

To Hell in a Handbasket: GE and Other Fiascos

IS THERE A THERE, THERE?

Since the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) published its first “declaration of principles” in 1915, it has been generally understood that, in a university as opposed to a proprietary school, faculty have primacy over academic matters because of their expertise.¹ This primacy, of course, is not exclusive. Legislators, trustees, and the administration share in the governance of academic matters. But if faculty consistently lose the last word on major academic matters, the university forfeits its ethical, if not technical, status as a university.²

The California State University (CSU) is far down the road to such forfeiture. (This argument applies to many public universities.)³ Faculty on term-limited appointments far outnumber the tenured and tenure-track faculty.⁴ By and large, contingent faculty are managed in ways that the tenured and tenure-track are not. They are hired to teach specific courses in specific ways. Often, they have little say in designing the curriculum. Their academic freedom is limited.

But then, how much self-determination do the tenured and tenure-track have as a faculty? Many of the courses that they teach must conform to the transfer templates for general education (GE) and for the major. These templates prescribe 50% of the courses for a baccalaureate degree. Pre-professional accreditations prescribe many of the other courses that tenured and tenure-track faculty teach. Perhaps no more than 25% of all courses express local faculty’s creation of a body of knowledge. Standardization has become the norm, as the CSU system has become more like a chain of franchises. It packages uniform skills for markets that determine those skills. In turn, the tenured and tenure-track faculty become more like the contingent faculty whom they help to manage.

COMPLIANCE SHERIFF

As faculty authority withers, campus self-rule in a system decreases. Central management moves in. In public comprehensive systems, central management tends to govern by enforcing compliance with a standard. Think, for instance, about the brouhaha that mods to PeopleSoft raised. Why is this so? Uniform practices eliminate the need to negotiate differences. Think of conversion from quarters to semesters. They provide administrators with a common denominator for decision-making.

Executive Order 1071 on tracks, emphases, and concentrations is an example of compliance thinking.⁵ It is a small beachhead in the current invasion into faculty and campus rights and responsibilities. Now, a specialization in a major cannot exceed 50% of the total credits in that major. There was no such rule previously. If its size persists, it must be presented as an entirely new program. The language that explains this change is revealing. A campus/president must get a “Chancellor’s certificate of compliance” with the new 50% rule before acting on specializations, tracks, and etc. This rule is necessary to meet “CSU policy and applicable law.” Without the rule, CSU will not conform to “reporting” standards in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the federal collection of higher education data.

These claims are mistaken. CSU policy (excepting this policy!) does not require such a rule. No federal or state law requires the campus rule. IPEDS warns that users should not view its data as “regulatory.” IPEDS leaves the definitions of emphasis, concentration, specialization, and etc., to the campuses.⁶

I am sure that CSU did not set out to misuse IPEDS. But it has. Now, I am not arguing against the sense of the rule; I am arguing against the way in which the rule was established. If the consultation with campuses claimed that law and reporting required this change, then the discussion was flawed. The thinking behind the rule also misunderstands how data should be used. Reporting requirements are more important than academic practices, the Executive Order implies. That implication does not bode well for relations between faculty and staff on the campuses and administrators in the Chancellor’s Office (CO).

MISSION

Frequently, rule-makers in central offices in higher education ignore the “loosely coupled” structure of university systems.⁷ In the CSU, campus mission statements respond mainly to region. That is why California State University, Northridge (CSUN) developed and the CSU approved (2005) area F (cross-cultural studies) in its GE program. The CO recently struck that category, however. It allegedly impedes student transfer from and to other campuses, especially within the CSU.

However, few students transfers from and to other CSUs.⁸ If there is a record of such complaints at CSUN, faculty were not told. Also, there is no obvious history of such complaints for transfers from the community colleges. The CSU Academic Senate does report that a student complained to a legislator about differing CSU requirements in GE.⁹ Shortly after that, Coded Memorandum 2016-19 asked that the campuses report requirements in GE that were in addition to A-E.¹⁰ That probably was when F was targeted. Sensitiveness to legislators’ complaints ignited this call for compliance in the CO. Complaints by a legislator often trump campus governance.

CONSULTATION

The CO could have consulted with CSUN before killing the category. Even if only a few students were affected, the few matter. No such communication occurred. This is unfortunate. There are many solutions that can preserve campus GE and mission, if indeed there is a problem. They all turn on the same strategy: put the student first. If a student transfers in with area F incomplete, evaluate that student by applying the GE scheme (CSU GE Breadth, IGETC, CSUN, or host/target campus) that is most favorable to the student.

The solution should be proportional to the problem. If 500 students are inconvenienced each term, then data justify a reconfiguration of CSUN GE. If 50 out of 4,000 transfers each term are affected (@1%), remedy but not reconfiguration is called for.

THE THRILLS AND SPILLS OF BASIC SKILLS

Inadequate consultation already has caused big problems in revamping CSU entry requirements and courses in basic composition and math in GE (Executive Order 1100). The Academic Senate

is trying to stop the train, due to inadequate consultation.¹¹ Consultation between the CO, the CSU Academic, the Senate's GE Task Force (GETF), and the General Education Advisory Committee (GEAC) was adequate until spring, 2017. Then, GEAC asked the CO to extend the time for feedback on the emerging executive orders.¹² Instead, the presidents were asked for their opinions on May 16, just as faculty were de-camping. The Executive Order was issued on August 23, just before faculty returned.¹³ But The GE committees had not yet made a recommendation to the Senate. The Senate had not yet consulted widely. It had not yet voted. It looks like the CO was avoiding having to make a data-based argument and conduct a campaign to win faculty's hearts and minds.

That is too bad. There is research to justify the change.¹⁴ CSU must have supportive data, although the CSU Outcomes Report in 2016 did not make this recommendation.¹⁵ Nor did the "Quantitative Reasoning Task Force."¹⁶ And you cannot get "there" from any of the reports on Early Start.¹⁷ The CO has not shown that its solution is proportional to the problem.

What is the alleged problem?

The problem with the current approach to remediation seems to be that it does not eliminate "equity gaps."¹⁸ It delays the graduation and, in many cases, discourages the continuation of the very students that the graduation rate project is supposed to help. It is not entirely clear, however, that this is the case.¹⁹ But let's assume it is. We then must ask whether the CSU is equipped to assume accountability for ending gaps that have been caused by the preceding twelve years of education, as well as by ongoing social inequity? Can the CSU reasonably be expected to make up for gaps in a multi-leveled educational system that funds the education of a graduate student in the University of California (UC) at many times the rate that it funds a K-12 pupil in Southwest LA? Are we confident that by retailoring remediation in the extreme, we are not opening other gaps inadvertently? We do not need a full answer now. But we do need a testable theory, methodology, and evidence plan to build confidence in the proposed changes.

The CO implies that there will be committees to develop something like this (Executive Order 1110).²⁰ But how will that be done before fall, 2018? In fact, the entire timeline is too compressed. The CO says that "implementation" begins in 2018, with the introduction of new or modified courses.²¹ That ignores all the background changes that must be implemented beforehand. By my clock, we already are two years behind. If programs require something like the "Chancellor's certificate of compliance" in 1071, the time can be much longer.

How are faculty to configure new courses before the CSU develops and publicizes new placement standards? These changes will take . . . how long? And how will these standards tie into Common Core in the schools?²² Is the California Department of Education (CDoE) on board, so that our multiple measures correspond with theirs? Do we plan to continue co-programming with K-12 in the junior and senior years? Will all this be worked out before fall, 2018? How long will these considerations take?

I am concerned particularly about the fate of the lecturers, who work so diligently in remediation/ developmental courses. When we dissolve developmental courses and attach pieces of them to credit-bearing courses that fulfill GE, we affect employment. Unless we are

thoughtful (and consult with CFA, too), we might craft courses—and thereby job descriptions—that freeze out many of the lecturers inadvertently. Will entitlements be wiped out or carried over? This transition must be done carefully; it cannot be done hastily. And it must be done after we know what the curriculum changes are and, of course, sufficiently before we advertise for, (re)hire, and (re)train faculty.

How will budgets be accounted for? CSU spends over \$60,000,000 on remediation.²³ Do we project these funds staying in basic skills? Planners need to know before they craft a different curriculum. Are campuses prepared for the Klondike onslaught of new claim-diggers in math?

WHAT IS TO BE DONE WITH GE?

1. The CSU should approach the revamping of GE as a massive change project.²⁴
2. The CO and the Academic Senate should appoint several “eminence grise” (previous faculty trustees, retired presidents) who can serve as advisors on process.
3. The parties should agree on a route through governance for reviewing related proposals.
4. The CO should prepare a data-based argument; it ought to request other groups, like the Quantitative Reasoning Task Force, to present their data and reasoning.
5. The CO should make public any outcomes projections and methodologies.
6. The CO should explain the ties to Common Core, Smarter Balance, and the junior and senior years.
7. The CO should consider a phase-in that begins, say, with treatments of students, as cohorts, in the junior year in high school.
8. The CO should begin to identify labor issues and solutions.
9. The parties must agree on a reasonable time.
10. The CO, GEAC, and GETF must identify a logical sequence for setting entry qualifications, course prerequisites and content, outcomes, and assessment as a feedback loop.
11. At the appropriate time, before submitting proposals for review, the CO and campuses will account for existing costs and projected costs.

¹ The Redbook, <https://www.aap.org/sites/default/files/RedBook%20Contents.pdf>.

² In particular, see the AAUP resolution in support of faculty control of the curriculum under similar circumstances in 2013, <https://www.aap.org/resolution-support-faculty-control-curriculum-city-university-new-york>.

³ See for detail How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation.

⁴ See Human Resources for 2015 in Statistical Tables in IPEDS, <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/Statistics.aspx>.

⁵ See Executive Orders in CSU, <https://www.calstate.edu/eo/EO-1071-rev-1-20-17.html>.

⁶ Introduction to the Classification of Educational Programs, https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/Files/Introduction_CIP2010.pdf.

⁷ Weick, Karl, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol. 21 (1976), 1-9.

⁸ See Table 28.13 on transfers in Academic Reports, Analytic Studies, CSU, http://www.calstate.edu/as/stat_reports/2016-2017/rfnse28.htm.

⁹ See for December, 2016,

http://www.calstate.edu/acadsen/Newsletter/December_2016/resolution_summaries.shtml.

¹⁰ <https://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/codedMemos/ASA-2016-19.pdf> an

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- ¹¹ See <https://www.calstate.edu/eo/EO-1100-rev-8-23-17.html>; and the Academic Senate's resolution at <http://www.calstate.edu/acadsen/Records/Resolutions/2017-2018/Documents/3304.shtml>.
- ¹² GEAC minutes, <http://www.calstate.edu/app/geac/documents/2017/GEAC-March-2017-Minutes.pdf>.
- ¹³ See the Coded Memorandum for May 16, 2017, <http://www.calstate.edu/AcadAff/codedMemos/ASA-2017-14.pdf>. And see the Executive Order, <https://www.calstate.edu/eo/EO-1100-rev-8-23-17.html>.
- ¹⁴ For instance, see The Campaign for College Opportunity at <http://collegecampaign.org/remedial-education-redesign/>; and Carnegie Math Pathways, <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/in-action/carnegie-math-pathways/>. See, too, Gleason, Barbara, "Remediation Phase-Out at CUNY: The 'Equity versus Excellence' Controversy," College Composition and Communication, Vol. 51, #3 (February, 2000), 488-91.
- ¹⁵ See, for example, the regressions in CSU Outcomes Report (2016), 28ff, http://asd.calstate.edu/doc/CSU-Undergraduate-Outcomes-Report_FINAL.pdf.
- ¹⁶ <http://www.calstate.edu/acadsen/Records/Resolutions/2016-2017/documents/3265.shtml>.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.calstate.edu/acadaff/earlystart/index.shtml>.
- ¹⁸ See the Coded Memorandum, May 16, http://asd.calstate.edu/doc/CSU-Undergraduate-Outcomes-Report_FINAL.pdf.
- ¹⁹ The CSU Outcome Report, 11-13, shows similar graduation rates for black and white students who enter CSUN, needing remediation.
- ²⁰ <https://www.calstate.edu/eo/EO-1110.html>.
- ²¹ See previous reference to Executive Order 1110.
- ²² <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>.
- ²³ Derived from "Overview of Remediation at the States' Higher Education Segments," (Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst's Office, March 1, 2017), 6, <http://www.lao.ca.gov/handouts/education/2017/Overview-Remedial-Education-State-Public-Higher-Education-Segments-030117.pdf>.
- ²⁴ See, for instance, Kotter, John P., Leading Change (Cambridge: Harvard Business School, 2002).