

2009-2010 Academic Senate Retreat  
Answers to GE Breakout Group Questions  
September 14, 2009

**Table 1**

**What are the strengths of Cal Poly's GE program?**

- The emphasis on communication
- The different templates for the colleges

**In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- More interdisciplinary classes
- Credit should be given for foreign language
- The requirements should be consistent across colleges
- Accept additional options such as Human Nutrition
- Additional courses to broaden student's horizons and improve their functioning in life
- Course availability

**Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

No! Too many choices, not polytechnic enough, not interdisciplinary enough, too many courses not designed to make the students better people

**Table 2**

**What are the strengths of Cal Poly's GE program?**

- Variety within the GEB areas allows students to strengthen his or her level of understanding in subject areas outside of their major course of study.
- It is strong because the CSU program is strong.
- Students can delve into subject areas outside their interest or field of study to enhance their educational experience.
- It is evident that the entry level writing intensive courses have established a framework that has allowed students to improve their writing skills over the undergraduate career.
- Writing intensive courses at Cal Poly have the advantage of lower enrollments providing students with more feedback from instructors to improve writing.
- The proposal and approval process for GEB courses results in a document with enough specificity and defined learning objectives to allow any instructor to plan and implement a course that meets the GEB requirements.
- The Technology GEB elective area allows for students to sample a broad range disciplines outside of their specified major.

**In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- Some suggest that the program is strong enough.
- Help students to appreciate the value of GEB.

- A way to make the program stronger is to reduce the number of options in each area and focus more heavily on the skills sets that students require to be effective learners as opposed to a possessing a pre-determined amount of information.
- There should be an effective, relevant and manageable review process to determine which courses continue to meet the ULOs. Sometimes “longtime” course offerings continue to be offered without determining how these courses continue to hold up in comparison to newer courses or courses with revised content.
- The rigid areas for GEB make it difficult to integrate interdisciplinary principles into existing courses. Moreover, the infrastructure to support interdisciplinary courses is insufficient.

**Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

Why not ... as the GEB program at Cal Poly is consistent with the CSU requirement CP does not have flexibility with implementation.

Why ... the Area F elective helps us as a polytechnic

**Table 3**

**What are the strengths of Cal Poly’s GE program?**

- Departments or colleges that teach GE feel more of an investment in GE than those that do not. Part of this seems to be ownership; we should redefine GE to have ownership by all colleges.
- A great variety of courses are available in some areas, like D5.
- GE 2001 opened up a lot of opportunities for student choice. There was less ‘protection’ of courses and credits in some areas or departments.
- There is an opportunity for students to put together pieces of their education in a more meaningful way by selecting appropriate GE courses.
- Classes are taught by people who are experts in their disciplines.
- Faculty who are teaching GE courses are dedicated to student learning in those classes. These faculty look at GE as an important part of their jobs.
- GE classes have to include important learning components that make them more intellectually rigorous.
- GE program provides the breadth that many people consider essential to a professional education.
- GE strength is breadth of exposure.

**In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- Students choose courses based upon what is available rather than the courses they would really like to take.
- Low supply of the courses students want means that they just take what’s available. This is not a recipe for value.
- Is there a path in GE that ensures student success and perception of value?

- The notions of 'broad and foundational' and 'breadth' are not widely embraced and are somewhat arbitrary.
- The idea that GE should not engage in learning assessment is an indication that GE isn't really important or valuable.
- Students form a community in their major; they do not form a community within GE.
- If the professional colleges talked more about how GE can be stronger vs. be eliminated.
- It is the opinion of many faculty that the process to gain approval for a course as GE is arbitrary and uneven.
- A broader diversity of faculty from all colleges on GE committees may improve perceptions of governance.
- GE courses do not have to 'face the market.' They have a captive market and therefore are less concerned with student perceived value.

**Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

- Yes, because it's consistent with the new strategic document, which defines polytechnic as beyond the professional specialization.
- Yes, but only in a baseline way. Unless students are guided to connect the courses in an integrated experience, it's not really meeting the objectives. It works for selected students.
- No. In Europe most of this material would not be deemed essential to a university education.
- No. Most student-learning occurs in the major. A GE program that is required to integrate with the professional areas would be de facto more responsive.

**Table 4**

**What are the strengths of Cal Poly's GE program?**

- Broad exposure to many fields.
- How strong are the writing and oral skills of upper level students, as perceived by both the students and the instructors of upper level classes?

**In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- Introductory foreign language should be allowed for GE, especially to support foreign study.
- Comprehensive GE package for studying abroad in a particular country.

**Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

Common core – YES

Define as polytechnic university? ???????

## **Table 5**

### **What are the strengths of Cal Poly's GE program?**

- Contribute to the accomplishment of ULO; shows a direct connection of student accomplishment
- Distributes/exposes students to content, perceptions, habits of mind
- Potential use of inter-disciplinary education
- Lower division GE gives foundational information; Upper division does allow incorporation into major specializations as well
- Great value of content during course and/or after the course

### **In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- Clearer/ and provide administrative mechanism for inter-disciplinary measures
- Experts need to stay in the areas of appropriate GE
- Open interpretation for breadth perception of classes; anything not a major as a GE course
- Sequence/cluster courses of GE
- Area C elective or Language course (intermediate level)
- Checking off classes; not folded into essential part of student through put; addendum to their education as add-on
- Advising in terms of when, what GE course to take for students – responsibility needs to be put on educating faculty on GE area learning outcomes/specifics.

### **Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

It could do better – there is no clear inclusiveness of “using” GE courses in their major course of study; where is the mechanism to balance the exact field of study that requires students to balance other of study via GE.

## **Table 6**

### **What are the strengths of Cal Poly's GE program?**

- Promotes Life-long learning and provides societal perspective.
- Develops the ability of students to work with people from different backgrounds. Sensitivity to disparate backgrounds.

### **In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- The value of GEB may not readily apparent to faculty and may be apparent to students.
- Access to classes should be timed so the content is context appropriate to major course.
- Disconnect among faculty and students on meaning of ULO terms.
- Critical thinking should be taught later in the curriculum.
- Delivery of content and learning should be interdisciplinary. Use multiple departments to offer one course (team teaching). Could look at current models of thematic GEB offerings?

**Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

- How do courses fit into major courses?
- What is the common theme or coherence in GEB courses?
- Contributes to life-long learning, not major learning.
- Are there tools to advise students on course choices?
- Should emphasis be on faculty advising?
- Integrate GEB course content/learning outcomes with major classes?
- Maybe not be a common core for a comprehensive polytechnic UNIVERSITY, but maybe for a comprehensive polytechnic STUDENT.

**Table 7**

**What are the strengths of Cal Poly's GE program?**

- Creates opportunities for majors from diverse backgrounds learn together, and from one another
- Provides strong connection to the issues of society and the thinking and communication skills that are essential for educating informed and effective future professional.

**In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- Create a way which allows faculty to learn and understand how to help students integrate the different parts of their education into a whole person.
- An effective GE experience is much more likely with effective advising. For example, it is preferable to take 200 level classes and then 300 level classes rather than the reverse.
- Support for course design.
- Support for team teaching.

**Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

Cal Poly is very compartmentalized. This rigid administrative structure makes it difficult to develop broad interdisciplinary paths for education. The funding mechanisms for effective implementation of our GE program are opaque.

**Table 8**

**What are the strengths of Cal Poly's GE program?**

- Students are able to interact with students and faculty outside of their major. Students introduced to topics outside their major often come with a greater sense of enthusiasm.
- Avenue for building, and maintaining, writing skills.

**In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- Unevenness in regard to demand for certain courses and course offerings.
- Balance writing skills development with larger class sizes
- Co-teaching across disciplines (incentives, support for faculty to engage in co-teaching)
- Ap credit tends to undermine ability to create a common core experience. Students that delay GE courses has same effect.
- GE could be better publicized and even more so, explained

**Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

May be a tendency to compartmentalize learning

### **Table 9**

**What are the strengths of Cal Poly's GE program?**

- Strengths
- Broad coverage
- Prepares rounded student
- Weaknesses
- Limited number of courses in certain areas
- Considered "bothersome" by students
- Disjointed from major field of study
- "love or hate" reaction to how the course is taught

**In what ways could the GE program be stronger?**

- Expand course selection by qualifying existing similar courses for GEB
- Diversify sections of same courses
- Recognize foreign language courses under GEB
- Year-long sequence of courses tied together with overarching, general theme to satisfy multiple GEB areas and credits.

**Does our GE program function as a common core that helps to define us as a comprehensive polytechnic university? Why or why not?**

- Yes, comprehensive education
- Yes, satisfies common core
- Not enough emphasis on the polytechnic nature in the GEB