

**THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AND RELATED MATTERS  
AT SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Report of the External Review Committee:  
Kenyon Chan, Occidental College  
Jacquelyn Kegley, CSU-Bakersfield  
Robert Shoenberg, Consultant**

We three were invited by the San Francisco State University (SFSU) Academic Senate as external examiners to conduct a review of the General Education Program (GEP) and matters related to it. Our work was a planned part of an extensive review of the program and was preceded by a self-study conducted by an internal group created by the Academic Senate for the sole purpose of undertaking this study.

The self-study was made available to us prior to our visit. We found it an admirable document, given the time frame within which the work had to be completed and the lack of any substantial student outcomes data available to the Task Force. This internal group appointed by the Senate asked the right questions, collected a good deal of information, and conducted some student and faculty opinion surveys on its own. Its conclusions and the questions it raised for future consideration were forthright and honest. The report should be a good guide as the Senate moves forward to reconsider the current GEP.

We spent two full days talking with SFSU faculty members, academic administrators and students. All were open in expressing their opinions and sharing their ideas. Those with whom we talked revealed a concern for the students they teach and serve in a variety of ways and dedication to the task of education. We were impressed with the commitment, thoughtfulness and good will of the people we met. The nature of

this report does not allow us to comment on all the good ideas we heard, but we are sure that they will not be lost to the university.

Our conversations left us with a general impression that teachers and students are not deeply dissatisfied with the GEP but that they find a lot of things wrong with it. Some of the problems are the result of lack of resources, others are structural. In particular, we note that the SFSU general education requirement is unusually extensive.

We also note a high percentage of non-tenure track instructors who teach general education courses. Given that the obligations to the campus of these temporary employees are limited, asking them to participate in the training needed to give them an understanding of the goals and purposes of SFSU's general education program and to adjust their course content and teaching methods accordingly poses considerable difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot offer much help in dealing with these budgetary and systemic problems. Nor can we respond usefully to some of the detailed questions raised in the self-study. These matters ultimately need to be addressed by the SFSU academic community. This report will thus focus on placing the current GEP in the context of contemporary thinking about general education and offer some ideas about current good practice that might inform SFSU's further examination and revision of its general education program.

### SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The current GEP has many problems which may be individually correctable but which in their totality may require rethinking of the entire program from the ground up.

---

<sup>1</sup> We should also note that we met many highly committed and involved full-time instructors.

The GEC will have to decide what approach to take as it gets into its discussions. Here are some basic problems we see:

1. The current program is a collection of bits and pieces, with each major category divided into sub-categories. Thus students experience the program as a series of unconnected courses. The whole is no more than the sum of the parts.
2. The primary purpose of the program appears to be exposure to certain kinds of subject matter and some experience in developing certain basic skills. The structural principle seems to be “one requirement, one course.” One course is hardly sufficient to develop the skills, but except for unmonitored expectations for writing and critical analysis in Segment III clusters and the current plan to introduce a writing requirement in the major, none of the skills is intentionally taken up elsewhere again elsewhere in the curriculum. The 27-hour distribution requirement has no clear rationale and leads nowhere, inviting the familiar and regrettable notion that it is something to be “gotten out of the way.”
3. Neither the program nor any of its parts has a clear and sufficiently extensive rationale for its purposes. Thus advisors have no answer to the age-old question, “Why do I have to take this course?” Faculty members have no guidance as to the way they should teach general education courses to accomplish the purposes of the requirement. In terms of educational purpose, everyone is going through the motions.
4. As we have noted, the requirement is unusually extensive. Nominally it is 48 hours, but most students need to pass English 114, which is not included in the program and many have to take English 414. Neither does the GEP include the American history and government courses which are required by the state. The auto-tutorial program that satisfies the information competency requirement carries no credit. Thus for many students the requirement is effectively 60 hours. Even at 48 hours, the program structure engenders a gaming of the system to fit in all the requirements at the expense of programmatic coherence.

### BETTER WAYS TO THINK ABOUT GENERAL EDUCATION

Thorough program revision requires first a clear and extensive statement of the purposes of general education that is readily available to both students and faculty members and couched in terms that guide teaching and learning. Some of the individual requirements in the current program do have strong statements of purpose (e.g., science)

but they are located in places where few people, especially students, look and none is written in language readily apprehensible to students.

One result of this obscurity of purpose is many courses approved to fulfill each requirement, a substantial number of which are only technically relevant to the purposes of the requirement. Some courses which may have been directly to the point when they were approved are no longer taught in ways that are apposite. Especially in the case of the distribution requirements, course approval has been granted on the basis of subject matter only, failing to take into account the ends to which the subject matter is taught. All of these practices lead students and their advisors to talk about general education, especially Segment II of the GEP, as though its only purpose were to expose students to a range of subject matters.

Contemporary thinking about baccalaureate education posits two major differences from this approach.

1. The total undergraduate educational experience is conceived of as a whole. General education and the major work together to accomplish its goals in systematic ways.
2. Those goals are stated in terms of developing intellectual skills, awarenesses and capacities, which might be summarized as follows:
  - a. communication skills (written, oral, mathematical)
  - b. analytic and critical thinking
  - c. dealing with unstructured problems
  - d. understanding and exercising the capacities of citizenship in local, national and world communities
  - e. ethical and moral reasoning

These goals, by the way, are consistently cited by employers as reflecting the skills they are looking for in new employees.

The CSU and SFSU general education requirements are attentive in some ways to the goals described in 2., above, but they encourage a one-requirement-one-course

approach, with the general education program rather than the entire baccalaureate curriculum being the only place where these goals are specifically addressed. Thus Segment I of the GEP deals with the communication and critical thinking skills and Segment III includes a diversity requirement which in some cases deals with the citizenship goal of learning to live and work in a diverse society. But except for some additional writing requirements, the “lick and a promise” provided by general education receives no reinforcement elsewhere in the curriculum.

In current thinking about general education, distribution requirements, of which Segment II of the GEP is characteristic, have as their purpose introducing students to the “ways of knowing” characteristic of the four domains of knowledge (science, social science, arts, humanities) into which the academic world, SFSU included, characteristically divides the arts and sciences. And indeed, such rationale for Segment II requirements as exists does point to this epistemological purpose. The evidence we have, however, suggests that certainly the students and probably most of the faculty are not aware of this intention and do not teach their courses with that purpose in mind. If SFSU retains a distribution requirement—and given the CSU framework it is hard to see how the university would not—all of the courses currently approved for Segment II will have to be reexamined and rethought.

The CSU general education framework is seen by some as constraining, but it by no means necessitates the one-requirement-one-course approach which the GEP by-and-large takes. Neither does it preclude a basic rethinking of what general education should be about. Much creativity is possible within the given constraints, which require only

that students have demonstrated the competencies. We suggest an approach to revising the GEP that includes these elements:

1. First and foremost, develop a clear and coherent statement of purposes for baccalaureate education as a whole. This statement of purpose should connect general education and the major.
2. Organize the curriculum so that the skills and capacities first addressed in the current Segment I continue to be addressed systematically throughout the major and further general education courses.
3. Make clear the epistemological purposes of Segment II and build from the ground up a set of courses that meet those purposes.
4. Reduce the extent of general education requirements by building skill development into many courses. For instance, a separate critical thinking course is unnecessary if all courses address critical thinking skills.
5. Make clear to students that the major is not the sole point or even the main point of baccalaureate education.

None of these admonitions should be taken to imply that knowledge is unimportant or even that some kinds of knowledge are not of particular importance. The State of California, for example, has made a determination that knowledge of American history and government is singularly important. Knowledge in depth, as represented by the major, is of utmost importance, if only because it helps students understand the power of expertise, even at a baccalaureate level. Most to the point, one cannot develop skills in a vacuum: those skills need real knowledge on which to operate.

Still, knowledge is the vehicle, not the operator. Students need to understand the contingency and contextuality of knowledge, the ways in which it is produced and modified, and both the power and limitations of different ways of knowing, including those of one's chosen field of study and endeavor.

## SPECIFIC ISSUES

Beyond the general conceptual issues of the GEP, each of the segments of the GEP has some problematical aspects.

### *A. Segment I*

Here is where the “one-requirement-one-course” approach seems most dysfunctional. No one questions that the basic skills of writing, speaking, quantitative reasoning and critical analysis are the cornerstones of collegiate learning and discourse. Indeed, one might argue that critical analysis is the distinguishing feature of baccalaureate education, the approach to learning that distinguishes it from high school and the facility which marks the proverbial educated person. Organizing the Segment I requirements in a way that suggests that completing them is a sufficient indicator of collegiate mastery trivializes their significance.

These skills have in common their focus on strategies and forms of analysis and representation of ideas. This point of convergence should be emphasized in the way the teaching of these skills is organized. Rather than teaching them separately, they might be presented together in a variety of ways. Furthermore, these skills might be developed in the context of some particular subject matter of interest to students. Here are a couple of suggestions.

1. First-year seminars. Instructors, preferably tenured and tenure-track faculty members, teach students in sections of 15-20. The subject matter is a problem of general interest that relates to the faculty member’s field of specialization. In exploring the problem in its various aspects students learn skills of inquiry and analysis, develop “information literacy,” and practice skills of written and oral presentation and, as appropriate, mathematical analysis and representation. These kinds of seminars exist in many institutions. Nearby ones include San Jose State and Stanford.

2. “Blocked” courses. Sections of introductory courses frequently elected by students are scheduled in tandem with basic skills courses. The same students are registered for both sections so that instructors can plan assignments together. Some assignments receive two grades, one for the basic skill, one for the subject matter. This kind of parallel scheduling is most often done for writing, less often for speech. SFSU has done some pairing of mathematics courses with writing and with critical thinking. Using a textbook that teaches mathematical ideas in the context of significant human problems offers another approach. One such text, *EarthAlgebra*, developed at Kennesaw State University in Georgia and in wide usage, teaches the concepts of college algebra in the context of global warming.
3. Double credit courses. Courses meeting for 300 minutes a week combine basic skills instruction in various modes.

Faculty members can devise any number of creative ways to reinforce students’ awareness of the importance of these modes of analysis and representation to their intellectual maturation. The faculty to whom we talked seemed uniformly disappointed that student performance in these areas was not better by the time they attained upper division status. Like instructors almost everywhere, they recognized that students come to them deficient in reading ability, which we take to mean skill in reading analytically. Even some students recognize this weakness.

The obvious conclusion is that these basic skills need to be identified to students as the ground of their education and taught not only in courses designated for these purposes but in every course students take. The “across-the-curriculum” strategies that are being implemented in writing should be extended to the further development of other basic skills in courses in the major. Analytic reading and inquiry, followed by oral, written and mathematical presentations that proceed from those investigations, should be expected features of all courses and developed *systematically* in distribution courses and in major programs. Revisions of the SFSU undergraduate program should emphasize developing a “culture of literacy” in its broadest sense.

The current writing program seems to be a sub-problem of the larger issue of developing communication and analytic skills. Many students must take what appears to be a semi-remedial writing course, English 114, which is not included in the GEP. The course that is used to meet the GEP writing requirement by most students is English 214, which bases instruction in literary texts. Those in charge of the course maintain that literature is used as the occasion for writing, rather than as the object of writing. Others insist that in at least some sections the writing assignments involve literary analysis of the kind typical of introductory literature courses.

Following some of the suggestions we have made for using other vehicles for the teaching of writing would obviate this issue. Still better would be a more uniform and better rationalized set of writing experiences. Here is one suggestion:

1. In the first year, all students, with rare exception, complete an introductory writing experience which is included in the general education requirement. The experience might be embedded in other courses, blocked with other courses, or be of a more traditional kind.
2. Eliminate English 214 and its equivalents.
3. Continue with plans to introduce a “writing-intensive” course into all majors. Two such courses in the major would be even better, with the second focusing on writing about the field of specialization for a general audience.
4. All students, in the year they achieve junior status, complete a second writing course like English 414 or one of several other possible varieties.

Thus all students would have at least three courses focused specifically on writing, as well as whatever writing is required in other courses. We note that this rationalization of the writing program would not pose an additional resource burden since English 214 would be eliminated.

Some kind of uniform writing proficiency test or an evaluation of a portfolio of written work submitted at the point where the student has accumulated 75-90 credits, would be a good addition to this writing requirement and a signal that SFSU takes proficiency in written communication very seriously.

### *B. Segment II*

We have already noted the problems we see with Segment II. It is not that this part of the GEP attempts to address inappropriate aspects of a competent collegiate education but that it is fractionated and weakly conceptualized. The important thing to keep in mind is that a distribution requirement is not so much about the individual subject matters as about the epistemologies these subject matters represent. Thus, for example, an introductory sociology course is primarily about the modes of inquiry, standards of truth and characteristic forms of representation of the social sciences. Instruction in any distribution course should address both the strengths and limitations of that “way of knowing.”

The long lists of courses that satisfy requirements in each of the categories represent, judging from their titles, a rather miscellaneous collection, especially in the humanities and behavioral and social sciences. Fewer courses, most of them specifically designed for the distribution requirement, might present an approach of clearer purpose. After 25 years of accumulation, the current lists look more like departmental efforts to get as many courses as possible into whatever categories can be stretched to fit than a carefully designed and well-tended program.

We hasten to add that some of the requirements, though created a quarter century ago, look very contemporary in their purposes. Several categories are clearly aimed at

demonstrating the practical consequences of applying the knowledge and intellectual strategies of the arts and sciences disciplines. Many of the integrative science courses focus on connections between science and public policy or individual behavior. The courses in Category B of the social and behavioral sciences by definition have a social policy focus. A revised program would do well to retain those features of the GEP in some form.

A new program might also try for some depth within the distribution requirements. Recognizing that scheduling may pose an unacceptable barrier, those designing a new program might explore the possibility of sequenced courses in some of the categories; e.g., an introductory course in a particular field followed by a course in the same field (or an interdisciplinary course) that applies the strategies and insights of the basic course. The follow-on course might be a junior-senior level offering.

While few institutions, either large or small, have carefully sequenced pathways through the undergraduate curriculum, the conditions for such practices exist almost everywhere. For ideas about important central themes of undergraduate education and ways in which they can be developed systematically throughout the curriculum, SFSU might be interested in a new publication of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, *Purposeful Pathways: Helping Students Achieve Key Learning Outcomes*.

To the degree possible, the distribution courses should include work that engages students in active inquiry. Learning to ask and answer consequential questions is the defining feature of undergraduate education. Several institutions make inquiry-based learning the centerpiece of their undergraduate programs. The most complete example is Hampshire College whose entire curriculum is based on inquiry. The model is too labor-

intensive to work at a large institution but some Hampshire practices might be suggestive. A large institution example more comparable to SFSU is North Carolina State University. Also of interest may be the specialized form of inquiry-based education called Problem-Based Learning (PBL). A large scale PBL program can be found at the University of Delaware. Samford University has a more attenuated program.

Perhaps the most extreme example of the “bits-and-pieces” quality of the GEP is the possibility of satisfying a humanities requirement with one semester of a foreign language. Aside from the fact that the course may or may not be humanistic in its orientation, the long-term value of a single course is questionable. While we all have trouble giving up the notion that some level of proficiency in a foreign language is one mark of an educated person, even an essential skill in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a single course as one option in the humanities distribution should not be enough to salve our consciences.

We are also aware of some unease that SFSU students’ only required contact with literature is ENGL 214, which is not, in theory, really a literature course at all. A revised program might remedy this situation by including a required humanities course of the type pioneered many years ago by Columbia University and still taught there. Many other institutions require some version of such courses, among them the University of North Carolina at Asheville and the University of Richmond. These two institutions include a mixture of literary, social and philosophical texts in the course readings.

Whatever strategies are ultimately chosen to address CSU distribution requirements, SFSU program builders should observe following principles:

1. Focus on “ways of knowing.”

2. Build some connections among courses into the program.
3. Place some emphasis on building inquiry skills.
4. Keep some of the applied liberal arts features of the GEP.

### *Segment III*

The impetus behind Segment III, giving students experience in studying a problem in some depth and at an advanced level and integrating ideas from several disciplines, is unexceptionable. This central purpose reflects exactly what students should be doing at an advanced level of study. The problem is that except for a very few of the course clusters, students do not engage in any activity that gets them to integrate their knowledge. While the idea of integration of knowledge as a capstone activity is well worth retaining, if no way can be developed to get students to engage in active integration, the requirement, at least in its current form, should be dropped.

Dropping this particular general education element does not obviate the need for an upper division component of general education. With the large percentage of eventual graduates coming to SFSU as transfers, the GEP needs a substantial upper division element to assure that the faculty's goals are being met. Any new requirement should retain the problem-focused, interdisciplinary and integrative qualities that are theoretically present in the current program. Suggesting any one way to accomplish these purposes is difficult because the possibilities extend as far as the faculty can imagine. Activities might include such elements as an internship (see Portland State's program), study abroad, a problem-focused senior seminar involving students from several majors, a piece of integrative research, or development of a portfolio of prior work.

The AERM requirement and/or one in international studies might also go into the upper division curriculum. Even better would be work that focuses on issues that these two areas of study have in common: a concern for the nature of human differences and the difference that difference makes. This strategy might even be designed to incorporate the State of California's American history and government requirements through a history course that looks at U.S. history in a world context or our governmental structures through a comparative approach.

A new look at the work of the final two years should not neglect the role that majors play in advancing the overall goals of the baccalaureate. Colleges would do well to review their major programs to be sure that they are engaging students in sophisticated inquiry and problem solving activities and demanding writing, speaking and analytic skills appropriate to adult levels of discourse.

We would also note several strong expressions of opinion about the unnecessary extensiveness of some majors. Students are having difficulty organizing their programs so that they can graduate in the canonical eight semesters. Doing so often involves choosing courses as one would complete a jigsaw puzzle, which cannot be solved if it is not put together in precisely the right way. Sometimes even the best motivated most skillful planners are thwarted by events beyond their control: courses offered infrequently, scheduling conflicts and the like. Students in some majors need more maneuvering room in their programs than departments grant them.

#### IMPORTANT PROGRAM NEEDS

More than anything else, SFSU needs an adequate statement of baccalaureate goals. The statement needs to be framed in language that people ordinarily use and to be

accessible to students both literally and in terms of its language. What exists now is hard to find, cryptic and couched in a specialized language that is opaque to students.

Even with a well-crafted statement of purpose, students need guidance in translating between it and their actual programs. The advising system might provide this kind of explanation were it not so overloaded and if advisors were better trained to explain the rationale for programs and specific requirements to students. A first-year seminar, and perhaps also a transfer seminar, could provide a place in the curriculum for extended discussion of curricular rationale.

The absence of a full and comprehensible rationale and well-informed advising leaves no alternative for students but to understand the GEP as a set of requirements to be gotten out of the way. The local interpretation of the CSU framework has the effect of translating the requirements into curriculum without much thought about how they could be oriented toward individual institutional rationales. So they just sit as bite size portions of individual dishes to be ingested without regard to the way they complement each other and make a balanced meal. The whole is no more than the sum of the parts. Effective curriculum building tends first to a concept of the whole, then to developing parts that are mutually reinforcing.

Designing those parts is the last step in a four-step process. The first step, as we have suggested, is a careful formulation of goals. Next comes consideration of what will constitute evidence of students having achieved those goals. This step does not require formulation of an assessment program, but rather some determination of observable behaviors and academic products that are correlates students having attained the goals. The third step is then to consider what kinds of experiences, curricular and co-curricular,

will enable students to demonstrate those behaviors and produce that academic work. Those experiences are both instructional and curricular. The question is as much a matter of the kind of instruction students need to have as the kind of material they should study. Thus the kinds of teaching strategies to be employed (e.g., traditional lecture-discussion, group projects, learning communities, independent research, experiential learning) must be considered prior to, or at least in tandem with curriculum.

We make a point of this progression of program planning because curriculum committees have a tendency to go directly to laying out courses of study without stopping to think carefully about goals, outcomes and instruction. Thus the discussion becomes embroiled in the political economy of departments and colleges, with people focusing mainly on securing for themselves and their units a place in the curriculum. Matters of purpose and outcomes, which are the most important matters for students, get lost in the scramble. As SFSU begins to reconsider a 25-year-old curriculum, this danger is particularly acute and its potential damage to good educational practice should be minimized by following a careful step-by-step process moving from goals to outcomes to instructional strategies, soliciting meaningful student input and forging a faculty consensus on these matters before moving on to specific curricular requirements.

While it is important to have a vision of the whole before trying to implement the parts, it is not necessary or even productive to try to make all the changes at once. If we had to suggest what should happen first, we might well choose steps to develop and encourage practices that intentionally focus on enhancing student intellectual skills across the curriculum. Such a step has much more to do with instructional practices than curricular change.

As far as curriculum per se is concerned, the greatest needs would appear to be developing upper division programs that can operate as intended and rationalizing the writing requirement. With so many students coming to the university as transfers, the upper division is the place where the character of an SFSU education gets defined. A major element in SFSU's distinctive character is its special concern about dealing with diversity. That bright thread in the fabric of the university's character might well serve as an organizing element for upper division work. Going beyond SFSU's established concern for racial, ethnic and gender diversity in American society to see it in the light world cultural diversity would help address the strong interest we observed in "internationalizing" the curriculum.

The current writing requirement does not seem to be producing the kinds of results with which the campus is satisfied, nor does the way it is organized seem to make sense to many. English 114, required of many students, is not part of the general education program. Many feel, whether with justification or not, that English 214 is often not taught as intended and is inadequate as many students' only exposure to literature. Students resent having to pay for the JEPET and many feel that passing the examination is not a good surrogate measure of the kind of writing college students should be doing. People are quite skeptical of the value of a writing program in the major that includes only writing and revising a 10-page research paper. The entire writing program thus needs to be rethought. In the process, SFSU might consider instituting its own competency measures such as are in place at Washington State University. Admittedly, such a program is expensive but it also seems worth the expenditure.

Both of these steps can be carried out in such a way as to address concerns about analytic reading and critical thinking. As good as the PHIL 110 course, which most students take to satisfy the critical thinking requirement, may be, developing the habits of reading and writing analytically requires more than an isolated course.

### PROCEDURAL CHANGES

We noted, as did the self-study group, some features of the conduct of the GEP that might be improved. In particular, having separate committees to oversee courses in each of the Segment II areas appears to us unnecessary. A single committee of perhaps 12-15 people with a range of subject matter backgrounds is perfectly competent to do the work for all Segment II courses. Indeed, this work can be done by an appropriately constituted General Education Committee which would also continue to be responsible for program policy and oversight. Segment III in its present form would seem to impose a sufficient workload to justify a separate committee, but if the upper division requirement were changed that question would become moot.

With a clear focus on the epistemological thrust of the Segment II courses comes a need to revisit all the currently approved courses. Even if the structure of the distribution requirements remains unchanged, all courses should be reviewed to see if they are in fact serving the purposes of that requirement. The best way to see if these courses are indeed apposite is to look at the kinds of tests, written assignments and other activities which students are required to carry out. What the students themselves are asked to do in a course is the best indicator of what the course is about. The syllabus alone does not tell the tale, even if it includes a sophisticated statement of course goals. Once approved, courses should be reviewed on a regular basis, perhaps every 3-5 years.

To see if the curriculum and concomitant instruction is doing the job it is designed to do, SFSU, like the rest of U.S. higher education, needs to develop strong programs of student outcomes assessment. We do not in any way advocate developing special examinations or adopting commercial ones. Collegiate outcomes assessments should follow from the work students do in their courses. Comprehensive capstone experiences, through which students demonstrate their mastery of intellectual skills and subject-based knowledge, is one approach to assessment. Student portfolio development is another strategy in wide practice. What these methods lose in showing comparability across institutions they gain in authenticity and credibility. Any of these assessment strategies require, however, that faculty members carefully review the totality of these products to see where students are not performing as well as desired and adjusting instruction accordingly.

As is widely the case, the SFSU faculty, including advisors, need to spend a lot more time talking about educational purposes. New faculty members, adjunct and part-time faculty, and graduate students involved in instruction need to be brought up to speed on the purposes of the undergraduate program and the modes of instruction they need to adopt to achieve those purposes. Instructors who teach a course that meets a requirement have an obligation to teach the course in accordance with the purposes of the requirement. To insist on that principle is not to deny anyone's academic freedom.

Keeping everyone focused on the goals requires constant review and reinforcement. Faculty members need to talk to each other to coordinate their understanding of purposes and to convey that understanding to students. Students need to

understand the principles of coherence that underlie the studies in which they are engaged and to see how they lead to well-considered and meaningful ends.

Advisors need the training that allows them to reinforce that understanding and to make it the basis on which they advise. The advisors with whom we talked acknowledge that most of their work consists of making sure students are fulfilling their requirements and helping them put the puzzle pieces together. In general they do not have answers to the students' perennial question, "Why do I have to take this course?" because no one has provided them with those answers. Neither do they generally have time to do the kind of planning with students that would help them develop more coherent and purposeful programs.

#### IN SUMMARY

The General Education Program the university put in place 25 years ago was progressive for the time and in many of its elements continues to reflect good practice. The strong focus on communication and critical thinking in the early years, the concern for helping students gain knowledge and attitudes necessary to live comfortably in a diverse society, and the attention to integrating knowledge represented by the Segment III requirement and the Category C science requirement all reflect current thinking about the essential purposes of undergraduate education.

Over time, however, whatever clarity of purpose the program as a whole originally may have had has been obscured. Neither the GEP as a whole nor most of its constituent parts have goals both clearly stated and accessible. Local interpretations of the CSU framework and to a lesser extent by state requirements have resulted in emendations of the program that have fractionated it. The GEP gives the appearance to

students, faculty and advisors of a collection of individual courses that are no more than the sum of the parts. Under those circumstances, neither teaching nor learning proceed as conceptually unified enterprises.

More than anything else, SFSU needs a refreshed statement of educational purpose that includes both general education and the major as part of a unified whole that provides clear direction for the undergraduate program. Students and faculty members both need to be reminded constantly of that purpose and faculty members need to agree to teach toward those goals.

Although the current program needs a haircut and some styling, it may not need a complete makeover. However, given that both the extent of the program and the number of courses that satisfy the requirements are too extensive and the whole is rather unkempt, it might be easier to proceed from the ground up.

The key words are “intentionality” and “coherence.” The purpose of the undergraduate program should be clear, with the parts interrelated and the totality of a piece. Achieving those results requires attention to both curriculum and teaching.

Now is the time, when intended outcomes are being defined, to pay attention to assessment. The faculty needs to be continuously aware of whether its goals are being achieved and to correct for shortcomings.

Throughout the process, instructors need to be in regular discussion with each other to coordinate their efforts. Students should sense that their intellectual skills are developing, that they are not continually recycling through same levels of academic demand. The degree of communication that makes this developmental approach possible requires careful course approval and review, regular meetings of departmental/college

faculties to talk about the quality and sophistication of student work, and annual all-university discussion of the undergraduate program. Sustaining intentionality and coherence requires more attention than instructors are used to giving to these matters.

Students must be let in on the rules of the game. That means continual reminders of the collective faculty's expectations and evidence that those expectations are being addressed in their courses. Students, teachers and advisors need to be self-conscious about purposes and verbalize that awareness as a matter of course.

SFSU has great strengths. One of the greatest is a faculty and student body historically committed to making the world a better place for everyone. That commitment is reflected in the university's pride in its diversity and in teaching and activism that takes learning and scholarly pursuits into the world outside the university. The curriculum can build on those commitments, can take its special character from them.

We have enjoyed our experience in working with all at SFSU and hope that what may appear some sharp criticisms will not obscure our admiration for this singular institution. We wish you every success in the work that lies ahead of you.

### **Note**

Throughout the report we have indicated some institutions that furnish examples of good practice with regard to particular practices. You will know of California institutions to which you can turn for ideas. We would note three institutions of SFSU's

size and type that offer particularly good examples of well-considered general education programs with particular elements that reflect clearly stated goals:

Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI)

James Madison University (VA)

Portland State University (OR)

We can help you identify contacts there if that would be useful.