

Humboldt State University
GEAR (General Education and All-University Requirements) Committee Action Plan Proposal
8-29-2013

Background: We entered the 2012-13 year with a current GE program that lacked focus and coherence, had little sense of ownership among the faculty or others at the university. There was scant understanding of how GE supports student learning and success, or the extent to which experience of students in GE and in their major program of study need to be complementary. The First Year Seminar (FYS)-though conceived as a HIP (High Impact Practice) to improve graduation and retention rates-was not clearly linked to a longer-term vision for integration. Students and faculty routinely challenged the value of the general education program. Faculty development had not yet reached early stages of recovery, and assessment was seen as a compliance exercise. Selection of a software named "Compliance Assist" and flaunting that trade name only exacerbated this undesirable image.

In fall of 2012, we added a Director of Educational Effectiveness to resuscitate a coordinated effort at faculty development, to examine our current state of assessment and to help the institution and the faculty to perceive assessment as a way to get the kinds of information that empowered improvements. Working with general education and first year experience seminar was also added to the Director's plate.

During the entire year, our GEAR group, in consultation with others, worked toward embracing higher level reasoning as the vision of purpose of GE. We spent our year developing ways to meet the above challenges by studying AAC&U's Value rubrics, reading Stephen Brookfield's 2012 book on critical thinking (which came after the Value rubrics and provided valuable insights regarding critical thinking across all disciplines), and looking at metadisciplinarity as a way to align the larger traditional approaches of liberal education with critical thinking. We learned that it was desirable to develop an expanded vision of critical thinking beyond that currently defined by the CSU System. We sought to meet the essential learning outcomes of the CSU System (which incorporate both LEAP and WASC initiatives), incorporate the special traits characteristic of our unique University Mission, and to use the development of these combined required skills and content in an integrated fashion to develop enhanced reasoning, with most importance assigned to reasoning.

We applied and were admitted to the AAC&U 2013 Institute for General Education and Assessment, held in June, 2013 at the University of Vermont. While there, we were provided time to focus on articulating a plan. The University is currently spending the assessment cycle on the mapping of course outcomes to program outcomes in all its programs. This work is due for completion October 31, and was initiated by and stressed as essential by the Director of Educational Effectiveness. Without this mapping in place, it is difficult for programs to contribute effectively to either assessment cycles or to All-University curricula. We will have this to springboard from in late fall of 2013.

The AAC&U Institute could not have come at a better time for Humboldt State University. We feel we have the unique opportunity to facilitate dialogue and affect positive change on our campus. Our five-year goal is to have a GE program through which students experience a coherent and focused program built on dimensions of the university's baccalaureate learning outcomes, led by committed faculty from across the campus, and with an assessment system that supports a cycle of continuous improvement in student learning, especially in development of higher level reasoning skills. We expect that the thoughtful evaluation and redesign of GE will have-as a side benefit-a positive impact on retention and graduation rates.

Our plan for action is outlined in three phases:

Phase I (2013-2014) Laying the Foundation for Change

- 1) Draft baccalaureate learning outcomes informed by AAC&U-LEAP essential outcomes, WASC core competencies, HSU Mission, Vision & Values, and current HSU outcomes; vet these learning outcomes among university groups
- 2) Communicate a vision for GE (FYS; Engaging Pedagogy and Meta-disciplinary themes; Senior Synthesis) and the assessment system that will track student learning and guide ongoing development
- 3) Revisit GE learning outcomes informed by baccalaureate outcomes; vet these learning outcomes among university groups
- 4) Define the parameters for a GE pilot
- 5) Define the parameters for a Senior Year Capstone/Synthesis pilot
- 6) Establish a faculty director of General Education
- 7) Engage in a “listening tour” to departments and co-curricular offices to dialogue about the structure, assessment and purpose of GE
- 8) Engage faculty in Assessment Education (Year one with an Assessment Day in January of 2014)

Phase II (2014-2015) Initial Implementations

- 1) Pilot FYS courses (Spring 2014 or Fall 2014, expanding in Spring and Fall of 2015)
- 2) Pilot Assessment (Direct and Indirect Measures of Student learning, particularly of reasoning)
- 3) Department commitments to participation in the GE program redesign

Phase III (2015 and Beyond) Plan for Ongoing Success

- 1) Assess the progress to date and process for improvement
 - 2) Scale up FYS and assessment pilots
 - 3) Annual assessment schedule with clear instructions and deadlines
 - 4) Pilot an on-going development of GE synthesis experiences (9 unit clusters of upper division coursework and related integrated experiences)
-