

Summary of GE Open Forum 12/12/08

The first GE Open Forum was held Friday, December 12, 2008 from 2-4 pm. Approximately 50 people attended including faculty, staff, administrators and one student. After a general introduction to the charge of the GE Design Team (Loker) and of the process we envision for GE consultation and re-design on our campus (Trechter), participants broke into groups of 5-6 people, with a member of the GE Design Team at each table to facilitate the discussion. We used four questions to guide these discussions:

- What should be the mission and purpose of General Education at CSU, Chico?
- What on campus do we already do that is consistent with that mission and purpose?
- What further steps do we need to take to achieve our goals for GE?
- What skills and knowledge do students need in the 21st century?

After more than an hour of dialogue in small groups, each table reported out to those assembled. The event closed with a brief wrap-up by Sara Trechter and thanks to those who participated.

Numerous ideas emerged and were often reinforced/repeated as groups reported out. The most prominent of these are summarized below.

1. GE should be consistent with the University mission and strategic plan. As we look to constructing a “distinctive” Chico-specific GE program, we should look to the University mission, vision, etc for guidance. These comments were often followed by mentions of sustainability and civic engagement. It was also mentioned that the AAC&U LEAP goals and statements are compatible with our University plan.
2. There was a recognition that GE has multiple functions, including providing Foundational Knowledge/Skills (Core), exposing students to broad areas of study (Breadth) and preparation in and for the major
3. Among the Core skills most frequently mentioned were:
 - a. **Writing** – there was frequent lamentation about the inability of our students to write well and the importance of GE as a site for teaching writing;
 - b. **Critical Thinking** – comments in this area ranged from finding and evaluating information (information literacy), critical media literacy (“Know when you are being sold something”), analysis, synthesis, etc. At least one table suggested combining writing and critical thinking skills and several mentioned infusing “skills” in “content” courses;
 - c. **Research Methodology** – discussed in relation to problem-oriented learning
 - d. **Communications skills** – only one explicit mention of oral communication
 - e. **Other skills**: Leadership skills, professionalism, self-presentation, working in teams, technology skills
 - f. **Numeracy** – only one table mentioned quantitative reasoning specifically, but this skill may be implicit in discussions of analysis and research methodology.
4. Breadth and Coherence – there was a recognition of the balance that must be struck between breadth and coherence, between choice and structure. One of the most difficult tasks in designing a new GE program will be in striking this balance.

- a. Coherence: There was frequent mentioned of the desirability of broad thematic threads in GE, though this was not necessarily a consensus view. Also, the Upper Division Themes in GE were viewed as both negative and positive models for thematic content in GE. Among the themes mentioned most frequently were:
 - i. **Globalization** – wide recognition that GE in the 21st C must prepare our students to live (and compete) in a globalized world. This includes cross-cultural awareness and appreciation.
 - ii. **Sustainability** – especially important given our campus commitment to education in this realm
 - iii. **Science, Technology and Society** – understanding the ethical and societal consequences of rapid technological change
 - iv. **Others** ... Media/society, Ethics, Diversity, Civic Engagement, ?
- b. Choice: Students need to have choices, depending on major and to explore majors. GE allows students to be exposed to “disciplinary brilliance.”
5. Relationship of GE to the Major – Another delicate balance. Diverse majors, and their students, have particular needs in GE. How do you maintain the integrity/coherence of GE but still allow double-counting and other strategies that facilitate student progress, especially in high-unit majors? What do *integration* and *integrative learning* mean in this context?
6. A common notion, raised at four tables, was that GE needs to “push students out of their comfort zone.”
7. Chronology – students need to understand broad sweep of human history and US history
8. Pedagogy – There was some discussion of pedagogy. The “key terms” that came from these discussions were:
 - a. **Active learning**
 - b. **Learning how to learn**
 - c. **Problem-based learning**
 - d. **Research, Analysis, Synthesis**
 - e. **Public-sphere pedagogy**
 - f. **Integrative** learning (requires integrative teaching, which requires support)
 - g. **Capstone** experiences (for synthesis)
9. Rigor: While it was recognized that our students are at a various developmental stages (from First-Year to Sr.) and levels of intellectual preparation, several voices were raised for a *rigorous* GE program, but also for the support necessary for students to perform well. Chico is not Harvard or Stanford.
10. Other issues raised (less frequent mention of these ...)
 - FTES and GE as “cash cow” are barriers to change ... how can these be overcome? Also, GE is “undervalued” in ABC model, hence little incentive for excellence (e.g. in assigning courses to best profs)
 - Code requirements (US, State, local government, US History) should be incorporated into GE
 - GE program must be assessable
 - There is currently little support for faculty teaching in GE, especially part-timers. This may be due in part to the highly de-centralized administration of GE .. no one “owns” GE as a program. Faculty development and nurturing “connections” among faculty is necessary for GE coherence.