

Special Report to the Academic Senate on the GE Initiative

November 11, 2004

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The Chair introduced the report. She noted that it seemed appropriate to start the dialogue on GE before we were voting on it next semester.

(Professor Draper kindly submitted his introduction and concluding statement for inclusion in these minutes. – LH)

Good afternoon, and thank you Dr. Dreisbach, for your invitation to provide the Senate with an update on the work on GE reform. This report is the first step in responding to the May 2004 Senate charge to *EPC and its G.E. sub-committee [to] develop a General Education Program proposal guided by the [GE Path] proposal. [...]*

I am Paul Draper and I chair the GE Subcommittee. Presenting with me today are Dolly Freidel, Chair of the Geography Department, and a member of the GE Subcommittee, Scott Miller, Director of the Writing Center, and ex officio member of the subcommittee, and Bev Viljoen, a student who has been a CSA in Residential Life and a Peer Mentor in the EMT/FIG program. Provost Ochoa will address resource issues before we move on to a Q & A period. I ask that you hold all your questions until then.

Since 1991, there has been an enormous demographic shift in the ratio of junior transfer students to native freshmen from the 70% junior transfer rate to the current 75% native freshman rate. It is therefore altogether appropriate that we once again examine to what degree GE remains coherent and clearly defined *for the students*, and what we as faculty can provide that addresses the specific learning and developmental needs of our annual enrollment of 1200 plus freshman. We are confronted with a new generation of students, whose styles of learning and academic preparedness are quite different than they were even 10 years ago. Now is the time to design a GE Program that is student centered. One that accepts both the strengths and deficits with which students come to us, and that guides students to becoming knowledgeable, creative, capable participants in the world.

We have an opportunity to once again assert our mission as a Liberal Arts and Science University by creating a truly distinctive GE Program that will draw, inspire, retain, and graduate the next generation of capable, informed citizens.

As we go about designing this distinctive program, we build on discussions that date at least since the 1992 GE retreat chaired by Lou Mattson. We consider recommendations from the 2000 Area A Lab, the 2001 Ashville Conference team, the 2002 Faculty retreat on GE organized by then Senate chair Rick Luttmann, and the work of the joint EPC/GE Task Force on GE Reform which led to the writing of the “New Path for General Education”, and the guidance of the APC Task Force on GE Reform led by Rick Marks and Bob Coleman.

In 2003 this body passed a Mission for GE:

General Education (GE) at Sonoma State University (SSU) investigates the complexity of human experience in a diverse natural and social world, and promotes informed and ethical participation as citizens of the world.

How do we translate this mission into a cohesive GE Program? What does a renewed GE Program actually do?

A renewed General Education acknowledges that it is the responsibility of each faculty member, and the faculty as a whole, and the University structure to support each student's development academically, socially, ethically, and morally.

A renewed General Education accepts that the learning skills, breadth and inter-disciplinary nature of GE and the depth and content of majors are of parallel importance, which together give students the capacity to work across disciplinary lines in their relationships to individuals, community, country, and the world.

A renewed General Education, especially through FYE and the capstone, ensures that individual students develop as parts of a community of learners, and that this community, takes responsibility for the engagement and development of the individual student.

The "GE Path" offers six interrelated components. When fully implemented, they will provide a cohesive GE experience that students appreciate because it is integrated, skill building, purposeful and comprehensive of their needs and aspirations. The six points are:

- 1) Create an integrated, cohesive, rigorous, and sustainable Freshman Year Experience
- 2) Expand student choice among courses at the 200 to 400-levels.
- 3) Create a set of capstone GE courses
- 4) Implement Writing Across the Curriculum ...grounded in 100-level composition, and spreading across all disciplines in 200-400-level courses
- 5) Provide faculty development resources that enable us to teach to the new goals especially as required in FYE and the capstone.
- 6) Apply appropriate assessment rubrics to the GE Program goals and student learning outcomes

Each of these supports the others. But how?

A successful First-Year Experience embraces the whole student—the social being as well as the learner. It inspires engagement, demonstrates rigor, promotes consistent standards and expectations, and models creative problem solving. College is a new world for every new student. FYE sets the stage for the rest of the college experience by showing why education is worthy and important. FYE teaches necessary skills, acknowledges and tends to transitional, advising, and developmental needs, and guides students to choose a major right for the individual.

With a foundational experience behind them, sophomores are prepared for the challenge of greater academic independence. Expanded choice in breadth courses teaches students to appreciate other disciplines and allows them to follow their curiosity rather than a set of prescribed classes. Faculty can be both passionate and rigorous about the subjects they care about most —trusting that most who take their courses for GE credit will truly want to be there.

The GE capstone helps students to digest and crystallize the whole college experience and to work from one's own discipline along with students deeply engaged in other fields to examine problems of scale and scope that demand consideration from multiple knowledge bases and skill sets, and to form deep collaborative trust.

Writing Across the Curriculum ensures that all students become strong writers. Several levels of intensive writing courses--some foundational, others advanced and taught from the perspective of

the majors—develop abilities to research, weigh, organize, and express themselves to different audiences in several. Because good writing requires mental discipline, the consistent, guided exercise of writing over the baccalaureate career demonstrates high academic achievement.

Faculty Development and GE Assessment are needed to ensure that we get the resources we need to be successful teachers and mentors in the new GE Program, and necessary, sustained feedback on how well the GE Program does in achieving its goals.

Collectively, these elements define an exceptional, inspiring GE Program that will support and enhance work in the majors, while developing skilled, creative graduates who are able to get good jobs, and participate fully in their communities.

The GE initiative work is ongoing and has benefited from the contributions of many voices from all the Schools, Professional staff, administrators and students. It is a collaborative process that brings us closer together because many assumptions about how we organize ourselves, what our hopes are, and what we think we might lose all come to the fore. The effort is difficult, necessary and rewarding, and I trust, will lead to significant and gratifying changes.

There is a great deal of inspiration, creativity, and plain hard work going into this effort. There is also concern that we may be undercut our majors by redistributing scarce resources. The resource limitations are real. The First-Year Experience proposal that you will hear about today is now ready for resource analysis. Undoubtedly, adjustments will be made in response to the available resources, but we now know what is core to the proposal, and can move forward with that in mind.

The bulk of the effort since May has been on developing the FYE portion of the “PATH” I would like you to hear from others who will share where we are in this initiative.

(the other guests' remarks are summarized. LH)

B. Viljoen introduced her self as a fifth year student at SSU who will be graduating in May with a degree and Theatre Arts – Acting Emphasis. She was a Community Service Advisor for one year and is in her second year as a Peer Advisor for the Freshman Interest Group for Performing Arts. She put together, with the help of others, what she thinks students want and need in terms of general education.

To receive guidance and mentoring about exploring college education/life opportunities and possibilities;

To become accustomed to college level work and responsibility;

To develop college level reading, writing and critical thinking skills;

To find correlations and connections between curricular and co-curricular aspects of college;

To understand how the university works and what students need to know to have the university work for them, for example policies, regulations, advising and finding a major;

To understand how and why GE and individual GE courses are important to why I am at SSU and to develop and extend a sense of why we are here;

To understand how GE relates to any major and getting a degree that will land a good job in the future;

To understand how and why GE is not only about getting a good job later;

She argued that the majority of incoming freshman students have the mentality of a) I'm coming to college because my parents told me to, b) I am going to college because I know it's the next step but I don't know what I want or what interests me, and c) I don't know why I'm here or what I want. Students are then presented with the 51 units of GE at SSU. She argued that the GE pattern is too general and has too many choices. She was not arguing for less choice, but thought choice was a problem when there is a lack of consistency in objectives, standards, goals and expectations from one class to another. She thought students did not get enough experience with a variety of subjects therefore they could not have an adequate understanding of what they want. She thought that students are not challenged as they do not learn critical thinking, it seems teachers do not take GE seriously and thus students do not take it seriously and treat it as a box to check off. She has been attending the GE meetings and thinks the lecture series will provide the consistency that is lacking and make freshman and GE more serious. She thought lectures around one big topic from many different disciplines will excite freshman and challenge them to think about what they want or why they are in college and what GE is for. In small group seminars the student will find a comfortable, safe setting where they can develop confidence, get to know each other and have the teacher get to know them. So they can learn how to think, speak up and communicate and learn that it is ok to be challenged. Since the lecture is once a week it won't be hard for students to listen to and will also provide a variety of learning styles for the freshmen. They will also learn how to hear the lecture and how to process the lecture in their small groups. She felt as a senior that her writing ability was still underdeveloped as well as her ability to read and process written material.

D. Freidel stated she's been on the GE subcommittee for six years and that this has been an ongoing discussion. She pointed out this has been a long term process that we've been struggling with. She noted that many people have participated in the process, some have felt frustrated and angry and are wondering why we have to change. She emphasized that this was a university wide collaboration, not just faculty, but also Student Services Professionals, and all the folks involved in the EMT program. We have our Mission, Goals, and Objectives. We needed to start moving along with the six point path that the combined EPC - GE subcommittee task force came up with and try to narrow it down. Many people took part in the task force this summer to try to define the freshman year experience. Many people have provided input and many more are invited to provide input. If you think there is something we are forgetting, please let us know. We are trying to incorporate all the feedback that we can possibly get. She was a skeptic, but now she sees it as an opportunity. She was very inspired by going to a meeting of the AACU on GE and Assessment. There were many interesting models some of which we are trying to incorporate into this new path. We invite criticism and feedback, but we really have to move on and try it.

S. Miller asked the body to look at the handout passed around with grids on it. A possible Fall semester model for the first year experience has two hours times three meetings per week. The curriculum as they have imagined it centers around the middle day with day 2, a large lecture given weekly by a faculty member. The lecture is on some topic related to some theme that the faculty members who are working together for this strand have determined together. On the other days the students meet with a team, a Faculty Member, a Student Services Professional and a Peer Mentor. They meet in groups of 15. In the small meeting they do a variety of things. Most of what they do is seminar on things that happened in the lectures. Within the context of that they do writing, critical thinking, reading and speaking. On top of that we integrate the objectives that are

currently housed in EMT. Integration is an important word in this.

He then invited the body to think about the topic of food and to imagine that a possible theme on food could be called Consuming Passions: food, the body and society. He asked the body to take 30 seconds to think seriously in their own discipline what kind of talk, lecture, or contribution you would like to make to the community of scholars and students who are all thinking about issues related to food. He asked what people had thought of. Responses were: Food, Gender and Society; Advertising and Eating Disorders, Hunger in Sonoma County; Searching for the Perfect Peach; Controversies on Genetic Modified Food; Talking about Food; Effective Weight Loss Strategies; Access to Food and Food Production; Markets and Distribution of Food; Food and Wine Management; Business of Food; Gluttons in Dramatic Literature; Ecology, Soils, and Sustainable Agriculture; Psychology of the Dinner Table; Political Economy of World Hunger; School Gardening, Nutrition and Good Eating in Schools.

A Senator noted that none of these wonderful ideas could be developed in a one hour course.

S. Miller responded that was an important point. The program will be successful to the extent that we harness the kind of excitement that we just saw to the goal of helping students realize that the intellectual work they've come to do is also about them, personally, that is exciting and interesting and fun. It involves them to express themselves in the best liberal arts and sciences tradition.

P. Draper noted that this is the first step in the GE program. The breadth and depth comes in many other current GE classes as we go on. The excitement that can come from this lecture series is an introduction to student's being excited about their reasons for being here, not the end of the road, but the beginning of the road.

E. Ochoa stated that this kind of coordinated, purposeful, multi-disciplinary program could be a way to develop a learning outcome of giving students an appreciation for the need for disciplinary rigor to make sense of the world. If there is a concrete object of study that has a unity already then the disciplines can apply their tool set to make sense of it. The students begin to realize that to deal with a problem you can't just look at the economics of it, or the sociology of it or the history of it, but that all these things come into play. That much could be accomplished in the first year experience. That could motivate students to explore the disciplines and understand the need for training in depth in one discipline. He presented a fragment of a resource analysis.¹ The big nut to crack here is how can we make it feasible to offer the small seminar in the freshman year experience. The key to do that is to combine it with the large lecture. The large lecture in combination with the small seminars can be very effective. It can also bring the whole community together and create a bonding experience for the freshman class and it generates a tremendous SFR. That would allow us to average out. He passed out a handout. If we have lecture a that is the entire freshman class, 1200, let's say, and small seminars of 15. The large lecture would generate one student credit hour in each of the two terms. The small seminars generating two student credit hours each of the two terms. On the faculty side and we work with 3 WTU's for each of the semesters, then you have in effect 80 sections of 15 for 1200 students, the global average SFR for the whole thing of 23. This shows that more or less the idea is in the ballpark. There are a lot of details that are not factored in. This was the initial analysis that shows that we could actually do it. Now that we've got something concrete we can tweak it to become feasible to do it.

Questions from the body:

A Senator asked the Provost if he had estimated what the 80 sections would cost.

The Provost said he just wanted to show that the SFR was feasible, then it's generating FTES at an acceptable cost.

The Senator followed up saying that cost is always a concern. Many departments are teaching GE courses for freshman and sophomores where the SFR ranges from 40, 50 to 60. His fear was that in order for this to work he and his colleagues would have to take more freshman and more sophomore students in the GE courses we now teach. How do we not take away resources from another part of the university to make something that sounds wonderful happen. He thought 80 sections would cost around \$350,000.

The Provost said to remember that units that go into this are already in our programs. So they don't displaced other units. So we're talking about 1200 X 9 FTES. That's enrollment we're currently producing. We're talking about producing it with a different product with a SFR that is comparable to what we are doing overall.

A Senator noted her concern about the dilution of content with the proposed GE course as described. Maybe we are trying to do too much with not enough time. Who will be teaching the 80 sections? It seems to be all about writing. She was not sure who would be qualified to be teaching writing. Some faculty may need extra training.

P. Draper responded that the Senator's question has come up as the model has jelled. We may mitigate the content dilution by getting students excited about breadth across disciplines instead of the depth of a discipline. They will get serious depth in writing and critical thinking in the small seminar sections. How to deal with the writing issue and where we get 80 instructors – do instructors do two sections – we are looking at different ways of solving this problem. These are good questions and at some point we are just going to have to try a pilot and that will answer a lot of questions and allow us to deal with problems as we go.

S. Miller said he was deeply concerned with the issues raised and noted that the devil is in the details. If it's done well, students will get a full year of intense practice on their academic writing rather than one term. That gets us a lot.

A Senator stated it was refreshing to hear the student's remarks on why students come to college. He noted that faculty were not typical students in college because we went on to graduate school. He thought faculty may lose touch with typical college students. When he hears there is going to be a class of 1200 students, he thinks unless we take role or there will be 200 students missing. He asked will role be taken?

A Senator said she was worried about having someone with experience to coordinate such a big program. That would be another cost, but she strongly recommended it. She also suggested that learning outcomes for this new program be assessed in the same way to show that it is at least as effective as what we already have.

A Senator said she had not been positive about the GE reform, but now had changed her mind. However, she did have concerns. She wanted to hear from the President and the Provost that there is no intention here to substitute graduate student labor for faculty labor in teaching this course.

Another Senator responded that there is no intention to use graduate students in this course. P.

Draper said it has never been raised in any of their discussions.

Motion to extend time by ten minutes. Second. Approved.

A student Senator asked about the “passion strands” and how that fits with undeclared students. It seems it might hurt people doing double majors or who switch majors in their second year.

P. Draper responded that the “passion strands” were more about advising, so more students are in more classes that are about what they think they want to be doing.

A Senator noted he shared the previous Senator’s concern about resources. To the degree resources arise, would the reallocation of resources be limited to the lower division level of coursework or might they be required reallocations from upper division level to the lower division level.

A Senator said the program sounds progressive and synthesized. She suggested that when this is implemented that time is created for student to take large science labs.

A Senator asked the Provost that the 3 units in the Fall seem to represent 6 hours in the classroom and the 3 units in the Spring seem to represent 4 hours in the classroom both of which seems to be under funding faculty participation. She asked P. Draper about the footnotes for the Spring semester models. It talks about the LCS faculty being responsible for choosing lectures and appropriate readings to support alternate viewpoints to individual lecture content. Does that mean that as a faculty, if I were to participate in this program, I have absolutely nothing to do with reading material that is going to be required for students in my section. What implications does that have for my say in the kinds of assignments to give? Is it going to be as specific as how many pages of writing would be required or to have a certain number of rough drafts or a certain number of essays?

A Senator noted concern about the co-curricular material really being addressed. WASC loved EMT, but it’s very labor intensive, so it’s costly. She was glad to see the suggestion of a college writing class to be required of all students after. She was concerned about resources being taken from the majors for this. She did not want the GE reform to undercut the idea of different disciplines.

A Senator asked if this proposal would take the place of freshman seminars.

P. Draper said that would be folded in to this new proposal.

The Senator continued asking if we have taken time to find out what has been successful in the freshman seminars. He didn’t want to lose that.

P. Draper said they are doing everything they can to ensure that.

A Senator asked what would be done with students who need academic remediation, how their needs, particularly in the writing disciplines, would be addressed. What happens if a student does not do well the first semester. How will they redeem themselves? She also was interested in understanding how the number of SSP’s expand to fit this workload. There are only about 24 SSP’s on campus.

The Chair asked if the body would like the guests back before the end of the semester. Moved

and seconded.

Closing Statement from Paul Draper

I want to thank you all for your attentive listening and good questions. This process is best served through openness. All of us working on this initiative encourage faculty to make additional questions known, though your GE rep, through an email or phone call to me, or by attending design meetings. As soon as we think a consensus has been reached on the shape of the Lecture/Seminar, I will bring it before the GE Subcommittee for its input, and hope to move it forward through EPC and on to the Senate, seeking its sanction for a 10 section pilot of 150 students in the fall of 2005. At that point, we will begin consideration of expanded choice and publish guidelines for capstone RFPs. Consideration of the other elements of the "PATH" is ongoing because they must be integrated into the planning of FYE, choice, and capstone.

Vote on motion to invite guests back before end of semester – approved.

1.

FRESHMAN YEAR EXPERIENCE
LARGE LECTURE/SMALL SEMINAR FORMAT
Two-semester preliminary analysis

	Fall	Spring	Total
<i>A5 Large lecture size</i>	1,200	1,200	1,200
<i>A6 Small seminar size</i>	15	15	15
<i>A7 Large lecture SCUs²</i>	1	1	2
<i>A8 Small seminar SCUs</i>	2	2	4
<i>A9 Co-curricular SCUs</i>	2	1	3
<i>A10 Total SCUs</i>	5	4	9
<i>A11 Faculty WTUs³</i>	3	3	6
<i>A12 No. of faculty sections¹</i>	80	80	80
SFR*	25	20	23

$$* = (A5 * A10) / (A12 * A11)$$

¹40 Faculty @ 2 sections/per faculty

²SCU = Student Credit Units

³WTU = Weighted Teaching Units