

Creating General Education Linkages in Public Higher Education
Some Notes

I'm happy to have this chance to talk about GE, because I think California has something positive to contribute to the conversation. We've been wrestling with GE issues at the statewide level for a long time; what we've come up with may not be anyone's ideal, but in some ways it's working out pretty well.

Let me start by setting the scene.

Public Higher Education in California

University of California

9 campuses

Bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees

California State University

22 campuses

Bachelor's and master's degrees

California Community Colleges

106 campuses (71 districts)

Associate degrees and certificates

There are three public segments of higher education in California:

- there's the University of California – eight general campuses (research universities, such as Berkeley and UCLA) and a health science campus;
- the California State University, with 22 campuses granting mostly bachelor's and master's degrees; and
- there are the California Community Colleges – 106 of them in 71 separate districts. Californians who can benefit from the instruction offered can attend any community college, regardless of where they live.

Each of the segments has a governing board, and the community college districts have local, publicly elected boards as well. Each of the segments also has a statewide

Academic Senate, and almost all the campuses have their local Senates. The CSU system has a faculty union, too, which includes tenured, tenure-track, and temporary faculty and librarians; in UC, there's no collective bargaining for tenured and tenure-track faculty; and among the community colleges, faculty unions bargain with individual districts. Along with the differences in governance structure from segment to segment, there are differences in organizational culture, differences in what's centralized or decentralized within a segment, and particularly differences in faculty traditions and in the degree of collective faculty responsibility for the curriculum. But we've all operated for 36 years under the Master Plan for Higher Education, the key precepts of which are in state law. And one of the key demands that lawmakers have made is that **students should be able to take the first two years of a baccalaureate program at *any* California community college and, if they perform adequately, transfer smoothly to *any* UC or CSU campus.**

Since general education is concentrated at the lower-division level, provisions for smooth transfer have to take account of GE.

The CSU has been at the center of statewide GE activity for several reasons:

The CSU and General Education

- Flow of students from community colleges to CSU
- Systemwide general education framework
- CSU faculty acceptance of primary responsibility for maintaining the integrity of CSU baccalaureate degree requirements

The vast majority of California community college students who transfer to a four-year public university, transfer to a CSU campus. Around **48,000** of them come to us each year, ***about six times the number that go to UC***. The CSU accepts freshmen from the top third of high school graduates, but the majority of CSU students have taken courses at a community college. It's not just the junior-level transfers – lots of students who entered the CSU as first-time freshmen sign up for a course or two at a community college. In part because of this flow, the CSU has maintained a systemwide GE framework for decades. Although the CSU didn't even *become* a system until 1960, it recognized a need for GE coordination at the system level if the Master Plan is going to work. And the systemwide framework has helped frame the GE discussions with other segments.

Beyond these formal, public elements, there are faculty traditions that keep CSU in the center of the GE discussions. The CSU has a long tradition of faculty senate leadership in establishing system curricular policy, which the Trustees have incorporated into administrative law. In particular, the faculty take very seriously their collective responsibility for the integrity of degree programs and for determining when requirements have been met. They know that much of the lower-division instruction of CSU graduates takes place outside the CSU, but as long as those students are receiving CSU degrees, then their learning should meet CSU standards. There needs to be respect and trust and consultation across segments, but they don't relieve the CSU faculty of that basic responsibility.

The last major revision of the CSU General Education-Breadth framework was approved in 1980. That was the culmination of a process that began in the fall of 1976, when the CSU statewide Academic Senate devoted its annual retreat to the need for revision of the general education framework. In January 1977, the senate formally asked the Chancellor to appoint a broad-based task force to review GE practice. Half of the task force was CSU faculty; students, campus administrators, and system administrators made up the other half, and community college faculty were eventually added. The task force worked for a year and a half, and after it issued its recommendations, there was extensive further consultation with faculty senates and CSU and community college administrators before the revision went to the CSU Board of Trustees for its approval.

The objectives of this general education program aren't extraordinary.

Graduates will have:

- achieved the ability to think clearly and logically, to find information and examine it critically, to communicate orally and in writing, and to reason quantitatively;
- acquired appreciable knowledge about their own bodies and minds, about how human society has developed and how it now functions, about the physical world in which they live, about the other forms of life with which they share that world, and about the cultural endeavors and legacies of their civilizations;

- will have come to an understanding and appreciation of the principles, methodologies, value systems, and thought processes employed in human inquiries.

Every word was considered very carefully, of course, when the objectives were under development, but they've occasioned little comment since they were adopted.

The structure of the framework isn't extraordinary either, though it can still generate a lot of debate. Here are some of its features:

The CSU General Education-Breadth Framework

- At least 48 semester units, including at least 9 upper-division units
- Requirements grouped in five broad areas:
 - Communication in the English Language and Critical Thinking
 - Physical Universe and Its Life Forms; Quantitative Reasoning
 - Arts, Literature, Philosophy, and Foreign Languages
 - Social, Political, and Economic Institutions and Behavior; Historical Background
 - Lifelong Understanding and Self Development
- Exceptions granted for students pursuing high-unit professionally oriented degree programs
- Oversight by systemwide advisory committee, with majority of members drawn from CSU faculty but also including CCC representatives
- Provisions for community colleges' certifying transfer students' fulfillment of lower-division requirements

Within the framework, CSU campuses can add requirements, shape requirements, regroup requirements, and do what they can to ensure that the students don't simply get isolated fragments. For the upper-division component, many have experimented with sets of thematically organized, interdisciplinary courses. On several campuses, including mine, CSU freshmen and sophomores have access to fully integrated GE programs. An integrated program is typically one of two alternatives for meeting lower-division campus GE requirements – the other is usually a more conventional, cafeteria-style approach.

If students start in a community college, however, and take a pattern of courses that's consistent with the framework, they won't have to worry about CSU-campus-specific lower-division GE requirements. The community college can certify completion of up to 39 semester units of GE. Full certification frees the student from *any* CSU-campus-specific lower-division GE requirements. Or a student can be certified as having met one or more of the five subject areas, and the CSU campus has to accept that. CSU campuses may differ a little in GE requirements for their students who enter as freshmen, but community college transfer students don't have to worry about those differences. If they can't get into their first-choice CSU campus and apply to another, or if they simply change their minds about which CSU to attend, the certification remains valid.

Many fewer students transfer from one CSU campus to another, but those who do can rely on reciprocity agreements among CSU campuses for lower-division GE.

The certification process goes all the way back to 1968, when the only CSU GE requirements were at the lower division and community colleges were told that they could certify completion of CSU GE requirements.

1968	All GE requirements are lower division. Community colleges can certify completion.
1981	GE requirements include 9 upper-division units. Community colleges can certify completion of 39 lower-division units, using courses in database. Courses in database are subject to challenge by CSU.
1993	GE requirements include 9 upper-division units. Community colleges can certify completion of 39 lower-division units, using courses in database. Courses must be reviewed and accepted by CSU-CCC committee before they are added to database.

Apparently, that turned out to be less than satisfactory, so when the current pattern was put into place in 1981, new arrangements were made. The CSU system was to maintain a list of community college courses that could be used in certifying completion of GE-Breadth requirements. Colleges could add courses to the list annually. A course review subcommittee was charged with mounting challenges to courses on the list if they appeared not to be consistent with GE-Breadth objectives and specifications. The subcommittee was made up of CSU and CCC faculty, with a majority of CSU faculty. If the subcommittee was dubious about a category of courses (for example, nutrition courses for the life science area, or programming-language courses for the quantitative reasoning area), it could initiate a challenge. A challenge panel of CSU and CCC faculty with related expertise would be formed, would collect outlines of courses in the category, and would hold hearings and come to a decision. A CSU campus could also initiate challenges. The faculty on the subcommittee or at the campuses, however, had to work primarily from course titles; at best, they might have been able to consult a catalog description.

The challenge process was cumbersome and inexact, and over time, the system-level staff support for it was undermined by retirements, reassignments, general downsizing, and changes of computer platform for the certification database. By the end of the decade, the challenge process was years behind. And that meant that the community colleges had no systematic feedback regarding the boundaries of the GE-Breadth pattern. A college would test the waters by adding a marginal or questionable course to the certification list; it wouldn't be challenged, and the college would assume that the course was considered appropriate. Meanwhile, CSU faculty and staff would glance at the ever-expanding scope of the certification list and conclude that the community colleges weren't holding up their end of the GE bargain.

Revising the process took several years and extensive negotiations, even though the substance of the requirements stayed off the table. Now, if colleges want to add courses to the certification list, they send course outlines to a CSU-CCC faculty committee, which reviews them. Only if the committee finds the outline acceptable is the course added to the list.

The committee works very hard, going through hundreds of course outlines during the annual update cycle each winter. Some experienced articulation officers help out with a preliminary review. Although there's a mix of veterans and newcomers on the committee and some veteran staff support, the committee isn't always perfectly consistent in its decisions, but the feedback to the colleges is *much* better than it was under the old procedures. We've seen evidence of greater faculty involvement at some

colleges, and some college curriculum committees have really made the attempt to rise above departmental self-interest, to take the CSU objectives and framework seriously, and within the framework to try to build the most effective GE program for students.

It's also clear that in the six years we've been doing this, the quality of the course outlines we see has improved, on the whole. We think that's of real benefit both to the colleges and the CSU. The colleges depend heavily on a shifting pool of part-time faculty, and a good course outline may be the best guidance a new faculty member can have about the college's and the CSU's expectations for that course.

There are still reasons why individual community college faculty might try to get their courses on the GE-Breadth list, however, marginally they might relate to the GE objectives. Community college fees are on a per-unit basis, up to a certain maximum. University-bound students, most of whom have heavy work responsibilities and many of whom are far from affluent, are reluctant to spend time or money on a course that doesn't count towards major or GE requirements. Faculty who see a course as valuable to students naturally want to have it count, to give students that incentive to take it. So we see a lot of outlines for "college success" courses, for example. The course review committee understands that a good "college success" course can raise substantially the probability of a student's succeeding in baccalaureate-level work, but if the course doesn't fit the GE-Breadth specifications – and almost none do – the committee won't accept it for GE. We have to trust that the college will find other ways to make the course attractive to students who would benefit from it.

Whatever its virtues or deficiencies, the CSU GE-Breadth framework isn't the only game in town for students seeking bachelor's degrees. *When a blue-ribbon commission of California citizens reviewed the Master Plan in the mid-1980s, it recommended a single lower-division GE curriculum for the three public segments, so that a student would not have to commit either to CSU or to a UC campus as an eventual destination to know what pattern to follow in a community college. By the late 1980s, the University of California had something loosely analogous to the CSU GE-Breadth pattern: the Transfer Core Curriculum, which had a lot of overlap with the CSU pattern but which wasn't identical to it. A student still had to decide early on the UC or CSU system to know what to do.*

The Master Plan commission's challenge had been taken up by ICAS, the Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates. This is a group composed of officers of the three statewide academic senates (UC, CSU, and CCC). The officers and their corresponding senates were able to agree quickly that reciprocity agreements could take care of the relatively few students transferring from one four-year institution to another, but that students in community colleges needed access to a GE pattern that would work for transferring to any CSU or UC campus. They could also agree quite readily on most

components of a common curriculum, dubbed the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum or I-G-E-T-C or eye-get-see.

**Comparison of California State University
General Education-Breadth Certification Pattern and
Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum**

**CSU General Education-Breadth pattern
(lower-division)**

**Intersegmental General Education
Transfer Curriculum**

<p>Area A: Communication in the English Language and Critical Thinking</p> <p>Oral Communication Written Communication Critical Thinking</p> <p>9 semester units</p>	<p>Area 1: English Communication</p> <p>English Composition Critical Thinking-English Composition Oral Communication (CSU only)</p> <p>9 semester units (CSU)</p>
<p>Area B: Physical Universe and Its Life Forms</p> <p>Physical Science (at least one course) Life Science (at least one course) Laboratory Activity Mathematics/Quantitative Reasoning</p> <p>9 semester units</p>	<p>Area 2: Mathematics/Quantitative Reasoning</p> <p>3 semester units</p> <p>Area 5: Physical and Biological Sciences</p> <p>Physical Science (at least one course) Life Science (at least one course) Laboratory Activity</p> <p>7 semester units</p>
<p>Area C: Arts, Literature, Philosophy, and Foreign Languages</p> <p>Arts (at least one course) Humanities (at least one course)</p> <p>9 semester units</p>	<p>Area 3: Arts and Humanities</p> <p>Arts (at least one course) Humanities (at least one course)</p> <p>9 semester units</p>
<p>Area D: Social, Political, and Economic Institutions and Behavior; Historical Background</p> <p>9 semester units (at least 2 disciplines)</p>	<p>Area 4: Social and Behavioral Sciences</p> <p>9 semester units (at least 2 disciplines)</p>
<p>Area E: Lifelong Understanding and Self Development</p> <p>3 semester units</p>	
	<p>Area 6: Language Other Than English (proficiency equivalent to two years' high school study – UC only)</p>

They were willing to allow a minor deviation for each of the senior segments:

- UC-bound students were obliged to take courses or demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English, equivalent to two years of high school study. Both UC and CSU impose that as an admission requirement on freshmen, and CSU was not inclined to see it as a major barrier to completion of the IGETC.
- CSU-bound students were obliged to take an oral communication course. It's been a basic component of CSU GE requirements through many iterations, but few UC campuses maintain speech-communication programs, where courses meeting that requirement are usually housed.

The hardest disparity to reconcile was UC's requirement of a second semester of English composition and CSU's requirement of a course designed explicitly to develop critical thinking skills. Someone finally noticed that several colleges offered courses that were on the UC Transfer Core Curriculum as second-semester composition courses and on the CSU GE-Breadth list as critical thinking courses. With some trepidation, ICAS put forth an IGETC pattern that included a single critical thinking-second semester composition course. UC replaced the Transfer Core Curriculum with IGETC, and the CSU approved IGETC as an alternative to the CSU GE-Breadth pattern. For significant parts of the CSU, acceptance of IGETC as one alternative was predicated on maintenance of the GE-Breadth pattern as another alternative.

Courses that were on both the Transfer Core Curriculum and the CSU GE-Breadth list were grandfathered into IGETC. For new additions, though, the IGETC procedures involved up-front review of course outlines by faculty of the senior segments. Implementation of IGETC came at the same time as implementation of the up-front review of additions to the CSU GE-Breadth list. We actually use the same CSU-CCC committee to review additions to the IGETC and additions to the CSU GE-Breadth list.

The up-front review process has elicited some grumbling among the community colleges and of course the occasional cry of pain from an individual faculty member whose course was rejected. The major controversy that followed the implementation of the IGETC, however, centered on the single critical thinking-second semester composition course.

We on the review committee called it the camel course, partly because it had two "humps," critical thinking and composition, and partly because it had been designed by a committee. Faculty in both systems worried that the course would have to cover too much material. The course didn't have a natural disciplinary home, and disciplinary

affiliation had recently become more important to CCC faculty. Community college teaching used to require a credential, similar to the credentials required of K-12 teachers, but those credentials had just been replaced by a set of minimum faculty qualifications, crafted by the CCC Academic Senate and based for the most part on the discipline in which one earned a master's degree. Most critical thinking courses had been taught in Philosophy departments, with a few taught in Speech, English, or Psychology departments. Most composition courses had been taught in English departments. Some community college faculty were dubious about their own or their colleagues' ability to teach both components effectively in a single course. Moreover, a majority of the first course outlines reviewed by the committee proved disappointing and were returned to the colleges for revision. The CCC Academic Senate passed a resolution calling for the abolishment of the camel course. But by the very next semester, the Senate stepped back from that position, in response to a cadre of faculty who had by that time actually taught a camel course and been pleased, sometimes to their own astonishment, with the result. There may be power simply in making explicit the expectation that writing well and thinking well go together. The link isn't obvious to all freshmen.

ICAS agreed when the IGETC was first implemented to evaluate it a few years down the road, and the evaluation is now under way. The CSU Academic Senate is engaged in a two-year study of the baccalaureate degree, and a roundtable discussion of the baccalaureate degree involving faculty, presidents, trustees, and students has also been initiated. Several CSU campuses are considering significant overhauls of their local GE programs, and our newest campus is experimenting with University Learning Requirements stated in terms of student learning outcomes, not courses passed. With our campuses increasingly decentralized, and with students increasingly expecting to be able to take a course from this college and that university to meet requirements, achieving some coherence in general education without stifling student interest and initiative and flexibility is likely to be an ever greater challenge.

GE won't look the same ten years from now. Some people have predicted the convergence of the IGETC and CSU GE-Breadth patterns, when the memories of the original rationale for the discrepancies have dimmed. Whatever its form, we expect the new GE to reflect the practical lessons we have been accumulating over the last thirty years.