

GENERAL EDUCATION COT FINAL REPORT

Over the past eighteen months, the General Education COT, despite having three chairs, fewer meetings than most other COTS, and inconsistent attendance, supported vigorous discussion of the position of CSUH's General Education program in the institution, debated assessment strategies and directions, and recommended significant changes in the relationship between general education and major departments. The GE COT's irregular meetings and frequent changes of chairs reflect significant work completed on the General Education Program prior to the COT's establishment. Since the major revision of the General Education program in 1998, which established lower division learning communities, the University completed a GE 5-6 year review in 2003. The results of that review were to retain freshman clusters, despite some vocal opposition, because assessment data was convincingly strong, eliminate sophomore clusters in favor of greater choice, and institute an upper division Science requirement. The COT's activities, therefore, looked to the future of GE and its place in the University.

Accomplishments over the eighteen months:

Learning Outcomes

- Established learning outcome teams for science, social science, and humanities
- Lower-division outcomes approved by faculty senate
- Humanities upper-division outcomes approved by Academic Senate
- Upper division social science and science, communication, and quantitative reasoning drafted and will go to the Academic Senate in winter 2005
- Performing arts and activities outcomes under development
- All outcomes, lower and upper division, should be in place by end of 2004-05.

Embedded Assessment

- The GE Program Coordinator and the Director of Assessment have assessed student learning in the clusters since the program began in 1998. Although most of the assessment strategies collect student perceptions of learning, these data demonstrate consistent results and strongly suggest learning communities, particularly freshman learning

communities, have positive ongoing learning, socialization, and retention effects. We currently collect one direct measure of student learning: the junior rising Writing Skills Test. Freshmen write essays using prompts and timing constraints used in the official test. The data show that cluster students consistently perform significantly better on the test than all other first-time test takers.

- Five freshman cluster faculty teams developed embedded assessments strategies during the summer 2004: Three in Humanities (Ancient World, Creative Spirit, Gender in the Arts) and two in Social Science (Individual and Society and Viewing Diversity). They are all piloting their designs currently. At the year's end, we will collect the data and the faculty teams will review and revise their strategies during summer 2005. No Science cluster faculty teams participated in summer workshops and none is working on embedded assessment.
- Embedded assessment in upper division general education courses will be developed over the coming two years.

Cluster review:

- The University community reviewed and approved freshman learning community clusters for 2004-2007. The GE Subcommittee received only one new cluster proposal. (However, there were sufficient established clusters to fulfill the immediate need.) Due to time pressures, neither of the committees nor the Academic Senate had sufficient time to provide faculty feedback on how well the proposals support the relevant learning outcomes. The cluster review did not include review of support courses (composition, communication, information literacy, or General Studies).
- Policy and procedures for review and rotation of freshman learning communities drafted fall 2004 by General Education Subcommittee. Winter 2005 the Subcommittee will review, revise and submit to Committee on Instruction and Curriculum then the Academic Senate for approval.

GE COT members participated in two important all COT meetings: Promotion, Tenure, and Retention and Diversity.

PTR issues for General Education: currently the PTR document lacks any specific indication that teaching in General Education, much less in the learning communities, is an important aspect of a professor's teaching

responsibilities, nor is it acknowledged as a part of University service. As a result,

- Few faculty see any reason to devote what limited time they have to teach courses that do not assist their departments. In some Colleges, faculty believe that teaching general education courses hurts their chances for tenure and promotion.
- Most all GE courses are also courses in the major. Few are designed specifically for a general population; most are foundation (lower division) or topics (upper division) courses and usually but not always elective courses, in the major.
- The lack of formal institutional recognition of faculty contributions to general education as an important aspect of faculty life encourages departments to offer upper division major courses without prerequisites in order to gain GE FTE, important currency at the University.
- GE will never become an important University program until faculty are rewarded for participation. Teaching in freshman learning communities requires significant time and effort beyond that required in stand-alone courses. Collaboration with others teaching in the learning community, integrating the cluster's theme, and working with freshmen require more from the faculty than stand-alone courses. With the CSUH faculty's already heavy teaching.

Diversity issues: our freshman class is the most diverse among the classes. We struggle to retain African American and Hispanic students, in particular male students. Nonetheless, we have no cluster themes that speak directly to our ethnically diverse freshmen experiences. Gender and Viewing Diversity are themes that address diversity but the issues and approaches taken to the subject matter are often not directly relevant to the students' lives.

- Need to develop clusters with themes that speak to the issues freshmen struggle with
- Need to increase the number of faculty of color teaching freshmen
- Need to develop more freshmen year activities that engage our diverse students in campus life.
- Peer mentoring in freshman learning community clusters might help significantly in identifying students who are struggling—financially, scholastically, socially before they drop out.

Major issues under continued discussion and debate:

1. Faculty need to engage in building clusters that excite the faculty member's natural tendency to interact and learn with others. Assessment needs to be seen by faculty as a way to improve existing courses and to increase learning. As embedded assessments become institutionalized, we expect a more natural source of rotating cluster topics and motivation to work together collaboratively to create and research interactively, enriching the work of faculty and the lives of students.

- Need to develop clusters with themes that excite faculty and students
- Need to find mechanisms to include faculty in clusters that may not require commitment to a full course
- Need to incorporate discussion and research activities at appropriate levels that empower faculty and students to engage more

2. Move the General Education Program review process to the Committee on Academic Program Review. The GE Program includes General Studies, the freshman seminar/support course in the learning communities and a faculty of eleven graduate students and lecturers. Currently the Committee on Instruction and Curriculum reviews the GE Program but does not have established procedures and structure for program review.

3. The COT energetically discussed the GE Program's status. Some COT members argued for a move to give GE departmental or more "regular" status.

4. Selection of faculty teaching in freshman learning communities: the COT discussed the recent trend to assign more and more lecturers to the clusters. Often the GE Coordinator will find out that a new lecturer is teaching in a cluster only after the quarter begins. This significantly undermines the integration of the theme in the courses and makes collaboration among the faculty almost impossible. Until there are explicit institutional supports or rewards for faculty to teach in the learning communities, we can expect this trend to continue.

5. House freshmen services in a single location (GE office, GS faculty, cluster support, First Year Experience Coordinator, freshman advising, and service learning, remedial policy enforcement). Currently these activities are loosely coordinated and in varied locations. Integration of freshman services would make better use the human and financial resources available for our entering students, and provide easier access for freshmen.