STRATEGIC PLANNING ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION #9 – FEBRUARY 8, 2005

Group Leaders: David Dauwalder; Mary Stephens; June Boffman
3:00 – 4:00 p.m. - John Stuart Rogers Faculty Development Center, 114

Goals 3 and 4

• We have a large, first-generation student population in our region. We need to do something for the region that also addresses the poverty issues. What we can do in the way of encouraging technology, bringing in high-tech organizations that would offer employment? Look at it from the perspective of working with the outside community to bring in employers. By fostering research in certain areas we could encourage employment at the same time, not just in the area of technology but also in other fields such as agriculture, health-care, etc.

• The economic point is an important one, but our service in the region goes beyond economics. Language issues with individuals for whom English is not their first language should be in here somewhere. Also, FSL. There is interest in the English Department to focus on what individuals with English-as-a-second language might contribute to us. English, as well as cultural issues, and developing a two-way street. There is a need for schoolteachers, social workers, nurses and business people who are bilingual as well. Why don’t we have a foreign language requirement for the Undergraduate Degree? It could be part of the GE package, but you have to keep in mind that it’s going to add units. We already tell people that they have to take a large number of units and some majors essentially have no electives; gives them almost no latitude. In some majors, to do all the GE and all the major requirements you are already well over 120 units. However, there may be an area for it in the lower division GE electives. We need to provide a student-friendly menu of opportunity in languages, particularly Spanish. The HILT program is a high-intensity language emersion program based on the primacy of the oral language rather than learning grammar. The program was very well received by students. We were doing it informally for teacher-candidates, but just this year it has been institutionalized in what used to be the department of modern languages. The student evaluations from last semester were fabulous.

Beyond language, there also are issues related to strong cultural differences and being sensitive to and understanding the different cultural perspectives. Providing a cultural emersion experience for every student, whether in an ethnic community in the United States or outside the United States. We need our students to be in the situation, however briefly, where they are not in the dominant role—they don’t speak the language or they don’t speak it well, and they are learning a whole new way of interacting with people. It’s really an important part of their preparation. We have several models, but the biggest one is the service learning opportunities at the BRIDGE—the outreach to the Southeast Asian community. We also have a skeleton program, which is Study Abroad in Stanislaus County. We’ve got communities who have said, yes, you can come here and work with Portuguese speaking people at the Parish south of town, and the Assyrian community also welcomes this interaction.

The language and cultural issues might fit under the distinctiveness objective — The University is going to develop and move in the direction of requiring a foreign language of all students, or, put it in a broader multicultural context as a goal, with the foreign language requirement as an objective.

• The other notion we talked about is serving the region and economic development. That might go along or be in addition to Objective 1, where we talk about trying to target programs that support
healthcare and information technology. Should that be changed to focus on economic development in the area? If you change it to a higher level of economic development it’s going to be harder to measure. When we talk about economic development are we talking about work force development or something else? We need to be precise.

What’s happening in information technology or in computer science and those areas? Are students getting jobs? Students seem to be getting jobs, but it’s pretty pedestrian stuff locally (e.g., working in the school districts to maintain/repair computers). What we are trying to impart to our students qualifies them to do quite a bit more; like to see students get excited about things like medical research and medical imaging for example. Medic Alert also might provide some unique opportunities for our students as a major medical information provider. There also are fairly interesting opportunities in the food processing and dairy industries.

Do we know that there is going to be a big need for IT statewide? For example, with PeopleSoft letting go of 5,000 people is there really that need? IT is in the economy, but this area is not typical of the state. Consider making some contacts outside the area and get people out to where there are some more exciting things going on. However, faculties do not really have the time to put feelers out and try to figure out where students can go. A major career services function on campus isn’t really the answer either.

• How much do we really know about the opportunities in our region? We haven’t actually focused as an institution on getting that information. Are we actually developing the skills in our graduates that are needed by our region in order to economically grow the region? Individual disciplines may have connections, like social work, nursing, CSI, and accounting, but it is more from the direction of where the graduates go and what the graduates are doing, which is another way of approaching the same issue.

• Looking at the objective, it isn’t really worded so that it responds to our region. It has the word statewide. It’s important but the regional, economic growth might be a different objective. Maybe we should focus more on either agricultural-related things or smaller entrepreneurship in the area of small businesses, including family-owned business.

Why IT more than accounting or teaching or social work or anything else? These areas came out of the data collected for the first workshop. IT might be another area that needs to be infused throughout the curriculum. Healthcare workers need to be more sophisticated in using technology; it’s in the schools and everywhere. Technology is so prevalent in our society that, rather than the majors in information technology the question may be, how much do our graduates need to know in the area of technology in order to function? The point of IT is productivity, so maybe we should think more in terms of that central idea.

• The point of education is partly getting a job and money, but why do you want the money? Ultimately there is some kind of satisfaction that people are after. There is more than one way to approach improving their lives. Also, to provide tools or programs for those who are looking toward mid-career change--flexibility of the workforce. People have to change their careers several times. One could easily become quite cynical as corporations become more efficient and shed off more workers and, as more functions are mechanized, then jobs disappear and people have to shift gears. The business world reacts to that with the belief that lifetime learning and development have to be
inculcated into everyone now—everyone should understand that this is going to happen. Downsizing, or smart sizing, is not going to go away. You have to manage this yourself by snatching up as much education and development as you can in your current job. They [businesses] will teach you because they want you to be more productive, but at the same time you have that asset, the knowledge, and then you can later take it away and sell it to somebody else. Some of this change will be by choice. There is not as much of a loyalty to employers. If we are really going to keep up with the generation we are educating, we have to recognize that one of their values is the ability to change. To increase our knowledge about and sensitivity to local workforce needs. The percentage of our students that are re-entry tells us that we already have a very large number of students who are in mid-career change. We need to reexamine how effectively we are facilitating or meeting their needs as well.

- A Liberal Arts education is supposed to make you flexible in your thinking. Maybe in the wording we could recommit to the Liberal Arts Education; refocus on the values of a Liberal Arts Education with critical thinking absolutely bedrock. That’s what employers are already saying—I can teach them skills, if you send me people who can write, think and communicate. We need to create the perfect blend of Liberal Arts and professional education. We need to say we are going to turn you out as a person who is going to be able to think, write, speak, and have a general knowledge of the world and can interact among the various cultures. Then the icing on the cake will be your professional skills. To recommit ourselves to the value of the Liberal Arts Education and refine the skills changing that we do in response to workforce development.

As we move through the next century the notion of community, citizenship and belonging, even though we are different from each other is critical. If we could get on the same page so that message goes out clearly to all our students that this is the reason. Do we want to re-look at our General Education? Is it too broadly based so that people don’t necessarily pull together a certain level of knowledge in each area? Is it cohesive enough? Is this the GE package that we think we need, or is it something we want to look at in the five-year goals? What is most important is that students learn how to extract relevant information by themselves on any topic, in any area, and in every course they take. They need to be flexible enough, so that when it comes time to start thinking about a career change, or whatever, they will be able to start self-teaching and to figure out what resources are available if they need assistance.

The American Council on Education team has been floating four learning goals that they are saying every graduate should be able to understand. One is sustainability—the ability of this generation to meet its needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Another is multiple perspectives—understanding that you have a certain way of looking at an issue and someone else has a different way. A third one is interdependence—understanding how all the systems hook together. The fourth one is social justice.

Would that change the upper division GE package or the lower division GE? How would that be accomplished? How universal is it at this point? It would need to be structured into the curriculum in some way that does not constrain faculty. It does need to be diffused over time into the way we think. If we state something as a goal, it doesn’t mean we are converting immediately. It means we are really committed to this over time. Do we personally believe in this enough to keep it in front of people over time, with lectures, with general activities, with faculty development, with student activities? You also need to find ways to reward it, whether it’s through RPT or some other way.
A Liberal Arts Education gives you multiple perspectives. In any particular issue, the criminal science people look at it from one perspective, sociologists look at it from a second perspective, and the psychologists look at it from a third perspective. There also are cultural perspectives, political perspectives, and even multiple ways of approaching the economy. I don’t see how you can go through your education without running into multiple perspectives. The whole idea is to get students to struggle with the issues and to understand, for example, that issues of social justice are always going to be issues of struggle—there is more than one way to look at it.

When it comes to sustainability that word is so broad and means so many different things, and it has been misused. What are the implications of the decisions we make now on the future? Approaching sustainability from a much larger perspective—it’s that critical thinking. If the issue is approached from the critical thinking perspective, it’s quite different than if it’s approached from the normative perspective. That’s where the multiple perspectives become so important because there isn’t one right way or one right answer. We can’t just do it in a course. It has to become a habit of mind that students ask themselves the question about sustainability, ask themselves questions about social justice, and so forth, so that we are not dispensing right answers, we are teaching them to grapple honestly with the issues.