

**2011 AAC&U Institute on High Impact Practices and Student Success  
Report to President Robert A. Corrigan and Provost Sue V. Rosser  
San Francisco State University**

## Background

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) holds several Institutes annually on topics related to university administration, pedagogy, and education. Teams representing universities across the country are selected based on the strength of their proposals. A San Francisco State University team was accepted to this year's High Impact Practices (HIPs) Institute held June 15-18 at the University of Vermont campus in Burlington. The team consisted of the following faculty members and administrators:

- Nancy Gerber, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry and member of the Baccalaureate Requirements Committee ;
- Trevor Getz, Associate Professor of History, Faculty Director of General Education, Academic Senator, and team leader to HIPs Institute;
- Helen Goldsmith, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies;
- Jo Volkert, Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management;
- Venise Wagner, Chair and Associate Professor of Journalism and Academic Senator.

The SF State team proposed to attend the Institute with the dual goals of developing and refining our university's first year and capstone experiences. This seemed an appropriate focus given that the new university-wide baccalaureate policy (Policy S10-255) and other recent policies and directives, as well as reports from outside consultants which have focused attention on these areas. In signing S10-255 in Fall 2010, President Corrigan addressed these issues by offering the following expectations:

*7. The Academic Senate will investigate the feasibility of requiring a major capstone/culminating experience for all majors, perhaps within the next 5 years, which would complete SF State's intended sequence of writing requirements from freshman English to senior-level writing in the discipline.*

*8. The Academic Senate will assess the effectiveness of the distributed first-year experience strategy of the new policy, and, at the same time, encourage interested faculty to develop and pilot test alternative strategies for first-year experiences.*

Subsequently, the Academic Senate passed a policy requiring culminating experiences. However, it became clear during discussion on the floor of the senate that some departments would need additional help to design and offer such capstone courses, projects, and experiences. Additionally, the senate needed additional support to study the efficacy of first-year experiences currently offered at the

university and to propose alternative strategies. It was largely these two additional needs that the SF State team proposed to address at the HIPS Institute.

Our team is grateful to the CSU Chancellor's Office, and especially Academic Associate Dean Ken O'Donnell, for financing our attendance at the HIPS Institute as well as the attendance of teams from eight other campuses. We would also like to thank Provost Rosser for supporting our flights and additional costs. Finally, we would like to especially express our deep thanks to Dean of Undergraduate Studies Gail Evans, who served as a faculty member at the HIPS Institute and who continues to support our endeavors in this area.

## **Experience and Activities at the HIPS Institute in Burlington**

As a team, we believe that our attendance at the HIPS Institute will be of great benefit to SF State university. Indeed, this report contains an action plan developed at the Institute. Our time was very well spent both preparing for and attending the Institute. We now propose a process for consultation and implementation to address the challenges of offering culminating experiences and first-year experiences at SF State.

At the Institute, we participated in four interwoven tasks. First, at plenary sessions we were introduced to theoretical and methodological advances in pedagogical practices. During break-out tracks we applied our expertise to data collection, course and program design, campus leadership, and connecting teaching to student success. We also spent intensive sessions developing a strategy within the team, sometimes seeking the advice of outside consultants who served as faculty (including Carol Geary Schneider and Tia McNair from AAC&U). Finally, we spent time interacting with teams from other campuses.

Building on the President's signing statement of the new baccalaureate policy and on our university goals, especially in terms of equity and social justice, we quickly identified the first-year experience as our primary focus and the culminating experience as a secondary focus. Our action plan reflects this prioritization, although many of the practices we are proposing to explore also have the potential to impact capstone experiences. In the first two days of the Institute, we came to realize the many steps of consultation and data collection and interpretation that we must undertake prior to proposing strategies for moving forward. We subsequently carefully constructed a framework to assess our current status, determine the most effective strategies for moving forward, and build support for these strategies. We also explored the context in which this process will take place in terms of budget, the CSU Graduation Initiative, and campus priorities. The result was the action plan presented below.

Throughout the Institute and these first steps of the data analysis and implementation process, we discovered that we were very fortunate to have a team designed to bring together the various needs and resources of the university. Not only are we composed of (a very collegial group of) administrators and faculty from various units and colleges, but we also represent Student Affairs as well as Academic Affairs and key committees and structures of faculty governance. Moreover, we bring to the table a

great variety of analytical, political, and design skills. We are optimistic about moving forward with our project as a part of wider initiatives within the university, and we thank you for your support.

## **Action Plan**

SFSU HIPs Institute team, 2011

### **Introduction**

SF State has a new set of baccalaureate requirements which we are currently rolling out. These new requirements are built around Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). However, the General Education (GE) portion of the requirements does not include a First-Year Experience (FYE), and the SLOs that would typically be in an FYE were partially lost and partially distributed into other required GE courses.

SF State does have a number of existing initiatives and programs (and others in development) aimed at first-year student success. Each year these programs reach significant numbers of new students: residential living/learning communities (~1200 students), Metro Academy (~100 students), Equal Opportunity Program (~300 students), the Presidential Scholars program (~20 students), and to some degree the First Year Composition Stretch program (~1100 students). These existing programs have not been fully assessed for learning effectiveness. Nor do they articulate a shared vision and set of skills and outcomes identified by the University as high-impact.

### **Project Description and Goals**

Our overall goals are to:

- obtain endorsement from the President and his cabinet for our efforts to improve student success,
- close the achievement gap identified by the California State University system (CSU) Graduation Initiative,
- introduce first-year students to and increase their participation in High-Impact Practices, with particular attention to traditionally underserved populations,
- help students to understand the mission and values of the University,
- help departments to explore ways to link students involved in capstone and first-year experiences, and
- find ways to help students connect their first-year experience to the rest of their college career.

### **3 strategies**

Our plan for moving forward is based on three interwoven but distinct strategies:

1. Evidence: We will gather data on existing programs at SF State and their impact on student success, as well as review data from other institutions for use as context. We will use this data to determine the methods by which we can most effectively make use of resources to assist our students further and we will disseminate this data to faculty, staff, students, and administrators.
2. Social justice: We will especially narrate and disseminate evidence of the impact of first-year experiences (and culminating experiences) on student equity and success for underrepresented students who are the first in their families to attend college.
3. Campus culture change: We will interface individually with departments and other units that potentially have the greatest reservations about the strategies we are proposing.

## Actions and timeline

Our timeline for moving forward is:

1. Meet with the Dean of Undergraduate Studies to discuss proposed action plan (summer 2011).
2. Report to Provost and President on our HIPs experience. (late summer or early fall 2011).
3. Conduct inquiry activities that help us to assess our current first-year projects: What first-year projects exist? How many students are touched by them (disaggregated by ethnicity, first generation status, gender, Pell grant status)? Do they currently meet the SLOs we are proposing? How successful are they in terms of retention and time-to-graduation? (AY 2011-2012)
  - a. Collect and interpret quantitative data on GPA, retention, and graduation. (AY 2011-2012)
  - b. Interview involved faculty and staff. (fall 2011)
  - c. Conduct student focus groups. (spring 2012)
  - d. Perform document and website analyses. (AY 2011-2012)
4. Identify stakeholders. (early fall 2011)
5. Develop a proposed set of SLOs for First Year Experiences, and elicit feedback from stakeholders. (in progress)
6. Propose SLOs to the Baccalaureate Requirements Committee and then the Academic Senate for endorsement. (fall 2011)
7. Propose a professional learning community to support, monitor, and implement new or expanded FYEs. (spring 2012)
8. Publicize/publish findings to stakeholders. (late spring 2012)

9. Possibly apply for appropriate external funding. (summer 2012)
10. Meet with local CSU campus teams that attended HIPs Institute (CSU East Bay and Sonoma State) to share ideas and information about what is working on our campuses. (fall 2011)

## Milestones

As we proceed, we hope to achieve certain milestones that will give us some evidence of the success of our strategies and allow us to evaluate and modify our programs. These include:

1. Complete, parsed data set with interpretation and shared set of goals,
2. A resolution supporting Student Learning Outcomes for FYEs from the Academic Senate,
3. The expansion of current FYEs and/or new pilots to meet identified needs, and
4. Additional data some years out showing efficacy of pilot/expansion.

## Addendum I: Additional models for FYEs

Based on our research so far, we are considering exploring and proposing several potential additional models for FYEs.

- LLD : The Life-Long Learning and Development requirement of our new GE program could create the space for an effective FYE option.
- Stretch math: First-year experience SLOs could be integrated into a stretch math program for those students enrolled in it, modeled on the success of the stretch English program already in place.
- Peer: We could explore developing a peer mentoring program that would connect graduating seniors involved in culminating experiences to first-year students.
- Faculty/Staff/Administrator mentors : We could explore developing a mentoring program which connects university personnel with new students.

## Addendum II: Draft Proposed SLOs for First-Year Experiences

Upon completion of a first-year experience, students will be able to:

1. Integrate personal educational experiences with the complexity and diversity of the wider world .
  - a. *Links to baccalaureate degree goals #3, 4, 6*
  - b. Value of a liberal education
  - c. Financial literacy
2. Demonstrate active engagement in campus and community activities that reflect the mission, culture and values of SF State.

- a. *Links to baccalaureate degree goals #3, 4*
  - b. The role of personal and interpersonal skills in achieving academic success
- 3. Develop a realistic personal degree roadmap leading to timely graduation .
  - a. *Links to baccalaureate degree goals # 2*
  - b. Study skills
  - c. Understand competencies needed for academic success
  - d. Assess personal level of competencies needed for success
  - e. Identify and use resources available to achieve academic success
  - f. Exposure to HIPs
- 4. Identify ways to contribute the well-being of the local, state, national and global communities.
  - a. *Links to baccalaureate degree goals #3, 4*