Making Change Happen: Reform of General Education in the CSU

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CSU/AAC&U Conference: GE in California

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Introduction

- “American students already know they want a degree. The challenge is to help students become highly intentional about the forms of learning and accomplishment that the degree should represent.” -- 2007 LEAP Report
- How can we as educators implement General Education to help achieve this goal?
- How do we effect a change in culture on our campuses to sustain implementation?
Where to start….

- I start with the assumption that you are passionate about GE, or you wouldn’t have come to this conference.
- My focus today is less on the substance of the work in which you are engaged, although I have been fully engaged in that, but more on what it takes to make it happen.
My intimate involvement in GE reform comes from my tenures at both San José State University and San Francisco State University, as well as consultations at several other institutions, including CSU Chico and CSU Fullerton.

Although each institution has a unique set of circumstances, certain commonalities cross any campus change initiative.
Steps to Campus Change

- Get campus involvement from all constituencies.
- Link your proposed changes to other campus initiatives or plans.
- Ensure the support of your administration.
- Recognize faculty ownership of the curriculum and support faculty leadership.

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Steps to Campus Change (con’t)

- Develop a “road map” or timeline for implementation.
- Determine the effect of and on existing policies and procedures.
- Commit resources.
- Develop an assessment plan for your work.
- Recognize that the work in which you are engaged is inherently political…….
Steps to Campus Change (con’t)

So how have these steps worked (or not), in “real-life” situations?
Executive Order approved in June 2008:

3.2 CSU Student Learning Outcomes: Each CSU campus shall define its GE student learning outcomes, to fit within the framework of the four “Essential Learning Outcomes” drawn from the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) campaign, an initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.
LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes Framework

- Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
- Intellectual and Practical Skills
- Personal and Social Responsibility
- Integrative Learning

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The San José Story of GE Reform and Assessment

- Fall 1998: Implemented new GE Guidelines that were predicated on course-embedded assessment, as well as a diversity requirement across the curriculum.
- 1998-2001: Approximately 280 courses were submitted for re-certification. Course proposals required a plan to assess student learning based on evaluation of Student Learning Objectives.

http://www.sjsu.edu/ugs/ge/

http://www.aacu.org/aacu_news/aacunews07/february07/feature.cfm
Certification & Continuing Certification Processes

• 2004: Eliminated a “check the box” format in relaying GE requirements to students and faculty
• 2001-2008: Course coordinators submitted assessment summaries and course syllabi indicating how students were assessed, the results of those assessments, and appropriate course modifications based on the assessments
Integrated Knowledge of an Educated Person

These courses will help students become integrated thinkers who can see connections between and among a variety of concepts and ideas. An educated person will be able to apply concepts and foundations learned in one area to other areas as part of a lifelong learning process. These courses will help students to live and work intelligently, responsibly, and cooperatively in a multicultural society and to develop abilities to address complex issues and problems using disciplined analytical skills and creative techniques.

Earth and Environment (R) (3 units)
Self, Society & Equality in the U.S. (S) (3 units)
Culture, Civilization & Global Understanding (V) (3 units)
Written Communication II (Z) (3 units)

Graduation Requirements: American Institutions (may be satisfied in Core) (0-6 units)
Physical Education (0-2 units)
(may be satisfied by two different activity courses)

TOTAL UNITS: 39 Units CORE 9-12 Units SJSU Studies

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2005 Revision of GE Guidelines

- When the 1998 Guidelines were approved by the Academic Senate, there was a stipulation for campus review in 2005
- To ensure campus buy-in for the continued culture change from solely “teaching-centered” to both “learning and teaching-centered”, many strategies were utilized
2005 Revised GE Guidelines

- Included overall GE program learning outcomes that are tied to the SJSU mission statement, the AAC&U Greater Expectations Report, and the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes.
- Changed name of upper division GE from Advanced GE to SJSU Studies. All courses in SJSU Studies must be from a different department.
- Student learning objectives added across curriculum for:
  - Information literacy
  - Values clarification
  - Civic Learning
Governance of General Education: Board of General Studies and GE Advisory Panels

- Solicit courses and curricular proposals designed to satisfy GE requirements from all colleges and departments of the University.
- Review, approve, and authorize courses and curricular proposals for GE.
- Evaluate courses and curricula (including assessment) they have approved.
- There are now more than 80 faculty participating in the assessment and review process each semester.
Assessment
Challenges in a Large GE Program

- Menu of more than 200 courses in 18 different GE areas
- More than 300 instructors teaching GE, a large portion of whom are part-time
- More than 500 sections of GE courses in any given semester
- GE goals that are not necessarily aligned with standardized tests
How Course Embedded Assessment Meets the Challenges

- Articulates well defined GE Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)
- Provides a great deal of flexibility for faculty in developing their assessment plans
- Allows faculty to use existing assignments and exams for assessing student outcomes
- Eliminates students from having to take additional tests outside of class
- Provides more immediate and focused feedback leading to faster implementation of course modifications
SLOs for One Area of SJSU Studies:
Culture, Civilization, & Global Understanding

Students shall be able to:
- compare systematically the ideas, values, images, cultural artifacts, economic structures, technological developments, and/or attitudes of people from more than one culture outside the U.S.;
- identify the historical context of ideas and cultural traditions outside the U.S. and how they have influenced American culture; and
- explain how a culture outside the U.S. has changed in response to internal and external pressures.
Content Objectives

- **Diversity.** Issues of diversity shall be incorporated in an appropriate manner.
- **Writing**
- **Civic Learning.** Courses shall address the civic relevance of the topic in an appropriate manner.
- **Values Clarification.** Students should demonstrate their ability to articulate and discuss their values and engage in civil discourse.
- Courses will address significant achievements of the human intellect and imagination in a comparative context to understand and appreciate different ideas, cultures, values, religions, institutions, languages, and peoples of the world.
Assessment

• Assessment
  • Writing shall be assessed for grammar, clarity, conciseness and coherence.
  • In accordance with the approved assessment plan, the course coordinator/department chair will summarize the assessment results according to the procedure for submitting courses for continuing certification in General Education.

http://www.sjsu.edu/ugs/ge/assessment/
Course Continuing Certification Philosophy

- Assessment as *pathway to success* vs. *gateway*
- Mentoring of faculty
- No decisions until the decision is “YES”
- Education of faculty regarding GE objectives and assessment
- Sharing of best practices
Students who complete the General Education curriculum should be able to demonstrate:

• A broad understanding of the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts; (LEAP 1)

• An ability to communicate ideas effectively both in speaking and in writing; (LEAP 2)

• The capacity for critical and creative thinking; (LEAP 2)
Successes to Date

- Completion of Assessment of GE Assessment (surveys and focus groups; overview prepared for WASC re-accreditation)
- Identification of model assessment summaries – posted on web
- Identification of models of the diversity requirement
- Identification of common problems in GE courses
  - 3 roundtable discussions in spring 2002 (active learning, course coordination, under-prepared students)
  - Surveys from GE Course Coordinators, Deans, Chairs prior to drafting 2005 GE revisions
  - 4 focus groups in 2005 on proposed revisions
- Appointment of GE faculty in residence at Center for Faculty Development & Support
- Sharing of best practices for SJSU Studies
Remaining Challenges

● Continue assessment of overall GE Program Objectives

● Continue to improve assessment procedures, including going “paperless” with all documents being submitted electronically and decreasing workload for faculty without decreasing quality of assessment
General Education Revision at SF State

- Graduation Requirements Task Force was charged in 2006 with reviewing and revising baccalaureate degree requirements, including GE
- Spring 2008 adopted baccalaureate goals
  (www.sfsu.edu)
- January 2009 distributed draft revisions for campus input
- November 2009 submitted final report to the Academic Senate
Proposed Upper Division General Education Options

Option 1
Topical Perspectives
(9 units)

Choose one Topical Perspective and take one course from each of the three Domains of Knowledge and Inquiry.

- Creativity, Innovation and Invention
  (1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
  (2) Arts and/or Humanities
  (3) Social Sciences

- Enduring Ideas, Values and Achievements
  (1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
  (2) Arts and/or Humanities
  (3) Social Sciences

- Ethical Reasoning and Action
  (1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
  (2) Arts and/or Humanities
  (3) Social Sciences

- Human Diversity
  (1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
  (2) Arts and/or Humanities
  (3) Social Sciences

- Life in San Francisco and/or Bay Area
  (1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
  (2) Arts and/or Humanities
  (3) Social Sciences

- Personal and Community Well Being
  (1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
  (2) Arts and/or Humanities
  (3) Social Sciences

- Social Justice and Civic Knowledge/Engagement
  (1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
  (2) Arts and/or Humanities
  (3) Social Sciences

- World Perspectives
  (1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
  (2) Arts and/or Humanities
  (3) Social Sciences

Option 2
Integrated Study
(9 units)

Three courses that have been devised by a faculty team into a coherent, integrative program of study.

The program as a whole must integrate the following groupings of Domains of Knowledge and Inquiry:
(1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
(2) Arts and/or Humanities
(3) Social Sciences

Option 3
Study Abroad
(9 units)

A minimum of eight units of coursework with at least five units abroad, and a one-unit course upon return to campus.

The program as a whole must integrate the following groupings of Domains of Knowledge and Inquiry:
(1) Physical and/or Life Sciences
(2) Arts and/or Humanities
(3) Social Sciences
Lessons Learned

- Connect your efforts to other campus initiatives (e.g. accreditation, strategic plans)
- Remember that the administrative role is to ask the questions that will frame the work, ensure resources (not easy these days), and provide rewards
- Emphasize that faculty own the curriculum; their leadership and participation are critical to success
- Try not to be defensive
Lessons Learned (con’t)

- Be flexible, but know where you want to draw the line (i.e. where will you/will you not compromise)
- Connect GE intellectually to all disciplines (e.g. liberal arts and sciences, professional programs)
- Build a coherent and democratic governance structure (e.g. Academic Senate, GE Council, Administrator for GE)
... and more Lessons Learned

- Anticipate **resistance**, including **constructively critical resistance**, within the faculty:
  - Concern for loss of control of courses and majors
  - Concern for change in work load
  - Concern that the work is hard and leads to burnout
  - Concern for cost and sustainability
... and a few more

Rhetorical resistance will include:
- Student-centered vs. learning-centered
- Outcomes vs. dispositions
- Academic freedom

Be prepared to engage these concerns
... last few

- Develop an implementation plan with a timeline that includes:
  - Commitment of resources
  - Faculty development
  - Transition issues:
    - A conversion plan for continuing students to transition from the old to the new
    - A transfer equivalency plan to ensure or even enhance the flow of transfer students
In the end, General Education work is:

- Community Organizing
- Capacity Building
- Faculty Development
Drawing Conclusions (con’t)

General Education work requires:
  - Practical work
  - Political work
  - Personal investment
  - Patience
  - Persistence
  … and above all, a good sense of humor!
Thank You!!
Questions?/Comments?

(Special thanks to Joseph Wood, Provost at the University of Baltimore, for his contributions to this presentation)
Discussion Questions

- What are some good ways to “market” a liberal education curriculum in order to eliminate the “check-box” mentality?
- What are successes you have had on your campus with GE reform?
- What challenges/potholes have you encountered that you would recommend others avoid?
- Do you currently have course-embedded and/or program assessment of GE? How do they relate to one another?
Discussion Questions (con’t)

- How might your program include ways to improve your students’ ability to be integrative learners?
- What high impact practices have you/do you plan to include (e.g. FYE, Learning Communities, Writing-Intensive Courses, UG Research, Diversity/Global Learning, Service Learning, Capstones, etc.)?

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