

# Memorandum

To: Sandra Flake, Provost  
From: GE Design Team

Re: Progress Report, 6/09

## Updated Activities (post-April 3, 2009)

The GE Design Team submitted a report to you last April, bringing you up-to-date on our work to that time. Subsequent to that report, and into the end of Spring 09 semester, the GE Design Team developed a draft of learning outcomes connected to the [Mission and Values of GE](#) and continued to work toward the draft of a GE model for the campus. Utilizing the input from previous consultations, we focused campus discussion on specific items and sought broad faculty input on these items and the design process through consultations scheduled with departments. We deliberately chose departmental discussions as an alternative to continued open fora in order to reach those faculty members who have not routinely participated in open meetings.

Throughout April and May, members of the Design Team met with representatives of more than 20 academic departments and a group of RAs, gathering ideas about the shape and direction of a revised GE program on our campus. (See list at the end of this report.) To guide these discussions, the GE Design Team created a “checklist” of design features (available [here](#)) suggested at various points by faculty and others on our campus as desirable attributes of a revised GE program. In most cases, GE Design Team members compiled the feedback from departments and sent it back to the department chair for review, to ensure that we had portrayed their concerns and opinions clearly.

The work of the Design Team was also discussed at the Council of Chairs meeting on May 8 and presented to the Academic Senate on May 14.

On May 21, 2009, the GE Design Team met for 2 ½ hours to review all of our work up to that point and reach consensus on important issues related to changing GE on our campus in preparation for this report. As has been the case throughout the year, the Design Team worked hard, constructively and collectively to arrive at a set of recommendations that represent the consensus of the group and the input that we received from campus. These recommendations provide a clear basis on which to build a model for General Education at the beginning of the 2009-2010 Academic Year. Although the “checklist of features” included a number of ideas that may be incorporated in GE in a variety of ways, only the guiding recommendations are included here.

## Recommendations

The GE Design Team recommends:

1. The campus adopt a Mission and Values statement for GE (see draft [here](#)) and that the principles articulated in this statement guide learning outcomes and course development;

2. To increase coherence and provide a clear rationale for students, a limited number of “pathways” through the GE program be created that, upon successful completion, will result in an interdisciplinary minor for students. Each GE course should be incorporated into one or more pathways, although there may be a small number of GE courses that do not fit into any pathway;
3. Reduce the number of GE courses, and maintain these at a reasonable level, to reflect this increased coherence;
4. Incorporate the American Institutions courses into a 48-unit GE program, substituting for one Area C course and one Area D course. We recognize the disciplinary expertise of the faculty in History and Political Science as the responsible parties for ensuring that the “code” requirements are met. In effect, this move will reduce the number of units required in the Humanities (Area C) and Social Sciences (Area D) by 3 units in each area. We strongly urge that, as a matter of policy, majors not be permitted to increase their unit count, but that students be encouraged to use the six units freed by this change to choose elective courses within or outside their majors.
5. Because writing instruction is an integral aspect of GE, GE courses should continue to emphasize writing. However, the current policy that all courses require 1,500 words of writing is not consistent with effective writing pedagogy. We propose dropping the word count requirement and adding a High Impact Practice with the designation of “Writing Intensive” courses/sections, where enrollments are capped at a level consistent with strong writing pedagogy. Students would be required to take some number (perhaps four) of these courses. Faculty teaching writing intensive courses should receive training and support in effective writing instruction.
6. As a further means to reduce the number of GE courses and create a coherent and manageable program, majors (baccalaureate degree programs) may be permitted to fulfill a limited number of GE requirements – we suggest 9 units – simply through successful completion of the major. This will allow majors in diverse fields – including, but not limited to, science and engineering – to create courses that fulfill the intent of GE without proliferating major-specific courses that try to serve both GE and major goals.
7. The campus maintains a requirement of two science laboratory experiences.
8. The campus maintains courses in critical thinking, freshman composition, oral communications, but consider establishment of links between these foundation courses focusing on “skills” with those that focus on “content.”
9. We feel strongly that our GE program must reflect the university’s values and make strategic use of High Impact Practices (HIPs) to enhance student learning. Toward that end, we suggest investigating the proposal that all students have a capstone experience that reflects the university’s values, *either* in the major or in GE. Additionally, we are committed to the project of Making Excellence Inclusive (MEI) and ensuring that all students be exposed to some HIPs in GE. We are therefore exploring other possibilities for HIPs related to a civic engagement experience (such as the Town Hall meeting) early in their academic careers.
10. To add distinction and coherence to our GE program, we suggest changing its name, from “GE” to a unique, Chico-specific term that conveys our mission, values and approach to a liberal education. Suggestions for a new name include the “Chico Commons,” the “Chico Core,” “Chico Academic Threads (CATs)” or some other name suggested from the campus community.

Given the highly controversial nature of this work, the need to maintain the confidence and support of the faculty, the reality of 10-month faculty contractual obligations and the need to live up to our commitment to transparency in the GE re-visioning process, we pledged to Department Chairs and others that we would suspend our work over the summer. That is, we will not continue to meet as a group, and engage in active work around GE re-design. We view this report as our means of informing you on our progress toward a revised GE program in AY 08-09. Our work over the summer will be oriented more towards systematizing the information we have gathered, making it available on the web, responding to the feedback we have received and otherwise supporting the recommendations in this report.

We view these recommendations as the point of departure for an ongoing – but not open-ended – discussion of GE re-design. With your approval, it is our intent to share these results with the campus and to use them as the basis for a formal proposal for a revised GE program on our campus, to be submitted for debate and consideration in the Academic Senate in Fall 09. We envision the work of the Design Team continuing throughout the campus approval process in AY 09-10. After a revised GE program is approved, we recommend the convening of an Implementation Team to work with faculty, staff and administration on putting the revised program in place, with the goal of a fully implemented program ready for Fall 11.

Implementing a revised GE program will require considerable support for faculty revision of courses and their systematic review and incorporation into a revised GE program. We view the Compass grant as a major source of funds to support this process, including the development of pilot courses in AY 09-10. The implementation of this curriculum is also an opportunity to re-think the administration of GE on our campus. These are critically important tasks for a subsequent “implementation team.” But it needs to be recognized that the success of our GE curriculum depends not only on the creativity and support of our faculty, but also on effective administrative processes that encourage quality instruction, set and maintain high standards and provide for assessable outcomes.

The GE Design Team thanks you for your support, recognizes the intense interest of the faculty and other stakeholders in this process and appreciates the opportunity to serve the university in this important task. We are more than willing to discuss our recommendations and our decision-making process at your convenience.

**Departments consulted: (grouped according to College)**

College of Agriculture

Anthropology

Geography

Political Science

History

Theatre

English

Foreign Languages

Religious Studies

Philosophy (critical thinking faculty)  
Finance and Marketing  
Management  
Mathematics and Statistics  
Geological and Environmental Sciences  
Biological Sciences  
Nutrition and Food Sciences  
Physics  
Chairs of Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering, Communications  
Dean and Chairs of Humanities and Fine Arts  
Department Chairs