

# The Whole University Supporting the Whole Student: Educational Foundations for New College Students

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Sonoma State University has embarked upon a process of renewal of its General Education Program. This paper lays out a conceptual overview of the “New Path for General Education at Sonoma State University,” and then proposes a design and rationale for a new First-Year Experience, the logical starting point in the renewal process. This proposal is the first step toward a pilot program to be implemented during the 2005-2006 academic year.



*I. Conceptual Overview of “A New Path for General Education at Sonoma State University”*

Over the past decade, our undergraduate student population has undergone a striking transformation. In 1991, approximately one in eight undergraduates (12%) was a first-time freshman; this proportion grew to nearly one in five (19%) by fall 2003. In absolute terms, the number of first-time freshmen has almost doubled, growing from 703 in 1991 to 1,303 in 2003. At the same time, the percentage of junior transfers in the student population fell from one in six (17%) in 1991 to one in twelve (8%) in 2003.<sup>1</sup> We are currently confronted with a new generation of students whose styles of learning and academic preparedness are quite different from what they were only a decade ago. It is therefore altogether appropriate that SSU faculty once again examine to what degree General Education (GE) remains coherent and clearly defined *for this new population of students*, and what we as faculty can provide that addresses the specific learning and co-curricular needs of these more traditional-aged students.

Moreover, as multiple reports of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) have indicated, the University has yet to resolve historical problems regarding the purpose of GE, including clarification of the program’s status as either a stand-alone program or as support for the major. In the WASC Reaffirmation of Accreditation Letter of July 6, 1999, WASC Executive Director Ralph Wolff indicated that, in SSU’s case, “Data collected through the self study suggest a serious need to address the purposes of general education, their alignment with the mission and means of assessing whether the goals are being accomplished.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, WASC, too, expects significant advances in the area of GE at SSU.

Now is the time to design a GE Program that is learner-centered, one that acknowledges both the strengths and deficits with which students come to the university, and that guides students to becoming knowledgeable, creative, participatory members of the global community. Now is the time to reestablish SSU’s mission as a first-rate public liberal arts and sciences institution 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 a distinctive program, we build on discussions that date as far back as the 1992 GE retreat chaired by Lou Mattson. We have considered 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, the work of the joint EPC/GE Task Force on GE Reform which led to the writing of “A New Path for General Education at Sonoma State

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Leslie Deming, Office of Institutional Research.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Elaine Sundberg, Office of the Provost.

University (May 2003” (“PATH”), and the guidance of the APC Task Force on GE Reform led by Rick Marks and Bob Coleman.

In 2003 the SSU Academic Senate approved the following 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.

Let us now begin to translate this mission into a cohesive GE Program. The renewal of General Education proposed in this document acknowledges that it is the responsibility of each faculty member, the faculty as a whole, and the University structure to support each student’s development academically, socially, ethically, and morally.

GE renewal recognizes that the learning skills, breadth and interdisciplinary nature of general education and the depth and content of majors are of *parallel importance*, and, together, give students the capacity to work across disciplinary lines in their relationships to individuals, their community, their country, and the world.

Through a First-Year Experience (FYE) Program and the upper-division GE capstone, the renewal proposed here ensures that individual students develop as members of a community of learners, and that this community takes responsibility for the engagement and development of the individual student.

The “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. In essence, the six points aim to:

- 1) create an integrated, cohesive, rigorous, and sustainable First-Year Experience;
- 2) expand student choice among courses at the 200- to 400-levels;
- 3) create a set of upper-division capstone GE courses;
- 4) implement Writing Across the Curriculum grounded in 100-level composition, and spread across all disciplines in 200- to 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.

The “PATH” proposal is a holistic approach, and offers a comprehensive means for institutionalizing support for the *whole student* at Sonoma State University. Collectively, these six points define an intentional GE program that that engages and excites students toward excellence, so that GE is valued by them as being on par with our excellent major programs. FYE must be considered as part of a larger picture that is completed over the course of the baccalaureate. Rather than an end point, the first-year experience is foundational in broadening student awareness of diverse worlds, perspectives, and peoples. The GE Program that is developing is comprehensive, and is aimed at moving more excited and engaged students on into

200- to 400-level breadth courses and into their chosen majors. Ultimately, the program will help students learn to become engaged citizens and lifelong learners able to work through their disciplines in concert with professionals in multidisciplinary contexts.

The expansion of choice in breadth courses, the explicit emphasis on writing, and a capstone experience that guides students to connect disciplinary expertise gained in the majors builds upon the FYE foundation. Together, these components of the “PATH” form students who will be more able to creatively and collaboratively address problems that are greater in scope than those of any single discipline, and which require solutions that come from many knowledge sets and approaches. The “PATH” provides a structure to General Education at SSU where the educational benefits are cumulative and intentional, rather than ad hoc and accidental.

Though each of the six “PATH” components is valuable in and of itself, each component becomes even more potent as an integrated set. Breadth courses yield more meaning to prepared and engaged students—as do courses within the disciplines—than to those students still wondering if they belong in college, or unsure of what is expected of them at the college level, or unclear about the very purpose of the university. And the effect is synergistic as faculty are energized by prepared, alert, thinking students, rather than by mere placeholders.

All four academic components of the “PATH” are imperative to achieving a successful GE, one in which students comprehend, appreciate, accept, and develop in relationship to program goals, as opposed to merely fulfilling requirements often presented as a sheet of boxes to be checked off. The various elements of the GE “PATH” will create a synergy within the major disciplines which will inspire students to stay in school, increase time-on-task in a range of breadth courses, and empower students to succeed in major programs and individual areas of passion and interest.

In order for the academic parts of the “PATH” to succeed, a rebuilt GE program must also include a focus on pedagogy, as well as mentoring and development of faculty who teach in the program. Additionally, we believe that getting students, faculty and administrators to think about GE in a new way will ultimately increase satisfaction with GE at all levels of the university. A rebuilt GE program will contribute to greater student retention past the freshman year, will reinvigorate faculty attitudes and involvement in GE, and will greatly enhance the quality of the liberal arts and science education students achieve at Sonoma State University (“PATH”).

Each of these six points supports the others, as follows:

- 1) 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 focusing upon why education is worthy and important.<sup>3</sup> FYE teaches essential skills, and addresses advising and co-curricular needs, including guiding students in the selection of a suitable major. During a

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<sup>3</sup> While SSU students continue to cite “to learn more about things” as their primary reason for going to college, “to make more money” and “to get a better job” are among the top four reasons cited. (Deming, “Students’ Educational Motivations”).

recent teleconference focused on the First-Year Experience, Distinguished Professor and Senior Scientist from Pennsylvania State University Patrick Terenzini noted, “Effective first-year programs are those where students feel that they are on a supportive campus, where they are engaged both cognitively and personally. College is a place where we make students think and support them while they do that” (“Shaping the Future”).

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

3) The upper-division GE capstone helps students to integrate the various diverse elements of their entire college experience and to work from their own discipline 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. As the “PATH” indicates, “The capstone experience of the General Education program should have at its core the integration of learning that has taken place in the first three to four years of the student’s university experience... Since this proposal envisages GE to be an integrated program of liberal arts, we expect the capstone experience to target or support themes that are broad, diverse, rigorous, and cross-disciplinary.”

4) 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 students’ abilities to research, weigh, organize, and express themselves to different audiences in several styles. Because good writing requires mental discipline, consistent, guided and progressively more challenging exercises of writing over the baccalaureate career demonstrates high academic achievement.

5) Faculty development is needed to ensure that faculty receive the resources they need to be successful teachers and mentors in the new GE Program. For newly hired tenure-track professors, such development will take the form of a course taught annually. Since new faculty are funded to advise and offer service to the university upon their arrival, but are so new to the university as to not yet have acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to do so, the first year of a tenure-track position is the ideal time to mentor new faculty, to give them a sense of the essential values of SSU’s GE Program and how that program relates to the overall baccalaureate design, to offer them pedagogical options (e.g. help designing effective writing prompts, etc.), to pair them with senior faculty, etc. Established faculty would be welcome to join this class; alternative development options will also be put into place.

6) GE Assessment responds to WASC’s primary concern by requiring stated GE goals, coupled with a means of assessment by which SSU demonstrates how well we meet those goals. These assessment rubrics must be evidence-based rather than indirect (portfolios and certain types of questions embedded in exams are “direct” methodologies, while Student Evaluations of Teaching Effectiveness (SETEs), for example, are “proxy” (Gardner) or “indirect” methods) and

the body of information must be compiled over several years, rather than on a semester-to-semester basis, to develop an accurate picture. Assessment tracks the efficacy of GE courses and the program as a whole. Assessment is not intended to evaluate individual faculty members for insertion in Personal Action Files and RTP documents; rather, it aims to provide program directors and individual faculty with detailed information with which they can confirm their good efforts and receive feedback with regard to possible areas of improvement.

Together, then, these six elements define an exceptional and engaging GE Program that will support and enhance work in the majors, while developing skilled, creative graduates who are able to obtain fulfilling employment 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, including faculty, professional staff, administrators and students.<sup>4</sup> It is a collaborative process that brings us closer together because it helps us to examine critically the many assumptions we currently have about how we organize ourselves, what our hopes are, and what we think we might gain or lose through a renewal of General Education. There is a great deal of inspiration, creativity, and plain hard work going into this effort. There is also concern that we may undercut our majors by redistributing scarce resources. The resource limitations are real, yet we must also recognize the liberal arts imperative to address the needs of the whole student, not only in the majors but also in GE. A renewal of General Education at SSU will respond to this imperative by valuing GE along with work in our individual disciplines, a goal of great importance to the Strategic Plan of the Division of Academic Affairs, also cited in the Long-Range Plan and elsewhere.

In August 2004, a timeline for GE reform was jointly developed by Provost Eduardo Ochoa, Elaine Sundberg, Carlos Benito, Rose Bruce, and Paul Draper in response to the WASC letter to President Armiñana. As its first action item, the timeline calls for a “Complete draft proposal for the First-Year Experience component of the New Path for General Education at Sonoma State (“PATH”), including assessment goals and strategies. FYE portion of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Point 4 of “PATH” recommendations, is rolled into FYE proposal.” (The full “WASC Implementation Plan” timeline is provided as an appendix to this paper.)

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<sup>4</sup> Contributors to the GE Initiative Process regarding “A New PATH for General Education at Sonoma State University, 2003-2004,” include members of the 2003-2004 GE Subcommittee (P. Draper; R. Eyler, M. Nickel, D. Crocker; L. Dawson, K. Brodsky, J. Hess, C. Fadeff (student), D. Freidel, J. Chong, D. Garbesi, E. Sundberg, S. Miller; members of the Educational Policies Committee (2004-05): E. McDonald (chair), G. Volmer, A. Warmoth, M. Halavais, L. Morrow, V. Richman, P. Marker, C. Works, R. Robison, B. Pugno (student), E. Sundberg, R. Coleman-Senghor; members of the Academic Planning Committee Task on Curriculum and General Education: C. Benito, R. Coleman-Senghor, A. Greenblatt, R. Marks (chair), S. McKillop, A. Warmoth (from APC) and P. Draper (from GE Subcommittee); Participants in the Summer / Fall 2004 GE Initiative: C. Benito, K. Borg (student), W. Boda, N. Alamilla Boyd, K. Brodsky, C. Brutocao, K. Daley, P. Draper, K. Ely (visitor from Georgia Tech), D. Freidel, A. Goldblatt, B. Green (student), D. Hammond, P. Hansen, R. Marks, S. Miller, B. Moonwomon, Cyndie Morozumi, B. Mumaw (Associated Students), M. Nickel, C. Nieto (student), B. Peterson, N. Rank, T. Rockwell, E. Stanny, E. Sundberg, S. Toczyski, C. Tung, E. Velasquez, B. Viljoen, (student, peer mentor); T. Wandling; A. Warmoth; C. Winston; 2004-2005 GE Subcommittee: P. Draper (chair), S. Cuellar, M. Nickel, N. Rank, L. Dawson, K. Brodsky, J. Hess, J. Reilly (student), D. Freidel, J. Chong, D. Garbesi, E. Sundberg, S. Miller, M. Halavais; Additional Consultation: Curriculum Committees for the Schools of Science and Technology, Arts and Humanities, and Social Sciences, the Educational Mentoring Team Steering Committee, a committee of Student Service Professionals formed to address the FYE draft plan, Academic Affairs Council.

Accordingly, the core of this document will address in detail the First-Year Experience proposal developed over the summer and fall of 2004. After much work and preparation, we believe the FYE proposal detailed below is sufficiently advanced to begin planning a syllabus for a ten-section pilot program for the 2005-06 academic year. Undoubtedly, adjustments will be made as a lecture topic for the year is selected, and a syllabus, schedule and assessment strategies are written to fill out the blueprint for the “First Class” pilot. But we now know what is core to the proposal, and can move forward with that core in mind.

In essence, the First-Year Experience combines “First Class,” a multidisciplinary, year-long, nine-unit lecture/seminar course, with the opportunity for students to explore areas of particular interest to them through their enrollment in additional courses, either in GE or in their prospective majors, an exploration that we have dubbed “Passion Strands.” The program incorporates the learning goals and objectives of traditional first-year courses (writing, critical thinking, communication skills) along with the co-curricular objectives currently associated with SSU’s Educational Mentoring Team<sup>5</sup> in the context of the shared lecture content. Together, then, “First Class,” in conjunction with courses from students’ “Passion Strands,” represent the First-Year Experience.



## ***II. Design for the new First-Year Experience at Sonoma State University***

The design for the new First-Year Experience program is aligned first and foremost with the Mission, Goals and Objectives of General Education adopted by the Academic Senate in March 2003. It is also grounded in a thorough consideration of the University’s mission statement, the mission and strategic plan of Academic Affairs, and an understanding of the Long-Range Plan of Sonoma State University. In particular, the first of four universal principles in the Long Range Plan states: “The University is committed to the belief that students should acquire appropriate skills, learn diverse modes of inquiry and be exposed to a variety of perspectives in their course of study. Along with inter-disciplinary inquiry, the University recognizes and fosters inter-disciplinary perspectives as valuable for full intellectual exploration.” In section IX, the Long Range Plan specifically articulates goals for GE, the first of which says: “General Education programs are philosophically coherent and have clearly defined and regularly assessed goals.”

The overarching organizational notion behind the First-Year Experience is an on-going engagement with the question: What does it mean to be(come) an educated human being? The underlying implication is, of course, that General Education is an essential and meaningful part of a well-rounded individual’s baccalaureate education, and it is therefore appropriate that faculty encourage students to embrace intellectual challenges and intellectual discourse in GE courses. This is the task of every university student from the very beginning of her/his college experience. In particular, the first year of college is the place to begin plotting a meaningful course for one’s future life and learning that embraces, yet goes beyond a goal of career development, to engage in values clarification, and to discover one’s own passion for learning by participating in rigorous academic conversations around contemporary topics of relevance. This

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<sup>5</sup> The EMT Program will be described in more detail in the “Rationale,” below.

overarching notion of the centrality of the life of the mind at the university will be reiterated throughout the course of the semester, woven throughout the FYE curriculum, and constantly foregrounded by faculty and students alike.

As discussed above, it is expected that all entering freshmen will participate in an integrated General Education Program in order to ensure an excellent educational foundation upon which all students can build a successful university experience.

The design of the new FYE is grounded in a tripartite understanding of the multiple challenges students encounter during the first year of college, as described in the following chart:

<b><u>ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT</u></b>	<b><u>SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT</u></b>	<b><u>INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- learning information literacy (i.e. research) skills</li> <li>- improving reading skills</li> <li>- expanding critical thinking skills</li> <li>- advancing writing and oral expression skills, including trusting one’s perceptions, and developing one’s voice and curiosity</li> <li>- developing effective study skills</li> <li>- focusing on values clarification around the purpose of getting an education and planning one’s own education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- dealing with independence</li> <li>- encountering diversity and valuing multiple perspectives</li> <li>- community building</li> <li>- care of self &amp; respect of others, including alcohol &amp; sexuality; identity development &amp; social responsibility</li> <li>- learning time &amp; stress management strategies</li> <li>- expanding sense of career options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understanding curriculum</li> <li>- understanding GE</li> <li>- understanding institutional policies (i.e. withdrawals, probation, remediation)</li> <li>- understanding academic ethics (plagiarism, academic integrity, etc.)</li> <li>- understanding the importance of remediation and supporting students on probation to improve their chances for academic success</li> </ul>

In conjunction with the “Passion Strands,” the core of the new FYE, dubbed “First Class,” will address each of these sets of challenges as follows:

**BASIS PRINCIPLES OF FYE**

A successful General Education Program, and the First-Year Experience in particular, embraces the whole student—the social being as well as the learner. The proposed SSU model for an INTEGRATED First-Year Experience program ensures that students share a common experience that is academically stimulating and rigorous while supporting their social transition into university life. This unique experience for SSU students will have two parts – a lecture/seminar titled “First Class” shared by all freshmen and “Passion Strands” based on individual interests.

Research indicates that two of the most important indicators for freshmen academic success and retention are the development of a strong social network and a mentoring relationship with a faculty member (Light). “First Class” positions a faculty member in just such a mentoring role. In order to ensure the success of the faculty in such a position, extensive professional development has been incorporated within the program. The “First Class” component responds to first-year students’ transitional needs and foundational academic development and integration. The “Passion Strands” respond to the individual student’s aptitude, curiosity and discovery or furtherance of a major.

The “First Class” lecture/seminar consists of three primary components:

- 1) a multi-disciplinary problem-based lecture series;
- 2) academic skill-building around content provided in the lecture series; and
- 3) transitional support and advising.

“First Class” will be a two-semester sequence meeting three times per week, with approximately a 2:1 ratio of academic to co-curricular content.

In addition, students will be advised to select additional first-year (100-level) courses which speak to their academic passions, whether within or without their major. These additional courses constitute the “Passion Strands” of FYE.

Together, the “First Class” and the “Passion Strands” define the scope of FYE. As a whole, FYE will address the tripartite notion of challenges described above, as follows:

#### **ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The rigorous academic content of “First Class” will consist of a series of engaging academic lectures focused around a central theme of contemporary relevance chosen by the faculty well in advance of the fall semester. This Lecture Seminar model (L/S) aims to excite and inspire first-year students about the educational and life-long journey on which they have embarked by enrolling in the university. Considerations of diversity will be built into the curriculum and its interdisciplinary approach, with every effort made to connect the curriculum to students’ real-life experiences. The building of a relevant and rigorous knowledge base will be buttressed by instruction in a core of essential skills described in detail below, and course goals and standards will be consistent and sustainable across all “First Class” sections. These goals and standards will be defined by faculty through its governance process, and detailed by faculty in its role as the primary instructors of the “First Class” course. Students will enroll in clustered courses, thereby creating serious learning communities to bolster student success. The content and pedagogy of “First Class” will be developed collaboratively and explicitly, and all faculty teaching “First Class” will have the opportunity to participate in the development of themes and individual lecture topics for each semester. From the beginning, the new “First Class” will incorporate assessment tools and feedback loops applicable to all sections, as described in section V, below.

The skills component of SSU’s “First Class” will be grounded in a strong emphasis on **information literacy**; hence, a foundational appreciation for research and scholarship in a variety of disciplines will be woven throughout the curriculum, with particular emphasis on:

- **writing** as an integral tool in the process of learning, with a strong focus on interdisciplinary writing; this element of “First Class” will be the foundation for students’ experience of Writing Across the Curriculum at SSU;
- **critical thinking** in an interdisciplinary context:
  - faculty will guide students to pose questions and discuss possible assumptions and conclusions;

- they will also teach students to evaluate multiple viewpoints found in a variety of relevant sources;
- **reading** in depth for meaning and analysis, including textbooks, syllabi, websites, videotext, etc.;
- **research methodology**, including how to locate, select, evaluate, use, and cite appropriate sources for academic research;
- **listening skills** to enhance students’ attention to course content and to each other;
- **learning skills**, including note-taking, research, study strategies, and time management;
- **communication skills**, including participation in seminar discussions and oral reporting;
- **ethical behavior** in the pursuit of knowledge; and,
- sustained and rich **feedback** from faculty, SSPs, and peers at all levels.

In addition to the emphasis on all of the skills that inform information literacy, “First Class” will include students’ involvement, whenever possible, in the university, local, and global communities, thereby promoting not only academic literacy, but also civic literacy and literacy for personal growth. This content will comprise approximately *two-thirds* of the course materials and instructional time.

#### **INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

“First Class” will also address students’ co-curricular and social needs by incorporating many of the traditional fundamental learning goals and objectives of the Freshman Seminar (University 102) and of the Educational Mentoring Teams.<sup>6</sup> This portion of “First Class,” which will be taught by a student services professional, will focus both on institutional knowledge essential to success at the university as well as issues in social development particular to the freshman experience. This content will comprise approximately *one-third* of the course materials and instructional time.

#### **PRAGMATIC DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

Entering freshmen will enroll in a two-semester, nine-unit “First Class” organized around three weekly meeting sectors, each with a separate instructional or advising focus. Within these sectors, faculty have one-hour bi-weekly meetings to discuss pedagogy, progress and assessment, and to plan for future weeks, or the following semester or year. On alternate weeks, this hour will consist of meetings of individual instructional teams or a joint meeting of the full cohort of faculty, SSPs, and peer mentors. Students’ engagement in the high-enrollment 50-minute lecture at the center of this model will be enhanced by their work as a learning community on the above-listed skills in the context of the lecture content. The seminar course will model the kind of reflective integration of knowledge that faculty hope to witness over the course of the students’ educational experience at SSU. In addition to the “First Class,” students will be encouraged to enroll in courses that speak to their passions and curiosity, i.e. “Passion Strands,” and to integrate the knowledge gained in these courses, whenever possible, with the course content of “First Class.”

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<sup>6</sup> See the section entitled, “Integration of Curricular and Co-Curricular Elements,” in the Rationale, below.

**“FIRST CLASS” MODEL**

“First Class” is a title given to the primary design component of the new First-Year Experience, and is formed of multiple learning communities. Each learning community (LC) consists of 15 students supported by an instructional team (IT) which includes one Faculty, one Student Services Professional (SSP), and one Peer Mentor.

The model provides a weekly average of: one hour of active listening, three hours of small seminar instruction, and one hour of EMT content, as well as a designated office hour for advising, career and major counseling, and designated LC group activities, as follows:

<i>Fall/Spring SEMESTERS</i> <i>3 meetings weekly</i>	<i>Day 1 (M or T)</i>	<i>Day 2 Wednesdays 12-12:50</i>	<i>Day 3 (F or Th)</i>
<i>50 minutes</i>  <i>Rotation of 2 weeks curricular focus, 1 week co-curricular over 30 weeks</i>	<b>Seminar:</b> (2 hour block) LC	<b>Weekly Lecture</b>	<b>Seminar</b> (1 hour block) LC
	Analytical Reading Critical Thinking Writing & Research Instruction & Feedback  Student Development  Small Classroom	Delivered to all LC sections  Warren Auditorium	LECTURE DISCUSSION Critical Thinking  Small Classroom
	Break		Break
<i>50 minutes</i>	Session continues	Bi-weekly faculty only meeting  Bi-weekly instructional team meetings	“OFFICE HOUR”  Student advising appointments  LC Group activities

The weekly lecture time will be fixed on Wednesdays at noon. Sections could be scheduled on Mondays and Fridays (8:00-9:50, 10:00-11:50, 12:00-1:50, and 2:00-3:50), and Tuesdays and Thursdays (8:00-9:50, 10:00-11:50, 1:00-2:50, and 3:00-4:50). Multiple time slots allow for flexibility in both faculty and students’ schedules, and allow both faculty and SSPs possibility of covering two “First Class” sections each.

**LECTURE THEMES**

The possible themes for the lecture/seminar course are limitless and depend only on the curiosity and creativity of the faculty who will teach in the program. During a November 2004 presentation on the General Education reform initiative at the Academic Senate, Scott Miller, Director of SSU’s Writing Center, invited everyone in attendance to consider one possible course series which he called Consuming Passions: Food, the Body, and Society.

In the short span of thirty seconds, faculty were able to come up with a variety of possible lecture topics drawn from a wide range of disciplines that the faculty present at the Senate meeting themselves could offer the series. Titles mentioned included:

*Food, Gender and Society • Advertising and Eating Disorders • Hunger in Sonoma County • Searching for the Perfect Peach • Controversies on Genetically 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 Gardens, Nutrition and Good Eating in Schools.*

The range of topics proposed after only thirty seconds of reflection speaks to the tremendous imagination and wide-ranging interests of SSU faculty, and it should be noted that every school on campus was represented in the list. This particular theme would also speak directly to the interests and concerns of new freshmen on campus, as it moves from the approachable – food— to more academically challenging notions such as gender, world hunger, etc.

In their summer 2004 meetings, the GE Initiative Task Force proposed alternative series' topics and lecture titles. These were seen as problem based learning themes of global reach, which spanned from pedagogical goals from intellectual understanding to active participation and engagement. One such series was named: Self and Other: Who in the World Am I? And Who Are You? Power, Knowledge, and Global Realities. Suggestions for individual lecture topics were

*Multicultural Competence: Awareness, Knowledge and Self “Are You Here?” • Engaging in World Citizenship and Making a Difference • Oil and Politics • Personal Relationships: Communication, Negotiation, Conflict Resolution • World Performance (Art/Music/Dance) • Religion, War and Peace • Imperialism • Oil and Politics • What is Social Justice? • Technology—History, Technology, and the Intellect • Markets and Government: Private and Public Good • Dreams • Global Health Issues: Work, Ecology, Sexuality, Drugs, Alcohol • Mexico’s Maquiladoras • Religion and Public Policy & Globalization and Discontent*

Another lecture set focused on themes and topics relevant to Student Development needs. Lecture topics include

*Young Adult Development • Philosophy of GE • The Unconscious • Person in Society • Our Multicultural Society • Jobs, Work, and the Good Life • The Power and Limits of Technology • Social Construction and Social Reality • Macro History, Micro History, Personal History • Sonoma State in Context—Regional, State, National, Global • Information Theory, Knowledge Theory • Campus Life Issues and Relationships • What is Information Competence? • Preparing College Level Materials: Note Taking, Writing Papers, Reading, Tests • Critical Thinking and Analysis: What is it? • Becoming an Actual Learner • Navigating a College Curriculum: Developing A Personal Curriculum*

*Through Advising, And Choosing A Major • Developing Cultural Competence—Beyond Appreciating Difference • Living on One’s Own: Developing Personal Competence*

The themes suggested above reflect the dual focus of the content provided through “First Class” lectures, readings, discussions, critical thinking, and writing: academic preparedness and personal/social development. Both are necessary for success in college.

As the “PATH” indicates, “First Class” must be “taught by faculty who possess a demonstrated passion to teach these courses and an understanding of the unique needs of the young student.” The GE Program must actively recruit senior and tenure-track faculty and long-term lecturers who have a strong commitment to educating freshmen and in particular to mentoring new students through the crucial transitional first year of college. Every effort must be made to identify faculty strengths and disciplinary passions and to align them with students’ educational interests, since, as national research demonstrates (Light), a long-term connection with a faculty member established from the beginning of a student’s educational experience helps the student to make more meaningful academic and life choices.

**2005-2006 PILOT PROGRAM**

In fall 2005 a pilot set of sections for “First Class” will be initiated, consisting of ten Learning Communities (LC) of fifteen first-year students each. LCs are led by a team of a faculty member, a Student Service Professional, and a junior or senior Peer Mentor. Students are also advised into “Passion Strand” courses—courses that are currently listed in the GE pattern. Students in the pilot program earn nine (9) Student Credit Hours (SCUs) over two semesters, credited upon completion of the spring semester. Of these nine units, each student would receive two areas of GE credit in each of Areas A2 and A3. Ideally, students would earn three additional GE credits since the course itself generates 9 units. For the pilot year, Area E (The Integrated Person) units are recommended.

Students in the pilot program register in two other GE or major courses per semester (“Passion Strands”) to enhance progress toward the choice of major. For example:

- a Music student might take a Music GE and an English Literature course;
- a Biology student might take a Math class and an Environmental Studies class, or courses required of freshmen for the biology major and which also count for GE;
- a Political Science student might take a Sociology class and a US History class.

Students needing remediation in English register for the appropriate ENG 30 or ENG 99 courses concurrent with “First Class.”<sup>7</sup> The EOP Academy will be maintained through designated “First Class” sections, and designated FIG sections will continue to be offered.



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<sup>7</sup> Note that academic deficits or economic backgrounds should not be barriers to access to “First Class,” although the planning team acknowledges that some students have special needs that must be considered. A plan to address the needs of students who fall behind during the “First Class” and other freshman classes will be developed with the pilot.

### *III. Rationale*

The new Freshman Year Experience (FYE) component to the General Education “PATH” is grounded primarily in the notion that a student’s first year at the university lays the foundation upon which all future academic achievement and growth is built. Freshmen who engage immediately with a cohort of their peers in an intentional path of rigorous academic study and skill-building within the context of a nurturing and supportive learning environment will demonstrate enhanced learning and success throughout their university careers, ultimately becoming life-long learners, engaged citizens, and capable professionals within their chosen fields. Moreover, freshmen have a rigorous GE learning experience that prepares them to perform with knowledge and skill in their subsequent major coursework. In due course, the new FYE will greatly strengthen SSU’s aspiration to excellence as a public liberal arts and sciences (COPLAC) institution.<sup>8</sup>

The proposed FYE at Sonoma State University represents an approach to liberal arts and sciences education which takes the CSU mandates embedded in components of SSU’s current Area A GE course offerings and the goals of the Educational Mentoring Team (EMT) and restructures and links these components in such a way as to make the freshman experience at SSU more cohesive, challenging and supportive. In so doing, the new FYE goes well beyond the traditional conception of “the freshman year” by implementing an intentional approach to student learning that addresses the needs of the whole person, engaging students in a rigorous, multidisciplinary program of study while facilitating student transition academically, socially, psychologically and emotionally. FYE supports the university’s mission of educating “learned men and women” through a strong liberal arts and sciences curriculum by preparing students for study both in general education courses and within the disciplines, ensuring that students have not only the skills, but also the intellectual engagement and foundational knowledge necessary to succeed at the university. This new FYE promises significant and diverse benefits for both students and faculty.

The new FYE will enhance student learning in a variety of ways, as described below:

- **INTENTIONALITY:** offers students an intentionally well-planned and coherent program of study for their first year of college;
- **INTEGRATION:** integrates traditional curricular course work and co-curricular elements of the first year of college (most often a variety of randomly accessed 100-level courses, including the Freshman Seminar, English 101, Philosophy 101 and others) into a single, internally coherent, sustainable, assessable and rigorous structure;
- **LEARNING COMMUNITIES:** fosters learning communities in which students engage in academic study with a cohort of their peers and cultivates student engagement in the learning communities by means of shared course content within a multidisciplinary context, providing students with an integrated academic experience wherein the skills developed in traditional first-year curriculum courses –“Fundamentals of

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<sup>8</sup> For more details about successful FYE programs across the country, see the website of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, <http://www.sc.edu/fye/center/>.

Communication” (A2) and “Critical Thinking” (A3) – are developed concurrently over two semesters;

- **GRASPING THE MEANING OF A LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES EDUCATION:** intentionally advances students’ understanding of the meaning and value of a strong liberal arts and sciences education and the role the General Education Program plays in fostering such an education;
- **HIGH ACADEMIC STANDARDS:** promotes uniformly high standards of written and oral communication, critical thinking, and information literacy for all freshmen;
- **LOWER SFR:** lowers SFR in courses for freshmen;
- **QUALITY ADVISING:** provides a mechanism to ensure quality advising and career counseling (including finding a major) for all freshmen.

In addition, FYE will enhance the teaching experience of SSU faculty in a number of ways; in particular:

- **COLLABORATION AMONG FACULTY:** facilitates faculty collaboration in creating the best possible educational experience for all new students;
- **HONORING FACULTY PASSION AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY:** honors the faculty’s passion for teaching while simultaneously further challenging faculty to engage with students with content drawn from across the disciplines;
- **FACULTY AS ROLE MODELS:** offers faculty opportunities to demonstrate their own sense of responsibility and commitment to the local and global community, thereby serving as models for new college students;
- **FACULTY DEVELOPMENT:** provides faculty the support they need to understand the expectations and needs of the freshman student set, and to teach to first-year students’ skill level;
- **MENTORING AND ADVISING:** creates intensive, sustained, and effective mentoring relationships between faculty and freshmen thereby clarifying the traditional role of faculty as primary advisors for the student’s entire academic experience;
- **STUDENTS WELL-PREPARED FOR STUDY IN THE DISCIPLINES:** ensures that all students entering major programs will have the skills and knowledge base faculty expect of advanced students.

*A more thorough discussion of the key advantages to students and faculty is presented in greater detail below, beginning with the advantages for students:*

## **INTENTIONALITY**

The “PATH” states that, “A winning FYE is the gateway to the world of knowledge and a rich liberal arts experience.” The concept of a well-integrated FYE corresponds directly to SSU’s own Mission Statement, which affirms that, “Excellence in undergraduate education requires that students participate in a *well-planned program* [emphasis added] which provides both a liberal education and opportunities for specific career education.” However, as the American Council on Higher Education’s publication “Greater Expectations” indicates, “Many students navigate this new terrain [i.e. college] without clear direction or educational maps, collecting credits haphazardly as they go.”

The authors of “Greater Expectations” suggest that, “The fragmentation of the curriculum into a collection of independently ‘owned’ courses is an impediment to student accomplishment, because the different courses students take, even on the same campus, are not expected to engage or build on one another. Few maps exist to help students plan or integrate their learning as they move in and out of separately organized courses, programs, and campuses. In the absence of shared learning goals and clear expectations, a college degree more frequently certifies completion of disconnected fragments than of a coherent plan for student accomplishment.”

The majority of SSU students are no strangers to this dilemma. Fully one quarter of all respondents to the 2003 General Education Survey at SSU “reported taking 11 or more unwanted, compulsory classes” (81). An intentional approach to the integration of diverse bodies of knowledge with strong attention to skill-building from the outset of our students’ university experience will allow students to prepare a more fruitful plan of academic study from the time they enter the university. This intentional approach to the first-year experience acknowledges the enormous social and emotional change that confronts freshmen, and aims to inspire these new students to grow intellectually, creatively, socially and emotionally. In “First Class,” traditional skill-building content and the co-curricular components of EMT will be melded in a large lecture/small seminar format that will deliver stimulating academic content and provide a forum for serious, sustained, moderated intellectual reading, critical thinking, writing and information literacy around that content.

By drawing upon the best elements of existing freshmen programs and courses at Sonoma State, “First Class” thus integrates traditional curricular and co-curricular elements of the first year of college. Currently, entering freshmen enroll either in English or a Critical Thinking course during their first semester of study at SSU; most subsequently enroll in the other course in the spring semester. Although enrollment is based upon ELM scores, in practice, many students enroll arbitrarily in one or the other course based on section availability. Along with the Freshman Seminar, these traditional first-year courses comprise the essential skill-building (writing, critical thinking, information literacy, etc.) or transitional (EMT) components of the first college year. “First Class” aims bring together the best elements of our current, traditional first-year curriculum with a particular emphasis on a strong information literacy component, in conjunction with a stimulating interdisciplinary lecture series. By creating an engaging, intensive large lecture/small seminar package for first-year students, the FYE will ensure that students establish a strong foundation for curiosity around a contemporary and relevant subject while at the same time developing *in a common context* the skills and passion for knowledge so crucial to their subsequent years at SSU.

## **INTEGRATION OF CURRICULAR AND CO-CURRICULAR ELEMENTS**

In addition to its rigorous academic focus, an intentional approach to student success in the first year of college also attends to the social and institutional needs of new students, coupling a strong academic experience with overt support mechanisms designed to ensure the student’s successful transition to college life. As WASC has recognized, Sonoma State University has addressed many of these needs through its existing first-year student transition program of Educational Mentoring Team program (EMT), of which the EOP Academy and the FIG Program are offshoots: “It should be noted that the faculty and staff have done an excellent job in

developing the Educational Mentoring Team Program, Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) and the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Academy which support learning in the General Education program for entering students.” Among other things, EMT has been praised for its success in raising students’ awareness of issues around diversity, a key element of SSU’s Mission Statement. Although all freshmen are assigned to an EMT upon arrival at the university, and therefore, in theory, are given academic advisers, most students interact with their EMT advisors in the cornerstone course of the EMT Program, University 102, also called the Freshman Seminar. However, in fall 2003, only 66% of first-time freshmen enrolled in University 102; in fall 2004, this number dropped to 61% due to enrollment goal reductions.<sup>9</sup> Hence, nearly 40% of the freshman class is not receiving the benefits offered by the Freshman Seminar. FYE will close that gap.

Currently, the objectives of Freshman Seminar are to:

- build a mentoring relationship between students, a faculty member, and a member of the professional staff;
- introduce students to the programs, services and facilities available to assist them in the transition from high school to college;
- identify and create specific techniques to help students develop the skills to achieve their academic goals;
- acquaint students with diversity as an integral part of a university education;
- help students who have enrolled in Freshman Seminar to develop a support group among their peers.

EMT’s explicit focus on the experiential, social and developmental dimensions of the first year of college is a critical co-curricular component of the First Year Experience.

Statistics show that SSU freshman who enroll in the Freshman Seminar are more likely to stay in college and graduate from SSU: “Nearly three in five seminar attendees persist into their senior year, but fewer than half without the seminar experience persist to this level” (Deming, “Some Benefits”). Thus, for those students who do not take Freshman Seminar, there is a demonstrably greater likelihood of leaving college without graduating. The new FYE design is predicated on the intention that SSU freshman should have an integrated first-year experience, thereby addressing the needs of nearly 40% more freshmen, many of whom are currently left floundering without either the support of EMT, or adequate advising, as evidenced by their lower graduation rates and lack of persistence to the degree.

Achieving an overall goal of higher retention and graduation rates is one of the chief successes of the EMT program, and argues strongly for its value. Yet statistics from the “End-of-Semester Freshman Seminar Survey” (covering 2000-2002) also demonstrate that the weakest areas of EMT are those directly connected with academic achievement: academic skills, information competence, and advising. An analysis of Freshman Seminar End-of-Semester surveys indicates that “Among the primary objectives [of the Freshman Seminar], peer support and academic skills received the lowest overall average scores... tending a bit more toward a *neutral* rating”

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<sup>9</sup> Data supplied by Vice Provost Katharyn Crabbe.

(Deming, “End-of-Semester” 39). While the EMT program achieves high marks for helping students transition between high school and home life to college and residential life, “First Class” aims to strengthen the existing academic components of EMT while maintaining the co-curricular support that improve students’ chances for success in the University.

By incorporating the goals and objectives of the EMT Program directly into core academic classes, FYE will be a stronger program overall. The strongest elements of the EMT Program in “First Class” will deepen connections between the two currently existing programs, thereby enhancing the students’ first college year experience. It is intended that this new amalgamation will provide freshmen with an excellent preparation for academic life at the university, and enhance SSU’s reputation as an institution that values that experience as a whole. Through the integration of the content of SSU’s fundamental skills courses (writing and critical thinking), their link them to a shared lecture series, and the delivery of this coursework over two semesters, “First Class” will enable students to engage in prolonged, context-based reading, discussion, research, and writing in a community that acknowledges and addresses their transitional needs as well.

In *How College Affects Students*, Pascarella and Terenzini state that, “The research is unequivocal: students who are actively involved in both academic and out-of-class activities gain more from the college experience than those who are not so involved.” The marriage of significant curricular and co-curricular components in “First Class” will enable students to engage in their first year at the university in personally meaningful and responsible ways. “First Class” aims bring together the best elements of each of the three programs described above with a particular emphasis on a strong information literacy component, in conjunction with a stimulating interdisciplinary lecture series.

## **LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

Student success also depends on a sense of community within the university setting, both between faculty and students and among students. Learning communities have existed at SSU since the establishment of the University. The Hutchins School of Liberal Studies exemplifies the educational benefits of students learning with small cohorts of their peers. More recently, the creation of the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Academy and the Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) within the residential dorms has broadened the availability of learning communities to students in a variety of demographic and interest groups. EOP Academy students learn basic academic skills in a level-appropriate English course and also enroll in a Freshman Seminar and one GE class together. FIG students are grouped according to their interest in a particular academic discipline: Business and Economics, the Pre-Health Professions, Global Issues, and the Performing Arts, to name only a few. Students in the FIG program live together, take intentionally chosen classes together and, consequently, study together. In preliminary assessments of SSU’s FIG Program, students report having built stronger mentoring relationships with faculty than their non-FIG peers, as well as stronger support groups with their own peers.<sup>10</sup> Currently, five of the program’s peer advisors are alumni of the program, and interest in the program is growing rapidly by word of mouth (as reported at

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<sup>10</sup> This assessment appears to be confirmed by subsequent data, though more recent data has not yet been formally analyzed.

yearly summer advising sessions), so much so that the Program is considering adding new sections for students in Hutchins and Engineering (Morozumi). Yet, even now, enrollment in these programs is limited, and only 24% (266 students of 1113)<sup>11</sup> are enrolled in one of SSU's formalized learning communities (Hutchins, FIG and EOP Academy). FYE will permit access to learning communities for all first-time freshmen, thus ensuring that all first-year students are academically and transitionally supported through small LCs (15-1 SFR) that are academically based.

Ample research has demonstrated that a learning community “provides a support group for students in a critical transition year” (National Resource Center website). The ability to share experiences with students of like interest in learning communities, both in the “First Class” and in the “Passion Strands,” will enhance student learning and success at the university; the concept of learning communities will therefore be a foundational part of the new FYE experience at Sonoma State.

### **GRASPING THE MEANING AND VALUE OF A LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES EDUCATION**

While some freshmen may choose to attend Sonoma State because of its reputation as an excellent small public liberal arts institution, recent data suggest that students' perception of the institution's reputation as a strong liberal arts college has diminished in recent years (Deming, “Students' Educational Motivations”). Many new students seem to lack a good understanding of what, exactly, a strong “liberal arts and sciences education” really entails, particularly insofar as such an education depends integrally upon the strength of a university's General Education program. Significantly, as the 2003 General Education Survey Findings demonstrate, the grand majority of currently enrolled SSU students “are much less likely to understand the overarching goals and purposes of the GE program than students in the past,” (Deming) and consequently, have no real appreciation for the value of General Education within the framework of a liberal arts and sciences education. Thus, another important advantage to a well-conceived FYE is the potential such a program offers faculty to address this lack of understanding overtly. From the very beginning of a student's university experience, explicit learning outcomes for FYE include a demonstrated conceptual understanding of General Education and its place within their greater university experience. In an important sense, FYE will model for students the kind of integration that they should strive for throughout their GE Program at SSU.

### **HIGH STANDARDS**

In *Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*, Chickering and Gamson (1987) identify “high expectations” on the part of university faculty as fundamental to student success. It is essential that faculty who teach freshmen GE courses take a rigorous approach to the material they are teaching, establishing high standards that challenge students to read critically, think critically, and respond critically to information that is both demanding and stimulating. It is important to note that SSU students themselves seek out such academic rigor, not only in their major disciplines but in GE courses as well; the 2003 General Education Survey indicates that GE courses “known to be rigorous attract more students than those with easy grades” (Deming). Students have also complained that GE classes are too similar in content and scope to their high

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<sup>11</sup> Data supplied by Vice Provost Katharyn Crabbe.

school classes to be challenging; indeed, “At the end of their freshman year, students tell us they are still coming late to their classes, and they are more likely to feel bored in classes than they were as high school students” (Deming, “First-College Year” 98-99). SSU faculty must capitalize on students’ desire to be challenged from the very moment they enter the university community, developing courses which, while appropriate to their learning level, take students beyond their comfort zones of knowledge and skill, and encourage them to excel in new and exciting ways.

In addition, an integrated FYE centered around the acquisition of reading, writing, information literacy and speaking skills will enable faculty to promote uniformly high standards for all freshmen. Beginning in the pilot year, faculty teaching in the program will develop a set of core expectations for each skill area as they also develop the content; FYE syllabi will reflect these shared values.

### **LOWER SFR**

In addition, unless new students enroll in small seminars, they may not experience some of the foundational advantages of a strong liberal arts and sciences university, advantages that are explicit in SSU’s mission which states, “The quality of the educational experience at SSU depends upon close human and intellectual relationships among students and faculty to foster the open exchange of ideas.” Many freshmen must enroll in multiple large GE classes, especially in these tight budgetary times when sections are reduced, classes in which they may have little to no personal contact with a faculty member in a discipline that interests them. Yet ample research indicates that freshmen have fundamentally different needs than those of sophomores, juniors and seniors, including new financial burdens, time management concerns, drug and alcohol problems, and significant changes in self-concept (Keup & Stolzenberg). In this crucial transitional year, it is essential that freshmen embark upon their university education in a context that encourages ample access and exchange with faculty committed to working with new students. Research also indicates that a lower student-faculty ration (SFR) is more conducive to learning (Pascarella, “College” 767). Current economic factors imply that students will have to take some large enrollment classes; however, the freshman year is not the appropriate setting for these large classes. As the “PATH” indicates, SSU’s new GE program will shift the burden of higher SFR to sophomore and junior classes, thereby addressing needs specific to freshmen in ways that are pedagogically and developmentally appropriate.

A successful, collaborative experience with faculty and their fellow students in both “First Class” and the “Passion Strands” will enable freshmen to experience the “close human and intellectual relationships” cited in SSU’s mission statement. A chief outcome of this intentional approach to FYE will be the timely acquisition of specific learning skills and the development of the whole student necessary for growth and development in major disciplines and in 200- to 400-level GE courses.

### **QUALITY ADVISING**

Quality advising for all students has been a hot-button topic on campus, prompting SSU’s Associated Students to call for across-the-board advising reform. At the freshman level, the greater part of the advising task has, in recent years, fallen primarily to EMT faculty, who are

charged with “providing accurate advising to incoming students regarding appropriate coursework and educational and career planning” (EMT Interim Program Review). At the end of the first year, EMT faculty are asked to actively participate in the “hand-off” of new students to their departmental faculty advisors. Yet, as the EMT Interim Program Review indicates, the hand-off mechanism currently in place is less than satisfactory. We also know that students enrolling in the Freshman Seminar are in fact less satisfied with their advising experience than students who do not have regular contact with an EMT; survey results indicate that “General Education advising within the Educational Mentoring Team (EMT) program was given good ratings by only 20% of those surveyed” (Deming, “Findings,” 53).

The proposed low SFR seminars which form the core of the new FYE will ensure true mentoring relationships between faculty and students within a strong academic context. Ideally, students will be paired with faculty in their intended major programs or schools, creating a strong personal and academic link from the beginning of the students’ university experience.

In addition, following the “PATH,” faculty who teach General Education courses will also participate in regularly scheduled development for GE advising, thereby becoming master advisors. They will have the opportunity to share best-mentoring practices with their peers in informal brown-bag lunch settings, and through drop-ins to the GE course for new faculty.

*While new students will gain greatly from the establishment of a cohesive First-Year Experience Program, faculty will also reap many benefits, as follows:*

#### **COLLABORATION AMONG FACULTY**

The new First-Year Experience will engage faculty in the renewal of General Education by creating the opportunity for them to work communally in an on-going, energetic and sustained way toward a freshman program that is academically sound and rigorous. Having developed the core pedagogical elements and standards of the FYE during the initial planning process (focusing on writing skills, critical thinking, information literacy, etc.), faculty will be charged each year to develop a stimulating new theme for the yearly lecture series. In addition to participating in the choice of a common lecture theme, faculty will be encouraged to take an active role in curricular design through the choice of common course readings, films and other shared resources. Faculty will also have the opportunity to share their own best practices (both in-class strategies and advising practices) with their peers in regular retreats and in the weekly meetings built into the “First Class” schedule as part of compensated faculty workload. Such creative collaboration amongst faculty will ensure the best possible educational experience for new freshmen.

#### **HONORING FACULTY PASSION AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY**

Through its creation of a forum for serious, sustained, moderated intellectual discourse, FYE will honor SSU faculty’s passion for teaching while simultaneously challenging them to engage with students on diverse subjects drawn from across the disciplines. SSU students have long recognized the faculty’s passion for teaching within their own disciplines. The First-Year Experience encourages faculty to enlarge the scope of that passion by embracing the opportunity to engage with new freshmen around challenging and thought-provoking multidisciplinary content, selected and organized by the “First Class” faculty group.

## **FACULTY AS ROLE MODELS OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT**

Because the new FYE will focus on contemporary issues of relevance to the learned individual by organizing a lecture series around a topic of passionate intellectual interest, the program aims to offer faculty a forum within which to demonstrate their own sense of responsibility and commitment to the local and global community. Faculty will engage with new students in intellectually challenging ways around socially and politically significant issues, and they will have the opportunity to demonstrate their own critical thinking skills and habits of intellectual judgment. In so doing, they will ultimately serve as role models for new college students.

## **FACULTY DEVELOPMENT**

By establishing a well-developed program for faculty development (based on the current EMT model and others like it on campus), FYE provides program instructors the support they need to understand the expectations and needs of the freshman student set, and to teach to the first year students' skill level and knowledge base. As indicated above, newly hired tenure-track professors will earn three WTUs by enrolling in course designed to give them the skills and knowledge necessary to being effective advisors at SSU. Established faculty would be welcome to join this class; in addition, opportunities for the sharing of pedagogy and successful approaches to teaching freshmen in particular will also be offered in the forms of retreats, brown-bag lunch sessions, etc.

## **TRUE MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS & SUCCESSFUL ADVISING**

As indicated above, the new FYE will encourage true mentoring relationships between faculty and students in a rigorous academic context, thereby launching students upon the path of learning with the explicit support of a faculty member who is committed to engaging with new students. Thanks to lower SFR (15:1 projected), and, consequently, a lightened workload, faculty will have more time to guide students' skill building and develop all areas of information literacy, with particular attention to writing, critical thinking, and communication skills. FYE will thereby facilitate advising and also improve retention by offering more effective major and career counseling and by effecting a more efficient hand-off to departmental advisors in the students' chosen majors.

## **WELL-PREPARED STUDENTS**

As educators at all levels, faculty have an inherent stake in the thorough preparation of new freshmen for study at the 200-level and beyond. Because the new FYE will engage committed faculty in cultivating a passion for learning in all first-year students, as well as in the teaching of the core skills and knowledge base essential to future success at the university, perhaps the greatest benefit to faculty will be the well-preparedness of their own future students.

## **RATIONALE: CONCLUSION**

Whether faculty participate in an intentional program or not, whether students self-select or are advised into an existing freshman program, SSU still needs to face the mounting need to reform

General Education and provide a resonant and coherent FYE for our students. At present, fully 50% of first-time freshmen who began their studies at SSU either drop out or transfer.<sup>12</sup> The other half survives their first college year, for better or for worse, and many eventually have to “catch up” or “get through” on their own. “Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree,” a report from the Greater Expectations Project on Accreditation and Assessment, suggests that a combination of what students learn in their General Education Program, along with their study of a major discipline, form the symbiotic spine of a successful baccalaureate education. It is essential that the faculty as a whole take responsibility for the entire curriculum, both General Education and the majors, and this responsibility starts with the first college year. A well-developed FYE will offer Sonoma State University an intentional, pedagogically rigorous, conceptually sound and socially appropriate foundation for student excellence and success at the university, both in their GE courses and in their major, a foundation in which the university’s own Mission plays a preeminent role.

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#### ***IV. Resource & Staffing Implications***

While the re-visioning of the first-year experience for freshmen at Sonoma State will naturally have important resource and staffing implications, it is expected that the design of the new FYE, marrying, as it does, the best elements of existing freshmen courses and programs, will continue to be funded primarily by the resources already allocated to those programs. In other words, the majority of funding for FYE will come from the existent resources of Area A2, Area A3 and EMT. While these generally add up to 10 units (3 for Area A2, 3 for Area A3 and 4 for EMT), the proposed plan adds up to only 9 units; resources associated with the additional unit would fund FYE for those students who currently opt out of the Freshman Seminar.

The Provost and School Deans will need to commit to regulating enrollment issues at the school level in order to control any unforeseen fluctuations; they will also take the lead in clarifying the potential economic impact of new GE program on individual departments, ensuring that small programs whose existence is critical to the liberal arts and sciences mission of the university are not unduly affected by the new structure of FYE. The Provost and School Deans will also collaborate creatively to provide faculty training and development opportunities, as will be described below. The discussion around resource allocation may well be eased by the potential separation of the GE budget from the budget for the majors.

In the pilot program, currently planned for fall 2005, 150 students will participate as follows: 10 sections x 15 students each. The pilot program will require the following staff:

- 5-10 faculty (who will receive three WTUs per section, per semester for teaching in the program)
- 10 SSPs
- 10 peer mentors
- 30 speakers in the lecture series, one per lecture over two semesters

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<sup>12</sup> Source: Vice Provost Katharyn Crabbe.

- Departments would receive an on campus transfer at replacement cost for faculty teaching "First Class" sections
- Speakers will be paid a stipend from a separate FYE budget for which funding will have to be developed

Provost Eduardo Ochoa has provided a preliminary look at Student-Faculty Ratio for the "First Class" lecture/seminar. These statistics suggest that with the WTU earned through the high enrollment in the one-hour weekly lecture, a very low SFR of 15:1 can be managed in the three hours of small seminars each week. The total SFR for the program averages at 23:1. The analysis shows that even in the Pilot year, these ratios are consistent.

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

| Draft: November 2004                           | <b>Pilot</b> |               |              | <b>At scale</b> |               |              |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
|                                                | <b>Fall</b>  | <b>Spring</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Fall</b>     | <b>Spring</b> | <b>Total</b> |
| <i>A5 Large lecture size</i>                   | 150          | 150           | 150          | 1,200           | 1,200         | 1,200        |
| <i>A6 Small seminar size</i>                   | 15           | 15            | 15           | 15              | 15            | 15           |
| <i>A7 Large lecture SCUs<sup>2</sup></i>       | 1            | 1             | 2            | 1               | 1             | 2            |
| <i>A8 Small seminar SCUs</i>                   | 2            | 2             | 4            | 2               | 2             | 4            |
| <i>A9 Co-curricular SCUs</i>                   | 2            | 1             | 3            | 2               | 1             | 3            |
| <i>A10 Total SCUs</i>                          | 5            | 4             | 9            | 5               | 4             | 9            |
| <i>A11 Faculty WTUs<sup>3</sup></i>            | 3            | 3             | 6            | 3               | 3             | 6            |
| <i>A12 No. of faculty sections<sup>1</sup></i> | 10           | 10            | 10           | 80              | 80            | 80           |
| <b>SFR*</b>                                    | 25           | 20            | 23           | 25              | 20            | 23           |

\* =  $(A5 * A10) / (A12 * A11)$   
<sup>1</sup>40 Faculty @ 2 sections/per faculty  
<sup>2</sup>SCU = Student Credit Units  
<sup>3</sup>WTU = Weighted Teaching Units

Assuming funding for the program will be drawn from current Area A2, A3, and EMT allocations, the cost will be relatively neutral relative to other academic programs. There would be certain program start-up costs, primarily to create and organize the pilot syllabus, to coordinate faculty, SSPs and Peers, staff and faculty, and for professional development of instructional teams (ITs). However, in light of WASC's June 2004 letter, start-up costs for a

revamped GE Program are all but inevitable. Indeed, the letter requires resource allocation to such efforts, requiring “institutional commitment to sustained follow-up.”<sup>13</sup>

Once FYE is established as a mandatory program for freshmen, 1200 students (80 sections x 15 students each) will be involved. The following staff will be required:

- 40-80 faculty (faculty will receive 3 WTUs per semester, per section for teaching in the program)
- 20-40 SSPs (6 hours per SSP per week (90 hours per semester) of SSPs’ workload would be allocated to “First Class”)
- 40-80 Peer Mentors
- 30 speakers, 1 per lecture over two semesters. (20 lectures of academic content, 10 lectures of student development content, including orientation)
- Departments would receive an on-campus transfer at replacement cost for faculty teaching a “First Class” section
- Speakers will be paid a stipend from a separate FYE budget for which funding will have to be developed

Note that after the completion of the Green Music Center, 1200 students could attend one weekly lecture. In the short-term build-up to full-scale implementation, a scenario such as the following would be necessary.

|                            |                                           |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| In academic year 2005-'06: | 150 students                              |
| In academic year 2006-'07: | 450 (maximum capacity for Person Theater) |
| In academic year 2007-'08: | 1200 (GMC)                                |

Alternatively, it has been proposed in the “Draft 3” FYE proposal, that at scale there might be offered multiple sets of lectures on a variety of cross-disciplinary themes. In the near term, this choice need not be made, as the pilot would mount only one lecture series. The discussion of pedagogical values to these different approaches, as well as cost for each should continue. A preliminary cost estimate shows that a multiple set of lectures would cause a negligible rise in the overall SFR and increase cost of the “First Class” program only in the area of speakers’ stipends:

|                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 set X 1200 students X 30 lectures @ \$200 per speaker = \$6,000 per annum |
| 2 sets X 600 students X 30 lectures @ 200 per speaker = \$12,000            |
| 3 sets X 400 students X 30 lectures @ 200 per speaker = \$18,000            |
| 4 sets X 300 students X 30 lectures @ 200 per speaker = \$24,000            |
| 6 sets X 200 students X 30 lectures @ 200 per speaker = \$36,000            |

Aside from these funding considerations there remain choices in philosophical approach to the “First Class” content. Is there a higher value to be placed on a common curriculum for our freshman class, or on a multiplicity of choices? Will the increased workload implied by multiple

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<sup>13</sup> Letter to President Rubin Arminana from WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SENIOR COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES, June 28, 2004.

preparations also require an increase in overall program cost? The pilot year will teach us lessons that can be used in determining the best approach to lecture content, staffing, and resources.

A detailed flow chart of workload for faculty, SSPs, and Peer Mentors, as compared with student instructional contact hours is attached as Appendix C (attached).

In the model, faculty are assigned primary instructional responsibility for leading seminars, academic reading, development of critical thinking skills, written assignments, feedback and grading. Student Service Professionals are primarily responsible for student development materials and experiences, those currently addressed in the EMT program. Peer Mentors would continue to serve as liaisons between faculty and students, and to help students integrate socially and academically to college life.

In the 2005-06 “First Class” pilot year planning projects that there will be 5-10 faculty, teaching a total of 10 sections (some faculty might teach two sections), 10 SSPs, and 10 Peer Mentors.

Faculty would earn 3 units per semester for a total of 6 units per annum per section. Faculty time is considered in four ways; 1) seminar contact hours, 2) lecture where faculty are present, but neither create or deliver the lecture, 3) advising or office hour time, and time for coordination with other “First Class” faculty, SSPs, and Peer Mentors. Anticipated at 50 contact hours for one section, when teaching 2 sections, contact time for the second section is reduced to 35 due to double-duty in lecture attendance. In the “First Class model it is assumed that time spent in office hours and week-to-week class preparation and planning is as usual for any course. The aggregate number of scheduled faculty hours including in-class contact hours, office hours, and course coordination time) would be 80 hours for one section, but only 57 hours for a faculty member teaching two sections (since lecture attendance and coordination hours are double-duty hours). Faculty teaching two sections, therefore, are committed to a total of 107 hours per semester.

By comparison, faculty teaching 3-unit courses normally have 45 hours of student contact hours, where there is an assumption of an additional 90 hours out of class, equating to total of 135 hours per semester. However, for the sake of consistent scheduling and to insure regularity for students, some of these non-contact hours are r “pinned” to the weekly schedule of individual sections.

Considering that faculty would also enjoy 1 prep for two courses over two semesters, and when low SFR is factored in, the “First Class” course could be seen as a reduction in workload, with the benefits accruing to students in the form of increased feedback on writing and other assignments, in advising, and through the development of mentoring relationships with faculty.

Similarly, for SSPs, workload is anticipated at 23 contact hours for one section. For the pilot program, SSPs would probably be assigned to only one section. Adding non-contact hour time, their commitment would boost to 56 hours per semester. Another indirect benefit to faculty is a reduction in numbers of course preparations each year.

Tenure-line faculty teaching 2 sections of “First Class” with 4-unit course basis (e.g., ENG, PHIL), as compared with faculty with 3-unit course basis:

| Fall                   | Spring                        | Fall                   | Spring                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 3 WTUs (“First Class”) | 3 WTUs (“First Class”)        | 3 WTUs (“First Class”) | 3 WTUs (“First Class”)         |
| 3 WTUs (“First Class”) | 3 WTUs (“First Class”)        | 3 WTUs (“First Class”) | 3 WTUs (“First Class”)         |
| 4 WTUs                 | 4 WTUs                        | 3 WTUs                 | 3 WTUs                         |
| 4 WTUs                 | X                             | 3 WTUs                 | 3 WTUs                         |
| 14 WTU +               | 10 WTUs = 24 WTUs*            | 12 WTU +               | 12 WTUs = 24 WTUs              |
| (3 fall preps)         | (1 additional prep) = 4 preps | (3 fall preps)         | (2 additional preps) = 5 preps |

\*Fall and spring course loads are reversible.

Per WASC’s recommendation, “In order to implement the new program effectively the administration and faculty should consider appointing a Faculty Director of General Education reporting to Academic Affairs.” It is expected that this “Chair of General Education” would provide leadership for FYE as well. The chair’s duties might include: scheduling FYE; coordinating faculty and student services professionals’ appointments to teach in the program and in other freshman GE classes; organizing on-going opportunities for collaboration on yearly themes and the sharing of pedagogy; creating a course for new faculty who plan to teach FYE (and GE; see section I, above, for details); ensuring the integrity of the MGOs of GE in FYE and all freshman classes; and attending to current research in the field of FYE and sharing their findings with faculty and staff.

One additional component of FYE (and for GE in general) for which additional funding will need to be developed is the area of a faculty preparation program. For a new tenure-track hires or faculty new to teaching the “First Class,” this program will equate to the three WTUs faculty receive during their first semester for advising, a period during which their ability to advise is most often strongly impeded by a lack of knowledge of SSU’s advising policies and culture. This program, in which each new faculty member will enroll, will include pedagogy for teaching information literacy, critical thinking, writing skills, and other communication skills, as well as a significant segment devoted to the cultivation of an understanding of the values of a liberal arts and sciences education in freshmen. Development opportunities will also include in-depth investigation into who our freshmen are, hands-on advising workshops, opportunities for collaboration on syllabi development, skills sessions on multicultural awareness and pedagogy, etc. A mentoring system whereby veteran GE faculty consult with new faculty on course development will also be put into place. It is hoped that master teachers could be brought to campus yearly to share their best practices with all SSU faculty. All of the aforementioned development opportunities will also be available in a sustained and intensive way to current SSU faculty who wish to teach in FYE, and in GE in general. The GE Director and the Office of Teaching and Professional Development could jointly sponsor this course.

It is necessary that the ability to teach General Education courses, and FYE in particular, become an integral issue in the hiring of new tenure-track faculty at SSU. It is also necessary that the university’s expectations in the RTP process be modified in such a way as to demonstrate and demand that teaching in GE will be valued and credited appropriately. (For example, successful completion of the above-described three-unit course for faculty could result in a letter in the faculty member’s PAF. Teaching in the FYE program could similarly result in an explicit entry into a faculty member’s PAF.)

In the days immediately preceding the completion of this document, members of the School of Arts and Humanities Curriculum Committee has circulated in draft form an alternative plan that funds faculty at 8 units while students earn 10 units. This plan will be examined in more detail and findings will be provided at a later date as an addendum.

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## ***V. Possible Assessment Rubrics & Feedback Loops***

During the planning of the new FYE model, every effort was made to create a program that is both sustainable and assessable, as it is necessary to look at a culture of evidence when assessing student learning in ten-year cycles.

It is anticipated that assessment of the Pilot “First Class” would form a 150-person experimental group that would be compared to two other groups of 150 first-year students: a) students who take the current first year Freshman Seminar, and A2 and A3 GE courses, and b) students taking only A2 and A3 GE courses. In this way, we can determine, at least in the short term, the efficacy of the “First Class” pilot in stimulating academic interest, skill development, and assimilation into the life of the university.

When developing assessment tools for FYE, as for all of GE, it is important to remember that the effort is about assessment of *student learning*, rather than program assessment. Assessment entails building a body of evidence that is not anecdotal (in the way the SETE is anecdotal), analyzing that evidence, drawing conclusions, modifying programs according to those conclusions, and establishing a feedback loop whereby all faculty teaching in a given program can benefit from the assessment results.

Both qualitative and quantitative assessment of FYE will be conducted. Appropriate assessment of FYE will involve using three different categories of assessment tools, with a culminating triangulation of results at the intersection of the different categories. The three categories are as follows:

- national instruments that will allow us to compare student learning in SSU’s FYE to that of other, similar institutions (public four-year colleges, i.e. COPLAC institutions, etc.);
- local instruments, including course-embedded assessments, implemented at several points during the student’s first-year (e.g., at the beginning of the freshman year, after the first semester, at the end of the freshman year);
- student surveys, to gauge students’ self reported engagement and learning within FYE.

National instruments include: Your First College Year (YFCY), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Source: Dr. Rose Bruce, Office of Institutional Planning.

Local surveys can be developed to allow students to self-report on perceived gain on the student learning objectives.<sup>15</sup> Each local rubric will need to be built and implemented, with an external reader analyzing the data. The rubrics might incorporate a range of possible responses to the student learning objectives already defined by the Mission, Goals, and Objectives of General Education. The rubrics could show an *unsatisfactory*, *satisfactory*, or *excellent* level of performance for each objective. Alternatively, in the area of freshman writing skills, for example, another assessment tool might involve analyzing a sample of student writing at the beginning of the fall semester, analyzing a second random sample midway through the semester, and analyzing finally again at the end of the semester. Such analysis could be done with an eye not only to compositional skills, but also to critical thinking skills and information literacy. (It should be noted that, while we might have twenty-five learning objectives to assess in FYE, in practice we might only assess four or five of these in any given cycle.) These writing assignments would be embedded into the class work so that students take the work seriously and do their best on the assignment. Time for assessment must therefore be scheduled into each course syllabus *from the outset*.

Feedback loops are essential to the assessment process, as they allow assessment data to be shared with all stakeholders. One important feedback mechanism for FYE will be the continuation of the yearly GE retreat, coordinated by the faculty Chair of GE, at which FYE assessment findings, along with general GE assessment findings, will be presented and discussed and changes to curriculum implemented. Changes to FYE based on assessment finds will be acknowledged and become part of the public record. Moreover, research demonstrates that when presented with authentic assessment data, faculty are normally quite willing and capable to replicate course strategies that prove to yield good results, while adjusting others to address areas of concern. “Faculty who develop embedded assignments and course activities are likely to be interested in results and willing to use them” (Allen 101). In fact, faculty usually do this on their own with out prompting.

Finally, effective assessment is about developing and maintaining program and teaching effectiveness over several years based on defined goals and outcomes. Properly done, it is separated completely from faculty PAFs and RTP considerations. A variety of methods and rubrics have been developed, and faculty who teach in the pilot and beyond, in conference with a Director of GE, and the Office of Institutional Research, will select the form of assessment

### ***VII. Timeline: Pilot fall 2005/running 2006***

December 2004/ January 2005	Select pilot faculty, SSPs and peer mentors.
January 2005	Form “First Class” curriculum committee consisting of faculty and SSPs, Director of Writing Center, EMT Curriculum Committee Chair, Director of Office of Teaching and Professional Development, Provost’s Representative, Office of Institutional Research, Librarian, GE Chair, Advising

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<sup>15</sup> The Freshman Seminar Curriculum Committee has already developed an instrument addressing students’ acquisition of institutional knowledge and students’ social development.

Office, A&R, seminar advisor from Hutchins School, Critical Thinking advisor from Philosophy Department, and others to be named at a later date.

February-May 2005

Develop theme, syllabus, schedule, and materials for pilot course.

Summer 2005

Mentor instructional team in pedagogies for writing, critical thinking, information literacy, seminar leadership, GE program, advising, "Who Are Our Freshmen," Summer Orientation, etc.

Fall 2005

Begin pilot program.

## *Appendix A: History of the Development of the Proposal*

Discussion about revisions to the General Education Program, and to the First-Year Experience in particular, is not new to Sonoma State. Notes from a March 1992 GE Retreat<sup>16</sup> highlight “the need for more interdisciplinary and integrative experiences for students” and assert that new students “come to us passive; they need to learn right away how to be actively involved in learning.” At that retreat, Professor Robert Girling proposed “a freshman seminar in which everyone meets the same themes” and Professor Jean Chan suggested “focusing on the freshman year and developing year-long courses in which students could grow together and with their faculty.”

The discussion about General Education continued with the Area A lab<sup>17</sup> in 2000-01 and the subsequent journey of a team of SSU faculty<sup>18</sup> to Asheville, North Carolina, in 2001, followed by faculty retreats focused on the topic of GE organized in 2002 and 2003. In 2002, the School of Education also convened a group of SSU faculty from across the disciplines to participate in a “Well-Educated Teacher Initiative”<sup>19</sup> focused on the general education needs of future educators. All of the above conversations have informed the creation of the First-Year Experience program proposed in this document.

In fall 2002, the Educational Policies Committee (EPC) and the General Education (GE) Subcommittee created the joint EPC/General Education Task Force, charging it with the following mandate:

- To analyze and synthesize available GE assessment data, including an evaluation of the status of GE assessment in relation to the concerns raised by WASC;
- To develop alternative scenarios for the future of GE based on a range of plausible assumptions about the future; and
- To propose a structure and process for faculty involvement in discussion and debate of alternatives for GE for the spring semester.

Pursuant to its charge, the Task Force<sup>20</sup> convened in spring 2003 and met bi-weekly over the course of the semester to examine a number of national models and design a model for SSU. The Educational Policy Committee and GE Subcommittee and contributed regular responses to the developing work of the Task Force, which culminated in a document entitled, “A New Path for General Education at Sonoma State” (“PATH”).<sup>21</sup> Among other things, the Task Force recommended a restructuring of GE which includes housing the First-Year Experience within General Education with a focus on the creation of a strong, content-based structure for teaching

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<sup>16</sup> In attendance: L. Mattson, Chair; J. Beaulyn, S. Hayes, J. Chan, R. Girling, P. Mellini, K. Marcus, R. Gordon, J. Frasca, M. Noble, J. Day, A. Sandy, D. Stoloff, J. Christmann, C. Campbell, C. Merrill, K. Crabbe, B. Godolphin, A. Lee, J. Thompson, P. Nourot and P. Beard.

<sup>17</sup> Participants: J. Allen, A. Botterell, R. Castro, R. Gale, S. Miller.

<sup>18</sup> Participants: B. Christie, R. Eyler, R. Luttmann, P. Northen, E. Sundberg.

<sup>19</sup> P. Fernlund (Dean), P. Draper, L. Fitzpatrick, D. Freidel, E. Galvez-Hard, B. Goldstein, D. Hammond, V. Lea, P. Marker, M. Nickel, M. Ruddell, S. Toczyski.

<sup>20</sup> Participants: P. Draper & A. Warmoth, co-chairs; K. Brodsky, J. Holian, C. Renaudin, S. Toczyski, T. Wandling.

<sup>21</sup> As noted in Appendix I, in March of this same semester, the Academic Senate unanimously accepted the “Statement of the Mission, Goals, and Objectives of General Education.”

the basic skills of writing, communication and critical thinking under the umbrella of information literacy, and the integration of concepts from diverse disciplines, a comprehensive set of learning skills, and non-traditional, co-curricular topics currently presented in the Freshman Seminar. The Task Force envisioned one central goal of FYE to be “to ensure the retention of entering students by helping them acclimate to the academic as well as the social and emotional aspects of university culture.”

Additionally, from spring 2002 to spring 2003, the GE Subcommittee<sup>22</sup>, working largely from the Asheville team report, wrote a set of Mission, Goals and Objectives (MGOs) for GE, which was unanimously adopted by the Academic Senate in March of 2003.

Over the course of the 2003-2004 academic year, the Academic Policies Committee (APC) Task Force on GE met biweekly to respond to the “PATH,” to ensure that it respond to the SSU Mission, Long Range Plan and multiple stake holder constituencies, and to discuss developing ways in which to move the “PATH” forward. Simultaneously, Provost Eduardo Ochoa and Professor Paul Draper led school wide discussions, meeting with Deans and Department Chairs to solicit school-specific responses to the “PATH.”

In March 2004, a special visit by the WASC Team commended SSU “for many accomplishments, especially in light of years of budget decline in the past decade” (Tetreault *et al.*). However, the WASC Team expressed several concerns and recommendations, including a recommendation that “Initial funding should support the development of a strong first year curriculum as a collaborative effort between faculty and student support services, incorporating the existing first year programs, i.e. EMT, FIGs and EOP Academy.” (ibid.) The WASC Team indicated that a focus on learning outcomes and a built-in assessment plan must be central to the planning process of the entire new GE package.

In the context of APC’s response to the “PATH” and the WASC Team’s report, the work of the GE Task Force culminated in a resolution before the Senate, at which time the Senate charged the Task Force to prepare a conceptual overview of the “PATH” and to design a First-Year Experience program which would serve as the cornerstone of students’ GE experience at SSU. A GE Initiative Task Force (ITF), consisting of SSU faculty and student services professionals (SSPs),<sup>23</sup> met throughout summer 2004 and into the fall of 2004 to prepare the aforementioned conceptual overview and to create a vision for a First-Year Experience program appropriate to SSU’s mission and student profile. Over the course of summer 2004, the Task Force examined a number of national models, both of General Education and of First-Year Experience programs in particular. On one occasion, they were joined by Provost Ochoa, who helped the ITF to explore the June 29, 2004 WASC letter to President Armiñana.

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<sup>22</sup> 2002-03 GE Subcommittee: Paul Draper, Chair, R. Eyler, M. Nickel, D. Crocker, L. Dawson, K. Brodsky, A. Mountain, J. Holian (Student Rep), D. Freidel, J. Chong, M. Welch, E. Sundberg

<sup>23</sup> Participants include: P. Draper, chair; N. Alamilla-Boyd, C. Benito, W. Boda, K. Borg (student), K. Brodsky, C. Brutacao, K. Daley, D. Freidel, A. Greenblatt, D. Hammond, P. Hansen, S. Hillier, R. Marks, S. Miller, B. Moonwomon, C. Morozumi, B. Mumaw (student), M. Nickel, C. Nieto (student), B. Peterson, N. Rank, T. Rockwill, E. Stanny, E. Sundberg, S. Toczyski, C. Tung, E. Velasquez, P. Viljoen (student), S. von Meier, A. Warmoth, C. Winston. Participants in the SSP Task Force that responded to the proposal include: A. Greenblatt (chair), L. Dawson, B. Boyer, C. Freund, P. Steinmetz, B. Peterson, J. Swing, E. Brown, M. Sanchez, S. Shand, K. Boyd and D. Garbesi.

Over the course of summer 2004, ITF members asked themselves the following questions:

- What can we put in place in the FYE that will *inspire* each of our entering freshmen to grown intellectually, academically, creatively, socially and emotionally?
- What components of FYE are essential to launch students into a quality education, to find a calling within a major, and to be prepared to meet the challenges that the major program requires?
- What components of a first-year curriculum (remediation, orientation, courses, approaches to pedagogy, advising, cohorts) are pertinent in FYE?

Activities geared toward answering these questions included extensive reflection on the first-year experience within the context of the university's mission, the mission of Academic Affairs, the General Education MGOs, and faculty and student services professionals' experience, as well as brainstorming to design a workable model consistent the above missions and with the SSU student profile. Coincidental to the ITF's primary concern of designing a cohesive FYE, ITF members also engaged in a detailed consideration of writing and critical thinking components for freshmen, faculty development to enable informed, creative, assessable and sustainable pedagogies, resource streams, and the examination of exciting national models for effective GE and FYE. The results of the GE Initiative Task Force's summer/fall 2004 collaborations on FYE are described in detail in "Design" (see the main document).

**Appendix B: SSU GE Reform Implementation Timeline**

OBJECTIVE	DEADLINE
Complete draft of Conceptual Overview of a new General Education Plan	September 30, 2004
Complete draft proposal for the First-Year Experience of the New path for General Education at Sonoma State ("PATH"), including assessment goals and strategies	September 30, 2004
Readings of above documents in the GE Subcommittee, Educational Policies Committee, & Academic Policies Committee, and forward to Academic Senate for approval	October-November 2004
Readings of above documents in the Academic Senate	December 2004- Spring 2005
General Education Fair, Schulz 3001	Dec.6-10, 2004
Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) – Point 4 of "PATH" recommendations for 200-400 GE courses completed	December 2004
Recommendations for Point 5 of "PATH" – Provide training and mentoring to enable faculty to teach to the new GE program completed	March 1, 2005
Professional development retreat for faculty, SSPs, peer mentors, and program leaders to prepare pilot of 10 sections (150 students) of new FYE program	Summer 2005
Pilot 10 sections (150 students) of new FYE program	August 2005
GE Initiative takes up Point 2 of "PATH" – Expanding student choice among courses at the 200-, 300- and 400-level	Fall 2005
Implement Point 2 of "PATH" – Expanding student choice among courses at the 200-, 300- and 400-level	August 2006
Campus-wide implementation of new FYE program, required of all freshmen	August 2006
GE Initiative takes up Point 3 of "PATH" – Create a capstone GE experience at the 400-level	February 2005
RFP Guidelines for GE Capstone published	April 1, 2005
Capstone RFP due	December 2005
Capstone implemented	August 2007
Point 6 of "PATH" – Establish a permanent structure for assessing GE course goals and student learning outcomes: As each of Points 1-4 of the "PATH" is designed, appropriate assessment tools and rubrics are applied	On-going
As each of Points 1-4 of the "PATH" are readied for implementation, appropriate permanent cycles of review of new GE Program components and courses established	On-going

*Appendix C: Flow Chart of Workload Expectations*

Insert EXCEL document /hyperlink here

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