

Cal State University/G.E. Affinity Group
Minutes from subgroup meeting
2/28/08

Achieving Coherence: Transfer, Upper Division
and Integration in Capstone Courses or Culminating Experience

Present:

Allen Butt
Keith Freeseemann
Jacqueline Kegley
Jacque Kilpatrick
Ken O'Donnell

Gretchen Peterson
Kathryn Rummell
Gerald Shenk
Susan Shimanoff
Anne Marie Todd
Marshall Whittlesey

We discussed some tools that could help “achieve coherence,” integrating the learning outcomes of general education with each other and with those of the major.

- GEAR (Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement)
 - suggested by Jackie Kegley, with most agreeing this would be a natural site for coherence
 - per Gerald Schenk and others, the CO advised moving it up to the junior year, to give more time for intervention with students who weren't proficient
- a smaller GE (Marshall Whittlesey)
 - the current GE pattern (set forth in EO 595) calls for 48 units
 - this encourages departments to create courses that fulfill a GE area (A-E) while meeting major requirements, narrowing the degree
 - a smaller set of requirements would take the pressure off, giving students the latitude to explore, and achieve breadth and coherence
- use of the nine upper-division units
 - many campuses make these writing intensive
 - Monterey Bay tries to achieve coherence by *requiring* each major to offer its own version of the nine upper-division units; e.g. a major in mathematics takes the upper-division GE designed for math majors
 - they are all interdisciplinary at Channel Islands, and most are team taught
- approaches to GE course approval and monitoring:
 - approval by non-experts is problematic
 - the challenge is balancing breadth with expertise: faculty need to be aware of (and accountable for) the whole GE, but also want to feel they're qualified to review each other's lower-division courses for GE areas
 - larger campuses tend to break GE committees into groups by GE area or discipline, but most don't have enough courses to make that practical
 - Keith Freeseemann/Long Beach described a “change of culture” there, where area review was conducted not by disciplinary group but by LEAP student learning outcomes

- in part the motivation was practical: their campus has 37,000 undergraduates and too many departments and sections to conduct GE review without this kind of grouping

- faculty in Monterey Bay who teach GE agree up front to provide three samples of student work per section: “excellent,” “average,” and “minimal.” Faculty meet to review each other’s unlabeled samples in a kind of norming session, where they have to determine the categories of each other’s samples

lower division coursework as an opportunity for coherence

- Sacramento State and Chico State both combine learning communities with freshman seminar courses
- Chico is also experimenting with a “longitudinal thread” that carries learning from those years into the upper division
- there was consensus that this is challenging: the better and more coherent (and more longitudinal) you make lower-division GE, the more you disadvantage transfer students

Both Channel Islands and San José State have had excellent results with team teaching

- can provide the coherence and multidisciplinary we seek
- pedagogical improvements: faculty learn by watching each other
- expensive, but perhaps a good use of TTL funds