A California Convening for Educators and Grantmakers

Give Students a COMPASS

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November 3-4, 2009
CSU Dominguez Hills
Carson, California

Cardinal Points
http://www.calstate.edu/app/compass
Cardinal Points

Cardinal points are the four major compass directions, used as references for all the points in between. Similarly, the quotations assembled here capture many of the recent big ideas in higher education, perspectives and priorities that can serve as guides to better policy.

A hard copy of this publication will be available to you at the meeting.

**Cardinal Points** is one of three background pieces prepared for the California Convening of November 3-4, 2009. The other two are:

**“Why Are We Doing This?”** A 7½-minute video compiling student interviews from around the state, on the subject of general education in California. See the video at [calstate.edu/app/compass](http://calstate.edu/app/compass).

**General Education and Student Transfer: Fostering Intentionality and Coherence in State Systems**, a collection of articles on the tension between fostering deep learning and facilitating transfer. A hard copy of this publication is sent to each participant in advance of the meeting; a few additional copies will be available on site.
Student Mobility

“For state systems, the phenomenon of student mobility creates a particularly complicated set of problems. All concerned want, insofar as possible, to make movement within these systems easy and to allow it to be accomplished without loss of credit. The formal mechanisms for creating this ‘seamlessness’ are sets of common core courses and agreements about transfer of credit.

But in their zeal to effect ease of transfer, the designers of these agreements often fail to take into account either the variety of ends to which core courses might be taught or the coherence of the general education program or major to which those courses apply.

Thus, they tacitly encourage students to mix and match unrelated courses, leading them to see these requirements as so many bureaucratic hurdles to be jumped, not as parts of a purposeful and coherent curriculum.”

Robert Shoenberg
General Education in an Age of Student Mobility
AAC&U, 2001

Integrative Learning

“The undergraduate experience can be a fragmented landscape of general education courses, preparation for the major, co-curricular activities, and ‘the real world’ beyond the campus. But an emphasis on integrative learning can help undergraduates put the pieces together and develop habits of mind that prepare them to make informed judgments in the conduct of personal, professional, and civic life. Many colleges and universities are creating opportunities for more integrative, connected learning. Often, however, such innovations involve only small numbers of students or exist in isolation, disconnected from other parts of the curriculum. But a variety of opportunities to develop the capacity for integrative learning should be available to all students. Fostering students’ abilities to integrate learning—across courses, over time, and between campus and community life—is one of the most important goals and challenges of higher education, and should be a cornerstone of a twenty-first century education.”

Adapted from “A Statement on Integrative Learning”
Association of American Colleges and Universities,
The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/general/index.asp?key=24
Detached Courses

“Unfortunately, the educational experiences of most first-year students are not involving. Learning is still very much a spectator sport in which faculty talk dominates and where few students actively participate.

Most first-year students experience learning as isolated learners whose learning is disconnected from that of others. Just as important, students typically take courses as detached, individual units, one course separated from another in both content and peer group, one set of understandings unrelated in any intentional fashion to the content learned in other courses.

Though specific programs of study are designed for each major, courses have little academic or social coherence. It is small wonder that students seem so uninvolved in learning. Their learning experiences are not very involving.”

Vincent Tinto
Taking Student Retention Seriously
April 2002

Restrictions on Curriculum

“These practical restrictions are equally frustrating to two- and four-year institutions.

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

The Need for New Tools

“Despite the challenges, there is growing awareness that California needs new tools and a new commitment to make transfer work better. Reports have documented the failure of the current transfer practices in California to provide a clear, straightforward and consistent pathway for students.”

Crafting a Student-Centered Transfer Process in California
Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy
California State University, Sacramento, August 2009
In the project’s second phase, partnerships of California State Universities and their neighboring community colleges will pilot new approaches to general education transfer.

Clear, mutually developed expectations for student learning will allow for mobility, while accommodating campus-level innovations in teaching, course design, and student engagement and success.

“If we are to have meaningful assessment, we shall need to assess something more precise than “liberal education” and broader than student performance in courses. The courage and capacity to assess is dependent upon institutions doing something other than putting the pea under a different shell. Defining what we want to assess as a general, or liberal, education is the real issue, and resolving it will take massive reimagination.”

Stanley Katz
“Taking the True Measure of a Liberal Education”

Defining the purpose and measures of liberal learning—however challenging—is key to improving general education (GE) transfer in California.

“We must account for higher-order understanding and critical thinking, in addition to factual knowledge and simple skills. We must tell of the development of civic responsibility and moral courage, even when our stakeholders have not thought to ask . . .”

Lee Shulman
“Counting and Recounting: Assessment and the Quest for Accountability”
Change Magazine, January 2007
Benefits of High-Impact Practices

“. . . 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. . . “

George Kuh
Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008

CSU Student Participation in High-Impact Practices

Percentage of seniors who report that while in college they participated in these top five High-Impact Practices, as identified by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) for the first phase of the Compass Project.

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement
Special Analysis, May 2009
A Substantial Restructuring

“It is clear that our nation will not be able to close the achievement gap unless we are able to effectively address student needs for academic support in ways that are consistent with their participation in higher education [. . . ] But closing the achievement gap will be not achieved by practice as usual, by add-ons that do little to change the experience of low-income students in college. What is required is a more serious and substantial restructuring of student experience.”

“Access Without Support Is Not Opportunity”
Vincent Tinto
Inside Higher Ed, June 9, 2008

Bundles of Courses on Timely Issues

“. . .As one alternative to the dominant structure of general education—a sprawl of cafeteria-style breadth requirements—we recommend the creation of structured interdisciplinary bundles of courses on timely intellectual and applied issues, made available to students as discrete, named sets and identified as such on students’ transcripts.

We also recommend extension of and improvements in freshman-sophomore seminars, capstone courses, problem-oriented courses offered by departments, and undergraduate involvement in research. . .”

General Education in the 21st Century
Report of the University of California Special Commission, April 2007
Center for Studies in Higher Education
UC Berkeley

notes
Purpose of the Second Phase of Give Students a Compass

The second phase of the Compass Project will bring more engaging, high-impact practices into the General Education Transfer Curriculum.

Research indicates this could improve success for all students, particularly the underserved.

By engaging students early, and capturing more of those who intend to transfer but don’t make it, California can offset the decline in degree production anticipated by changing demographics and declining state support.

Three of every four California Community College students who intend to transfer don’t make it. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data indicate 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.
notes
Appendix: Essential Learning Outcomes

The Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) campaign is organized around a robust set of “Essential Learning Outcomes”—all of which are best developed by a contemporary liberal education. Described in College Learning for the New Global Century, these essential learning outcomes and a set of “Principles of Excellence” provide a new framework to guide students’ cumulative progress through college. Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for 21st 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
Appendix: High-Impact Practices

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.
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.

George D. Kuh (AAC&U, 2008)
notes
The California State University and University of California

California Community Colleges

- Humboldt
- Chico
- Sonoma
- San Francisco
- Santa Barbara
- Channel Islands
- San Luis Obispo
- Los Angeles
- Fullerton
- San Bernardino
- Riverside
- San Diego

CSU Campuses

UC Campuses
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For more information contact:
Academic Programs and Policy
The California State University, Office of the Chancellor

http://www.calstate.edu/app/compass