



## CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS

### **Memorandum**

**TO:** Oddmund Myhre, Coordinator, Graduate Education Assessment Consortium (GEAC)  
**FROM:** GEAC Focus Group on Graduate Learning Goals (Ringstad, Thompson, Wittman)  
**DATE:** 8/26/11  
**RE:** **Report and Recommendations from focus group on graduate learning goals**

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### **Rationale**

The consensus of the Graduate Education Assessment Consortium (GEAC) was that we should take advantage of the chance to step back and think about many facets of graduate education at Stanislaus. To that end, GEAC tasked several focus groups to review various elements of graduate education.

An obviously bedrock document is the university's six learning goals for graduate education:

Students will demonstrate...

1. advanced knowledge, skills, and values appropriate to the discipline.
2. ability to be creative, analytical, and critical thinkers.
3. ability to work as individual researchers/scholars as well as in collaboration with others in contributing to the scholarship of their disciplines, as appropriate.
4. relevant knowledge of the global perspectives appropriate to the discipline.
5. knowledge of new and various methods and technologies as appropriate to the discipline.
6. advanced oral and written communication skills, complemented, as appropriate to the discipline, by the ability to access and analyze information from a myriad of primary, print, and technological sources.

Not only do our learning goals determine what kind of graduate curriculum we value as educators and as an institution; to a large degree, they guide our assessment efforts. The Graduate Learning Goals were endorsed by the Graduate Council in 2002. The work of our focus group was to review the goals and assessment of the goals. Our discussion ranged at times beyond a narrow conception of our charge, but we feel that some "charge creep" was allowable under the general consensus of GEAC and that all of our recommendations are relevant to the graduate education vis-à-vis our learning goals.

### **Overview of work**

The focus group on graduate learning goals met throughout the spring semester of 2011 focusing on Stanislaus' graduate program learning outcomes<sup>1</sup>. The focus group reviewed both internal and external documents including, among others:

- *California State University, Stanislaus Updated Graduate Assessment Plan (2009)*-which includes and contextualizes the Graduate Learning Goals
- *California State University, Stanislaus Graduate Education: Program Goals and Student Learning Objectives* (a program-by-program accounting taken from 2008-09 and 2009-10 Graduate Annual Assessment Reports)

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<sup>1</sup> While the focus group is cognizant of possibly important distinctions among goals, objectives, and outcomes, in this document we do not meticulously focus on those distinctions and *learning outcomes* is used broadly to include all three.

- [Graduate Assessment Report](#) : Analysis of Assessment Data for Graduate Studies (Master’s Degrees) 2000/01-2007/08.
- [Assessment of Graduate Learning Goals](#) (approved by the Graduate Council in 2002)
- *California State University Stanislaus Principles of Assessment of Student Learning*
- *Academic Program Review Procedures*
- [The Degree Qualifications Profile](#) (a publication of the Lumina Foundation that proposes reference points or benchmarks for associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees)

The *Degree Qualifications Profile* listed above was an important reference point as we worked. The Profile describes five basic areas of learning:

1. Broad, Integrative Knowledge
2. Specialized, Knowledge;
3. Intellectual Skills
4. Applied Learning, and
5. Civic Learning (4).

Beyond the review of documents, the group’s primary task was to compare the fit of program/college graduate learning outcomes with the university graduate learning goals.

Our tasks were to determine:

1. the degree of alignment between the university goals and individual program/college learning outcomes
2. the degree of alignment among the individual graduate programs
3. any rationales for reconsideration of the university goals.

To this point, we have progressed on tasks 1 and 3.

## Findings & Recommendations

We identified five areas we feel should be reviewed by the Council:

1. a review of the [The Degree Qualifications Profile](#) as an alternative way of framing graduate learning goals
2. alignment between program outcomes and the graduate learning goals
3. graduate learning goals 2, 3, 4, and 5
4. academic program review policy and procedures
5. dissemination of information regarding outcomes

### *A Review of the [The Degree Qualifications Profile](#) as an Alternative Way of Framing Graduate Learning Goals*

In our review of the document, we saw strengths in that the five basic areas of mastery in the profile listed just above are intended to work together to “[define] competencies in ways that emphasize both the cumulative *integration* of learning from many sources and the *application* of learning in a variety of settings” and that can be references points for curriculum including specific assignments and assessments (2). The emphasis on integration may help to better articulate the connections between students undergraduate and graduate work, and the emphasis on application fits well with applied scholarship and community service learning included in program learning outcomes. One example for discussion is whether the focuses on applied learning and civic learning would cause a substantive change to the graduate learning goals and/or program outcomes, whether civic learning and engagement is appropriate as a discrete university-level goal, and how such changes in the goals would affect student experiences in their graduate programs. An example of how the Profile might reframe elements of the

goals comes from the “fluency” within Intellectual Skills which includes a subarea of “Engaging Diverse Perspectives” which is similar to our current goal #4 (8).

While the Profile is a broad framework it is also detailed, and some might find it overly prescriptive. The level of detail reaches down to what looks more like our program-level goals. Under Communication:

**At the master’s level, the student**

- Creates sustained, coherent arguments or explanations and reflections on his or her work or that of collaborators (if applicable) in two or more media or languages, to both general and specialized audiences. (14)

For Broad, Integrative Knowledge:

**At the master’s level, the student**

- Articulates how his or her own field has developed in relation to other major domains of inquiry and/or practice.
- Designs and executes an applied, investigative or creative work that draws on the perspectives and/or methods of other fields, and assesses the resulting gains and/or difficulties of including fields other than his or her own.
- Articulates and defends the significance and implications of his or her own specialized work in terms of challenges, trends and/or developments in a social or global context. (12)

The Profile was built with attention to assessment and, especially in the area of Applied Learning, student success is demonstrated by “evidence of mastery” (9).

A more extensive study of the applicability of the Profile could be undertaken GEAC or by an ad hoc subcommittee of the Graduate Council.

Alignment between Program Outcomes and the Graduate Learning Goals

We did find alignment between some of the graduate goals and department outcomes. We summarize our findings briefly through two examples so that readers can judge the amount of “stretch” in aligning goals: the learning outcomes for the English MA concentration in Literature and for Criminal Justice. Our review essentially agrees with the [Graduate Assessment Report](#) listed above, which reports from Mary Allen’s—“a nationally recognized assessment expert”—2007 site visit, “[w]ith regard to graduate programs, she observes that while graduate programs have developed assessment plans specific to their program goals, the six graduate student learning goals were not always evident” (1).

English MA Literature outcomes	University Goals
Master the techniques and practices of literary analysis.	1. advanced knowledge, skills, and values appropriate to the discipline. 2. ability to be creative, analytical, and critical thinkers.
Become familiar with the history and current theories of literary interpretation.	4. relevant knowledge of the global perspectives appropriate to the discipline. 5. knowledge of new and various methods and technologies as appropriate to the discipline.
Acquire the abilities necessary to become professionals in the field of literature, whether as teachers or as other professionals.	3. ability to work as individual researchers/scholars as well as in collaboration with others in contributing to the scholarship of their disciplines, as appropriate.

	6. advanced oral and written communication skills, complemented, as appropriate to the discipline, by the ability to access and analyze information from a myriad of primary, print, and technological sources.
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Criminal Justice MA outcomes	University Goals
Acquired advanced knowledge, skills, and values associated with the discipline of criminal justice and characteristic of learned individuals possessing a master's degree.	1. advanced knowledge, skills, and values appropriate to the discipline.
Demonstrated enhanced oral and written communication skills, complemented by the ability to access and analyze information from a myriad of print and mediated-technological sources.	6. advanced oral and written communication skills, complemented, as appropriate to the discipline, by the ability to access and analyze information from a myriad of primary, print, and technological sources.
Demonstrated ability to be analytical and integrative, capable of critical thought, and creative in the exploration of the discipline of criminal justice.	2. ability to be creative, analytical, and critical thinkers
Demonstrated ability to work as individual researcher/scholars, but also in collaboration with others in contributing to the research of the field of criminal justice.	3. ability to work as individual researchers/scholars as well as in collaboration with others in contributing to the scholarship of their disciplines, as appropriate.
Demonstrated advanced knowledge of the global world, multiple perspectives, and intercultural competence as applied to criminal justice professions.	4. relevant knowledge of the global perspectives appropriate to the discipline.
Enhanced understanding of pedagogy for teaching and learning at a community college or university.	5. knowledge of new and various methods and technologies as appropriate to the discipline.
Demonstrated adherence to standards of professional ethics for criminal justice professionals.	

Graduate Learning Goals 2, 3, 4, and 5

**Goal 2: Students will demonstrate the ability to be creative, analytical, and critical thinkers.**

The terms *creative*, *analytic*, and *critical* are undefined. Should these terms be explicated at the university level, college level or, more likely, at the program (e.g., English) or disciplinary (literature, rhetoric) level? While the terms may be difficult to define and result in conflicting definitions if done at the program level, lack of further elaboration on the terms muddles attempts at assessment of this goal. There is benefit to determination by individual departments how best to define terms like *critical thinking*; the terms can be operationalized in ways most germane to the disciplines, likely resulting in more authentic direct assessment. Undergraduate programs have some depth of experience in explaining what inquiry critical thinking means in response to general education goal #3, inquiry and critical thinking. Another example, from [Chico State](#), more specifically delineates student learning outcomes for critical thinking in their general education program. On the other hand, program-level definition might inhibit use of university-level assessment protocols or measures.

The Council-approved 2002 document, [Assessment of Graduate Learning Goals](#) offers some elaboration of ways to implement creativity and analytic and critical thinking:

Graduate level seminars and courses will require extensive research and writing activities that meet high academic standards in both form and content.

The completion of an original thesis or project may be required as part of graduate academic programs.

However, the implementation activities do not signal any definition of the terms. University-level definition of the term, which would inform program-level accreditation and academic program reviews could draw from work done by other program in response to WASC or programs such as [Collegiate Learning Assessment](#) (CLA), Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)<sup>2</sup>, the [Foundation for Critical Thinking](#), or the [Delphi Report](#).<sup>3</sup> For example Table 3 of the Delphi Report executive summary provides a consensus list of cognitive skills and sub-skills that would help in thinking through outcomes.

<p><b>Interpretation</b> Categorization Decoding Significance Clarifying Meaning</p>	<p><b>Evaluation Assessing Claims</b> Assessing Arguments</p>	<p><b>Explanation</b> Stating Results Justifying Procedures Presenting Arguments</p>
<p><b>Analysis</b> Examining Ideas Identifying Arguments Analyzing Arguments</p>	<p><b>Inference</b> Querying Evidence Conjecturing Alternatives Drawing Conclusions</p>	<p><b>Self-Regulation</b> Self-examination Self-correction<sup>4</sup></p>

**Goal #3: Students will demonstrate the ability to work as individual researchers/scholars as well as in collaboration with others in contributing to the scholarship of their disciplines, as appropriate.**

The questions here concern the breadth of the goal:

1. Does this goal acknowledge the diversity of work performed by students in what for faculty the campus term research, scholarship, and creative activities?
2. Is there too much emphasis on traditional scholarship that contributes to the literature of a discipline and too little emphasis on collaborative work that is an integral component of many programs and the applied scholarship in communities through activities such as community service learning and civic engagement?

If the goal meant to embrace current practices at Stanislaus to be broadly understood as recognizing a diversity of activities, then it should be stated so. However, we feel it would be best to revise this goal to be more aligned with actual current practices at Stanislaus. The alignment of this important goal can be best ensured through review of the learning outcomes created by programs and colleges.

<sup>2</sup> VSA uses CLA as well as [Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency](#) modules on critical thinking and the critical thinking scores from the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress test.

<sup>3</sup> Complete report: ERIC Doc. No.: ED 315 423

<sup>4</sup> Facione, Peter A. *The Delphi Report. Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction*. Executive Summary. Millbrae CA: California Academic Press, 1990. Print.

**Goal #4: Students will demonstrate relevant knowledge of the global perspectives as appropriate to the discipline.**

As with goal #2 above, there are questions of definition and whether definition should occur at the university or program level. That is, some might see “global perspectives,” “globalization,” and “internationalization” as synonymous terms while others may identify “globalization” with a business model of the global marketplace. Indeed, in previous discussions at Stanislaus globalization and internationalization were often viewed as conflicting terms. Further, is there a need to clarify here that “global perspectives” does not emphasize internationalization of the curriculum over study of local and regional diversity and intercultural perspectives? Applied scholarship, as mentioned in the discussion of goal #3 may present many opportunities for local and regional intercultural activities. Generally, the question is whether “global perspectives” needs further definition—at some level—to ensure that it comports with the university mission and actual practices where program/college goals indicate more curricular emphasis on “civic learning” (the fifth outcome in the Lumina report) than on “global perspective.”

**Goal #5: Students will demonstrate knowledge of new and various methods and technologies as appropriate to the discipline.**

For this goal, the question is whether the bullets from Graduate Council’s 2002 Assessment of Graduate Learning Goals document leans too much toward distance education and deploying teaching/classroom presentational technologies.

- The Students may be required to participate in a supervised practicum, internship, or service learning activity in which they demonstrate the ability to perform successfully.
- Students may be required to participate in Distance Learning courses in which they demonstrate learning through mediated instruction.
- Students may be required to demonstrate their ability to use multimedia in the classroom or in professional presentations.
- Students may be required to demonstrate their ability to use all relevant information technology that is useful in their fields.

In our review of program goals, the majority of programs identified practical application of methods appropriate to the discipline as a major goal (which was consistent with the Lumina Foundation literature); there was much less evidence of “technologies” as identified the Council’s assessment document, especially in the second and third bullets above.<sup>5</sup> Another way to approach the goal asks whether it should be divided into one goal focusing on methods and one focusing on technology.

*Academic Program Review Policy and Procedures*<sup>6</sup>

Academic program review is normally the most important reflective and prospective activity a program carries out, both for program self-assessment and the university’s assessment of program. The time and resources committed to program review signify it’s importance to teaching and learning as well as to accreditation. With the increased emphases on assessment and accountability and an attendant focus on direct assessment and a “culture of evidence,” refining policies, processes, and procedures may help to reduce workload and/or make review more meaningful. One possible issue we saw with the current procedures regards procedure #5, which reads:

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<sup>5</sup> See Goal 5 alignment for English and Criminal Justice on pages 2 and 3.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, we realize that recommendation concerning APR policy/procedures would require consultation with other committees/subcommittees (Assessment of Student Learning, General Education, University Educational Policies, etc.) before moving forward to the Academic Senate.

#### I. Commitment to Student Learning

List the learning goals for students majoring in the program. Other than grades, describe how achievement of each of these learning goals is evaluated and documented. Describe changes the program faculty have made as a result of surveys of current students, student exit surveys, alumni surveys, and other methods used to evaluate student learning and program effectiveness.

For graduate master's programs, describe how the information derived from the assessment of the six student learning goals for graduate students has been used to improve the graduate program:

The group had two suggestions for consideration regarding this item. First, the language asks for improvement and changes rather than a report on whether or not the program's students are achieving the desired learning outcomes. To our minds, this is a significant issue if the academic program review is the program and university's record of outcomes based assessment. If so, it seems more directly relevant for programs to report on how they have met their goals rather than how they have used the university goals to improve. The second, related issue is that there is no clear indication whether programs should demonstrate how they met the university goals or whether programs should indicate how their outcomes align with university goals but then go on to report on the satisfaction of program outcomes. Procedure 5 references the university goals thereby implying that program reviews should be written in response to the university goals. However, many program-level assessment procedures, especially those based on direct assessment are more directly responsive to program outcomes, which reflects the direction of work carried out over the last several years by program assessment coordinators and sanctioned by the Assessment Council.

#### Dissemination of Information Regarding Outcomes

The group also pondered the consistency with which graduate programs understand, utilize, and assess the graduate learning goals. One point of discussion was the dissemination of information to all graduate programs. Specifically, we believe that summaries of several types of information should be disseminated to chairs, program assessment coordinators, or—perhaps more efficiently—graduate program coordinators: modification of program outcomes, changes in assessment methods, reports of assessments approaches that yield especially useful information, reports of how programs “close the loop” to improve teaching and learning, and reviews of alignment with university goals. Regularly providing such information to all graduate programs will reinforce the relevance and importance of our learning goals and multi-level program review, whether those programs' reviews are for accreditation or for the “normal” academic program review. Finally, regular dissemination of information can provide a basis for refining (or recreating) the uniform assessment methods and instruments at the university level, perhaps in ways that more authentically assess student learning outcomes in relation to the goals.

Each of the suggestions requires work. Loss of assigned time and staffing, coupled with and recent and expected workload increases, requires that any recommendations to proceed on any work should include a discussion of who is going to do it. Academic program and re-accreditation reviews are already monumental tasks for all parties involved, and any changes to program review policies or procedures should recognize that those changes affect work for many people for many years and can either add to or ease the workload of staff and faculty in reviewing, assessing, and improving student learning.