To: Ken O’Donnell, Debra David, Office of the Chancellor, California State University
From: Janet Hecsh, College of Education, California State University, Sacramento
Date: July 25, 2011
Re: Final Report, Give Students a Compass Project

ABSTRACT
Sacramento State’s Compass Project (2008-2011) provided the campus community with a set of opportunities to refresh our GE program, to engage with our colleagues nationally in within the framework of AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) inquire into nature of High Impact Practices (HIPS) on our campus, and to develop and pilot a set of GE reading assessment instruments and pilot GE pathways/strands. Our target populations are incoming freshman---in particular first time college attendees (first in family), EOP and CAMP (migrant program), PELL Grant recipients, and special admits. As we approach the final stages of our project, we realize that our ambition was great and appreciate that our achievements represent a serious and genuine movement toward overall institutional improvement outlined in our Graduation Initiative. This work was a collaborative effort and deep thanks go to Provost Joseph Sheley, Associate Dean Sheree Meyers and Dr. Terry Underwood, Campus Assessment Consultant and co author of this report. Thanks also to the members of the General Education/Graduation Policy Committee and the Faculty Senate of California State University, Sacramento for their guidance and support of the effective practices to promote high quality learning experiences for our students.
Our principal goals:

- Increase the engagement in and recognition of Sacramento State faculty and students in curricular matters pertaining to GE
- Reconcile LEAP Outcomes, existing Baccalaureate Learning Goals (BALGs), and area objectives facilitating GE program evaluation and improvement
- Design objectives and outcomes and professional development to infuse Civic Agency and Sustainability in the GE curriculum
- Develop common assessments and rubrics to pilot in First Year Experience courses linked to BALGs
- Develop a lower division, interdisciplinary and contemporary GE pathway option for first time freshman

Our Principal Accomplishments:

- Raising the profile of General Education at Sacramento State via respectful and civil discussions and debates in venues ranging from public meetings, department meetings and shared governance—student leadership and faculty senate.
- Ratifying and disseminating new Sacramento State Baccalaureate Learning Goals along with corresponding learning domains within which the VALUE Rubrics may serve as guideposts for designing and assessing student learning.
- Designing and implementing multiple professional development opportunities for faculty to examine, and reflect upon student learning through faculty interest groups, summer institutes, and workshops. Many of the faculty participating in Compass initiatives have taken these ideas and strategies into their departments and programs applying them to more localized work including GE and the majors via course redesign and similar activities.
- Designing and developing the first group of pilot GE pathways (three sets of three interdisciplinary lower division GE Courses reorganized as Academic Learning Collaboratives) for the 2011-12 Academic Year.

It is particularly rewarding to have had Sacramento State selected as a campus for field-testing the Civic Engagement rubric and to have the Honors GE Portfolio Project's assessment aspect incorporates the VALUE rubrics.

Student Learning:

Although we do not have formal quantitative research data to support claims of improvements in student learning, we do have informal qualitative data that suggests our new approach is having a positive effect on student learning, evidence drawn primarily from several sections of our first year seminar. In these sections we redesigned learning activities to focus students’ attention on coming to terms with the definitions of the VALUE learning outcomes we now have instantiated in our Baccalaureate Learning Goals. When we say “coming to terms,” we mean the following:

- Students discussed and wrote about the learning outcomes themselves as objects of study. They engaged in self-assessment activities wherein they depicted their understanding of an “educated mind” vis a vis the outcomes, and they rated their level of confidence in their own capacity to perform these outcomes. Finally, they wrote formal statements identifying those outcomes in which they had particular strengths and those in which more work was needed.
Students developed structured questions to use in interviews with one or more professors as a way to discover which disciplines emphasize which outcomes. They gained a more realistic set of expectations regarding the match between their own strengths and the requirements of particular disciplines. They also identified those outcomes that might pose obstacles to their success in particular majors.

- Students examined the institutional catalog for courses and programs to determine where and when particular outcomes might be taught and learned. They developed a personal map or plan to help them make better choices about GE courses to take.

By the end of the semester we found that many students had either confirmed their original choice of major, disconfirmed it and began a search for a more suitable one, or identified a potential major to look into for their future. We now know that students are responsive to direct instruction in the outcomes followed by close analysis and goal-setting structures in the context of the curriculum. Evidence for these assertions exists in students’ online portfolios. We plan to make these structures and activities available to FYE instructors as part of an overall first-year experience redesign. Additionally, we plan to make use of the structures and activities developed in this pilot project in our Compass II project wherein we will design and test an efolio system intended to help community college students make wise early choices with their eyes wide open both to their own talents and interests and to the affordances of the curriculum.

**Policies and Practices**

Both policy and practice have changed. A major change in policy occurred when the Faculty Senate voted to ratify a revised set of learning goals for undergraduates. Perhaps even more important, the Senate agreed to revisit the question of implementation in five years—an unprecedented commitment in the history of GE on campus. Because we have official, incontrovertible goals, we have been able to change practice. We are on the brink of implementation of an ALC (Academic Learning Collaborative) that will be interdisciplinary, relevant, assessable, and interesting; more will follow. Our Provost has provided fiscal support via incentives for faculty involvement and support for peer mentors and instructional activities.

Faculty in our Area B (Science and Mathematics) disciplines met last spring to identify GE learning goals for their Area that map onto the new Baccalaureate Learning Goals. Unsurprisingly, a tension arose between particular disciplinary outcomes and others not usually associated with Science or Mathematics, and the political machinery of the Senate and its committees will need to further refine and bring forward revised outcomes. This will have a ripple effect in requiring courses within those areas to go through the campus GE Course Approval procedures and will set the template for a similar revision by Areas and for periodic reviews for internal and external stakeholders.

Our new Baccalaureate Goals affirm our commitment to an interdisciplinary and multidimensional approach to General Education. We as a solidarity in Compass do believe, though, that Arts and Letters is responsible for, say, quantitative reasoning—not in the sense of a math major, but in a common sense, practical way. Clearly, numbers exist in literature, writing, photography, dance, just as a civic identity is relevant to biology, physics, engineering et al.
Needless to say, even if we did an extremely effective job of teaching first year students about learning outcomes, application in particular disciplines, etc., everything would be for naught if the institution did not actually practice in ways that invite growth toward the outcomes. In other words, we would have smart students still wandering in a wilderness. So the evidence we have collected suggests that we have some embryonic ideas about first year seminar learning activities which hold promise of orienting students to the landscape of the curriculum. But until we have our landscape mirroring the orientation, students may still find themselves lost and discouraged.

**Institutionalization**
We believe the institution has changed irrevocably and will restructure its General Education curriculum in the next few years. We believe the faculty will take the learning outcomes seriously as they plan and carry out the work of vibrant, thriving ALCs. We can name perhaps two dozen or more faculty individuals who are deeply committed to GE reform in the name of students. While that is a handful now, the allocation of resources will certainly follow sound practices in teaching and evidence of learning via the Baccalaureate Learning Goals for which the VALUE Rubrics provide models for practice and assessment.

Our Provost has shown that he is committed to the reform by way of his allocation of scarce dollars toward this effort. We have a pilot efolio project just getting started to test drive a version of portfolio practice that could become a model for all of GE across the years and curriculum. The work probably cannot honestly be characterized as “institutionalized,” though we hold out great hope because the themes and goals of Compass are growing in the hearts and minds of the locals. This can only be good for students!

In our view, the type of institutionalization we seek is one that is not static, but rather is recursive. The ratification of Baccalaureate Learning Goals (to be revisited regularly) and its attendant activities in reviewing and re-framing Area Outcomes, along with the reframing of the First Year Experience in terms of the BALGs will push the transformation of General Education---as will larger initiatives in IHEs like ours---over the course of the next decade in ways that challenge traditional notions of course, discipline, and learning. We are appreciative of the opportunity to participate in this initiative and look forward to the next phase of our development.
Sacramento State: Graduation Initiative, Closing the Achievement Gap and GE

**What?**

Sacramento State Baccalaureate Learning Goals (BALGs)

- **Competence in the Disciplines** in at least one major field of study and informed understandings of other fields, drawing on the knowledge and skills of disciplines outside the major.
- **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World.** Focused by engagement with big questions, contemporary and enduring.
- **Intellectual and Practical Skills** Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, & standards for performance.
- **Personal and Social Responsibility:** anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges.
- **Integrative Learning**, Including: synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies.
- Demonstrated through application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

**Who?**

- **High Impact Practices**
  - Common Intellectual Experiences
  - Collaborative Assignments
  - Research and Inquiry
  - Internships, Study Abroad

**How?**

Program, Major, Course, Projects

- Project-Problem Solving; Authentic Audience
- Assignments, Activities, Experiences

**How Do We Get Better?**

- **Motivated & Sustained Learning**
  - Lifelong Learning
  - Integrative Thinking
  - Intercultural Competence
  - Information Literacy

- **Communication**
  - Oral Communication
  - Written Communication
  - Reading

- **Democratic Participation & Civic Engagement**
  - Civic Engagement
  - Teamwork

- **Cognition**
  - Critical Thinking
  - Creative Thinking
  - Inquiry and Analysis
  - Problem Solving
  - Ethical Reasoning
  - Quantitative Reasoning

**DOMAINS:**

**VALUE RUBRICS:**

- Sacramento State: Graduation Iniative, Closing the Achievement Gap and GE
- Assignments, Activities, Experiences