Appendix to WASC Report – GE at SJSU

A Brief History

In 1998, SJSU undertook a major restructuring of its GE program. The program had become very complex with double counting of requirements that made it difficult for advisors, let alone students, to understand the requirements and the best way to choose a pathway that might possible align and integrate knowledge with one's major degree program. The structure of the GE program was simplified and aligned with the CSU GE Areas. Only the American Institutions requirements remained as double counting (with Social Sciences), but most critically, there was a shift from a content based definition of GE to an assessment based system founded on student learning outcomes at the GE Area level. Program learning outcomes were defined though assessment was done exclusively at the course level based on the GE Area to which the course belonged. All existing GE courses had to be recertified, a process that involved a review of content, but more importantly, an assessment plan to measure student learning. This was a complex process with many previous GE courses choosing not to recertify under the new system. Comprehensive annual assessment of all sections of every GE course were summarized in Continuing Certification reviews that occurred every 4 years for most courses. Some small, but important changes were made in 2005, most notably the inclusion of information literacy student learning outcomes in many areas within the GE program.

Our last WASC review noted (positively) that SJSU's GE program had defined learning outcomes and content objectives and assessed these for all certified GE courses on a regular on-going basis. Nonetheless, our program was found lacking in two respects: (1) that assessment was focused on collecting and reporting data almost to the exclusion of closing the loop and improving the GE courses and program based on the finding of the assessment, and (2) that program level assessment had never been done, despite the fact that there were 9 GE Program Outcomes enumerated at the beginning of the GE Guidelines.

In 2008, a Senate task force was created to review the assessment and continuing certification of GE courses (SM-S08-3). The recommendations of this group formed the basis for a revised set of GE Guidelines approved by the Senate in 2009 (S09-2). The assessment based GE program in place since 1998 was viewed as excessively burdensome. Every section of every GE course had needed to assess every student learning outcome (SLO) every time it was taught. University Policy S09-2 reduced assessment to one SLO per year per GE course based on a (usually) five-year cycle aligned with each department's Program Planning Self Study of its degree program(s). Limiting assessment in this fashion was intended to permit a more in-depth, reflective assessment process. Alignment with departmental program planning allows departments to review GE holistically and simultaneously as part of the department's reflection on resource allocation among the needs for major courses, service courses, and general education courses.

Program Assessment

At our last WASC review, the lack of program level assessment of GE was noted. Since 1998, there had been nine program outcomes for the GE program, but none had been directly assessed at that time. Mapping Learning Outcomes for the individual GE Areas with the nine program outcomes showed "coverage" of all program outcomes, however many of the outcomes were assessed at the lower division. There was no summative assessment at the upper division level. For example, most students take their Oral Communications GE course as freshmen and are not <u>required</u> to demonstrate or develop their oral communication skills and abilities at any later point in their GE education. Many upper division GE courses (instructors) have oral presentations, but these are included optionally and not as a requirement of the entire GE program.

In April of 2005, A Sense of the Senate Resolution (SS-S05-5; http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/SS-S05-5.pdf) embraced the AAC&U vision for Liberal Education and directed the administration to sign a letter of commitment to become a "LEAP Partner Campus." The entire CSU followed suit in June 2008 when the Chancellor Charles Reed issued Executive Order 1033, specifying that "Each CSU campus shall define its GE student learning outcomes, to fit within the framework of the four "Essential Learning Outcomes" drawn from the Liberal Education and American Promise (LEAP) campaign, an initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities." Executive Order 1065, issued in September 2011, replaced EO 1033 but maintained the AAC&U LEAP Outcomes as the required outcomes for GE programs in the CSU. Informally, the Board of General Studies (BOGS), which oversees the GE Program, adopted the LEAP outcomes and associated VALUE rubrics in 2010. The formal adoption of the LEAP outcomes came with the campus adoption of a revised GE Policy in Spring 2014.

In 2010-11, a pilot project (GE Program Assessment; GEPA) to assess GE program outcomes for the first time directly assessed the LEAP outcomes, as operationalized through VALUE Rubrics. Teams of 4-6 faculty evaluated anonymous student work from each other's classes using the appropriate VALUE Rubrics. As with most pilots, this one lead to many adjustments in methodology when a second round of GEPA was undertaken in 2012-13. The results were not surprising with the majority of students rated 2 or 3 on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = benchmark; 2 & 3 = milestones; and 4 = capstone) with trending toward ratings of "2" averages for nearly all rubric items assessed. The unanticipated benefit of these projects came from the extended conversations among the faculty teams regarding the interpretation of the Learning Outcomes and the types of assignments each had chosen to demonstrate learning. There was a sharing of best practices and a better understanding of how the individual courses were really part of a program. In both pilot studies, faculty were given one course of assigned (release) time for their participation. The pilots were intended to be exploratory to establish a viable process. The sampling was very valuable, but far from a comprehensive assessment of the GE program. A commitment of resources will be needed to establish and expand the GEPA process as an on-going summative assessment of the GE program.

Recent Changes

A significant revision to the GE Guidelines was adopted as campus policy in Spring 2014 (S14-5; http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S14-5.pdf). Some of the most significant changes are listed.

- Formal adoption of the AAC&U LEAP Learning Outcomes and VALUE Rubrics as the GE Program Outcomes.
- Establishing clear guidelines setting criteria for meeting GE requirements within major degree programs. (This enabled many degree programs to reduce to the CSU mandated 120 units.)
- Major revisions to the writing intensive GE Areas (lower division composition courses and the upper division junior level writing in the discipline). Changes to learning outcomes and content objectives at the lower division include required critical reading and an emphasis on drafts and revisions as part of the writing process.
- Redefining the CSU GE Area A3 (Critical Thinking) as Critical Thinking and Writing. Learning Outcomes were modified significantly to align with the AAC&U VALUE Rubrics for Critical Thinking and Writing. GE Area A1 (Oral Communication) and GE Area A2 (Written Communication I), both with grades of C or better, are now prerequisites to the newly defined GE Area A3. Integrating second semester composition with critical thinking aligns our campus with the requirements of the UC system and will assist most transfer students in taking community college courses that already teach integrated critical thinking and second semester composition courses.
- Significantly revising the student learning outcomes for the upper division disciplinary writing course that meets the CSU Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) at SJSU. The new outcomes emphasize communicating with technical, professional audiences as well as general audiences. They also more explicitly emphasize information literacy at the upper division.
- Creating a process for review of writing intensive courses with established recommended enrollment caps. Maintaining effective class sizes and pedagogies for writing intensive GE Areas has been very difficult with recent significant pressure to increase class sizes. Many courses are now running at two to three times the sizes recommended within the GE Guidelines since 1998. Effective and timely practice and feedback on written work with larger classes is next to impossible. There are strategies for teaching larger class sizes (TAs & readers for example) and the new review process will permit larger sections with (1) justification and (2) evidence that practice and feedback on writing is still possible. We envision that a community of best practices will develop due to the accountability now built into the GE Policy.

Table of Assessment review GE courses by department

	Scheduled Self-Study Year	GE Courses in Department	GE Section in PPR	Reviewed by BOGS?	PPR Process (New or Old)	PP Cycle Completed
Anthropology	2011	Yes	Yes	Yes (good)	Old	Y
Art	2012	Yes			Old	Y
Biology	2013	Yes			Old	N
Business	2012	Yes			Old	Y
Chemistry	2011	Yes			Old	Y
Child Adolescent Development	2014	Yes	Yes		New	N
Communication Studies	2014	Yes	Yes		New	N
Economics	2013	Yes			New	N
Engineering	2013	Yes			Old	N
English	2012	Yes	Yes	Yes (good after revisions)	Old	Y
Environmental Studies	2012	Yes			Old	Y
Geology	2012	Yes	Yes		Old	Y
Global Studies	2013	Yes			New	N
Humanities	2012	Yes	Yes	Yes, partial review	Old	Y
Kinesiology	2012	Yes	Yes	Yes (good)	Old	Y
Math	2013	Yes			Old	Y
Meteorology	2011	Yes		N/A	Old	Y
Political Science	2013	Yes			Old	Y
SISS	2014	Yes			New	N
Programs adding GE courses with GE Revision						
Nursing	2011	Yes, beginning fa 2014			Old	Y
African American Studies	2013	Yes, beginning fa 2014			Old	N