to be low relative to the number of students that likely enrolled with an intent to transfer.

One found that about one-quarter of “transfer-focused” students transferred; another found that among students seeking a college credential, 18 percent transferred; and several others found transfer rates generally ranging between 20 and 30 percent using different assumptions about who should be included in the pool of potential transfer students.”
At What Point Are They Leaving?

California’s college and university students drop out all along the way. But a disproportionate number leave while enrolled in general education courses -- typically in the first two years.

Most of the state’s general education curriculum is conceived as relatively unengaging, interchangeable three-unit lectures, intended to facilitate transfer and -- ironically -- student success.
“... Engaging in educationally purposeful activities helps level the playing field, especially for students from low-income family backgrounds and others who have been historically underserved. Moreover, **engagement increases the odds that any student – educational and social background notwithstanding – will attain his or her educational and personal objectives, acquire the skills and competencies demanded by the challenges of the 21st century, and enjoy the intellectual and monetary gains associated with the completion of the baccalaureate degree..**”

*High Impact Practices:  What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*

George Kuh, 2008
First-Year Seminars and Experiences
Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members’ own research.

Common Intellectual Experiences
The older idea of a “core” curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community. These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.

Learning Communities
The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with “big questions” that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link “liberal arts” and “professional courses”; others feature service learning.

Writing-Intensive Courses
These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice “across the curriculum” has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

Collaborative Assignments and Projects
Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one’s own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

Catalog of High-Impact Educational Practices

Undergraduate Research

Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students’ early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore “difficult differences” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

In these programs, field-based “experiential learning” with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

Internships

Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

Capstone Courses and Projects

Whether they’re called “senior capstones” or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they’ve learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of “best work,” or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.

The High Price of “Facilitating Transfer”

Both the universities and the colleges already know what high-engagement educational practice looks like . . .

. . . so why isn’t it in the general education transfer curriculum?

“The community colleges, which must prepare students planning to transfer to any of several baccalaureate institutions, can ill afford to create general education programs with distinct character.”

“The four-year colleges have somewhat more leeway in designing programs for their native students, but they cannot hold transfer students to those requirements.”

Robert Shoenberg, General Education in an Age of Student Mobility
Percentage of seniors who report that while in college they participated in these top five High-Impact Practices, as identified by the AAC&U for the first phase of the Compass Project.

“Give Students a Compass helps institutions build capacity to support academic excellence for all students, emphasizing the success of students traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

The project is a collaborative: systems and campuses are working together to re-map general education, take new approaches to program design and assessment, and concentrate attention on the success of students from underserved groups.

Compass partners understand the value of collaboration, especially in large systems where students are highly mobile.

Hence the metaphor for the project: we need to give students a compass so that they can navigate successfully through complex college and university systems.

The project is part of AAC&U’s signature initiative, Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), which fosters campus action, public advocacy, and useful evidence to make the aims and outcomes of liberal education a guiding framework for all students’ educational achievement—in professional and arts and sciences fields alike.”

aacu.org/compass
Phase One: 2008-2011

The CSU and UW systems are both participating in Give Students a Compass, as well as a national initiative to increase degree production while closing achievement gaps.

“What happens to quality in this ambitious agenda of producing 80,000 more graduates by 2025?

LEAP Wisconsin is the academic quality component of the Growth Agenda. We are working through this initiative to ensure that our students will graduate with a quality of mind that will enable their leadership in a 21st century, globally-engaged American democracy.”

Kevin Reilly
President
University of Wisconsin System
Phase One: 2008-2011

In 2008 the CSU enacted Executive Order 1033, reframing general education in terms of expected learning outcomes. The new EO draws on language developed by the AAC&U for its campaign Liberal Education and America’s Promise, or LEAP.

“The LEAP campaign is organized around a robust set of "Essential Learning Outcomes" -- all of which are best developed by a contemporary liberal education. Students prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

1. **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**
   Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
   Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

2. **Intellectual and Practical Skills**, including
   * Inquiry and analysis
   * Critical and creative thinking
   * Written and oral communication
   * Quantitative literacy
   * Information literacy
   * Teamwork and problem solving
   Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

3. **Personal and Social Responsibility**, including
   * Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global intercultural knowledge and competence
   * Ethical reasoning and action
   * Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
   Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

4. **Integrative Learning**, including
   * Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies
   Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems”
Phase One: 2008-2011

“In early 2008 the CSU Compass steering committee identified three campus-based projects for support: redesign of the general education curriculum at Chico and Sacramento, and a university-community college partnership at San José State and Evergreen Valley College. Excerpts from the progress reports of June, 2010:

“A substantially revised GE program was approved on our campus by vote of the Academic Senate on February 11, 2010. This revised program embodies the LEAP and Making Excellence Inclusive goals explicitly, and the debate over GE change on our campus was directly and meaningfully informed by LEAP and MEI projects. Our goal is a re-visioning of GE on our campus to bring the program into line with the 21st century, LEAP outcomes and CSU EO 1033.

In particular we look to institutionalize High Impact Practices in GE. We are seeking strategic points in students’ GE experience, particularly in the first year and senior years, where High Impact Practices can be especially meaningful. Our target population is historically underrepresented students, but our intention is to structure High Impact Practices in such a way that they are experienced by all students.”

“Our work continues in the service of disenfranchised, marginalized, and underserved young people and their communities. General education is being redesigned to institutionalize in intentional and logical ways specific practices and pedagogical structures in the part of the curriculum that is experienced by all students regardless of major.

We are more convinced than ever that the GE we have is the GE for faculty and the GE we need is the GE for students. They learn differently, what matters to them is a bit different than what mattered to us as learners decades ago, their needs are different and we will lose them if we persist in doing things the way we always have.”

“The curriculum for a special section of English 1B for prospective transfer students was jointly developed by Cathy Gabor, Composition Coordinator at SJSU, and Alexandria White, English Instructor at EVC.

The new course incorporated a service-learning project. The Writing Partners project matched 6th grade students from a high-need elementary school with the college students. They exchanged three letters during the semester and met at a culminating celebration and pizza party at SJSU.

Two peer mentors supported the class and acted as liaisons between the community college students and SJSU. They also helped students with their writing drafts.

36 students registered; 35 students completed the course.”
The partnership between San José State University and Evergreen Valley College focused on general education just prior to transfer. Faculty incorporated two high-impact practices -- civic engagement and peer mentoring -- into a GE class of 36 students. Community college students corresponded with sixth graders to improve writing skills on both sides, and met with university students to learn about life after transfer.

All but one of the community college students persisted to the end of the term -- in a course that typically sees attrition as high as 33%.

From a survey of the students:

“Having a pen pal was a good experience for my writing and to know more about the community, because it allowed me to get out of the box. I saw how important it is for younger children to be in contact with college students and get encouraged to pursue a higher education.”

“Meeting our sixth-grade pen pal was really fun, especially when we got to share stories. In other English classes we usually just work by ourselves, in this class we got to help influence the younger student in going to college or perhaps a right direction.”

“San José State now seems attainable.”
Purpose of the Second Phase of *Give Students a Compass*

The second phase of *Give Students a Compass* will bring together faculty who teach general education -- at both the California State University and the California Community Colleges -- to pilot regional collaboratives to bring more High-Impact Practices into the state’s general education transfer curriculum. Successful pilots could inform an improved statewide policy.

Research indicates a more engaging general education transfer curriculum could improve success for all students, particularly the traditionally underserved.

By keeping more of the university freshmen and sophomores -- and capturing more of the community college students who intend to transfer but don’t make it -- California can offset the decline in degree production anticipated by changing demographics and reduced state support.

*Three of every four California Community College students who intend to transfer don’t make it. NSSE data indicates transfers are less likely than other CSU students to engage in high-impact educational practices such as learning communities, which can improve engagement and persistence.*
Bringing together faculty from the state’s public universities and the community colleges is the indispensible first step to GE reform.

"When faculty are involved in planning and decision-making from day one, not only are the results improved, but the commitment for implementation is strengthened."

Jane Patton, President
Academic Senate of the Community Colleges of California

“In fields such as medicine and engineering, spending for research amounts to about 5 to 15 percent of total expenditures. In contrast, we spend well less than a quarter of one percent of the overall education budget on educational R&D.”

Anthony Bryk, President
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
Actions to Put High-Impact Practices into the GE Transfer Curriculum

1. **Focus on learning.** Convene university and community college faculty to agree on the learning that matters for general education, without reference to inputs such as courses from an approved list.

2. **Change the CCC-CSU relationship.** Empower community colleges to take articulation beyond transcript evaluation of individual courses and certify student completion of program-level general education learning.

3. **Reward High-Impact Practices.** Foster use of engaging educational practices in the lower division as a means to improve student achievement of the learning that matters.

4. **Give Students a Compass.** Orient university freshmen and sophomores, and acclimate community college students to the purpose and feel of university life before they transfer, by actively communicating the learning that matters: not only the “what” but also the “why” of the learning outcomes we expect of all students.

   Use advising, peer mentoring, and high-impact practices in general education to highlight the value and relevance of learning beyond the major.
Actions to Bring Together the Faculty Who Teach General Education

1. Support broad and deep participation in the next annual national meeting of the AAC&U, in San Francisco. Inform statewide conversations about liberal education with the best current thinking.

2. Invite proposals from individual campuses, both California State Universities and California Community Colleges, to attend a special two-day pre-meeting conference on general education in California.

3. Promote formation of regional pilot projects to experiment with new approaches to general education and transfer.
After the Meeting: Regional Pilot Projects

Selection criteria

The Compass Project will support regional pilot projects that:
- are faculty driven
- meet the criteria for general education as set forth in CSU Executive Order 1033
- employ high-engagement educational practice while facilitating transfer
- may be taken to statewide scale if successful

Evaluation criteria

Successful pilot projects will:
- highlight for students the relevance and value of general education
- lead to higher student grades in subsequent coursework
- improve educational outcomes, especially for the historically underserved
- produce measurable benefits in student term-to-term persistence and graduation
“In today's economy, higher education is more important than ever. According to the Census Bureau, a college graduate's lifetime earnings are almost double that of a high school graduate.

But a higher degree is more than just a ticket to a better job. It can improve the economic situation of both individuals and their communities.

That's why it is in everyone's interest - communities, businesses, and educators - to help students succeed in school and pursue the highest degree they can.

In fact, we cannot state this fact strongly enough: The future success of our country's economy is inextricably linked with the educational attainment of our students.”

Charles B. Reed, Chancellor California State University
This document and supporting materials are available at:

calstate.edu/app/compass