

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA

ACADEMIC SENATE

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMITTEE

REPORT TO

THE ACADEMIC SENATE

AP-008-212

**Merger of Interdisciplinary General Education (IGE) into the Department of Liberal
Studies**

Academic Programs Committee

Date:

**Executive Committee
Received and Forwarded**

Date: 03/02/2022

Academic Senate

**Date: 03/09/2022
First Reading**

BACKGROUND:

In the summer of 2021 two working groups were convened to consider the future of programs in the College of Education and Integrative Studies (CEIS). One was charged with considering the future of Education programs and another was asked to examine the future of Ethnic and Women's Studies at Cal Poly Pomona. Separate from the other CEIS departments, the Interdisciplinary General Education department (IGE) was tasked with identifying a department or administrative unit with which they could merge. The stated rationale was that IGE lacks a major, being entirely focused on their distinct GE offerings. Without a major on offer, and a corresponding cohort of students to guide to graduation, the administration cannot evaluate IGE according to the same Graduation Initiative metrics by which other departments are evaluated.

In light of their standing working relationships as members of CEIS, and their shared commitments to broad-based liberal arts education, IGE has proposed a merger with Liberal Studies (LS), a CEIS department focused primarily (though not exclusively) on educating students preparing to enter teaching credential programs after the completion of their undergraduate degrees.

RESOURCES CONSULTED:

Deans and Associate Deans, all colleges

Department Chairs, all colleges

CEIS Chairs, all departments (additional questions beyond general queries to all chairs)

IGE and Liberal Studies faculty

Dr. Iris Levine, Provost

Dr. Hend Gilli-Elewy, Dean, College of Education and Integrative Studies

DISCUSSION and RECOMMENDATION:

Of the options on the table for IGE, the AP Committee finds that a merger with LS is the least bad option for IGE. Faculty focused on offering an academic program should do their work within the setting of a department led by a faculty Chair who functions within a College like all other departments, not an administrative unit answering directly to an administrator beyond the College level. Among academic departments, LS offers at least three distinct advantages: First, a shared commitment to broad liberal education. Second, existing working relationships as peers in CEIS. And, third, while many other departments at Cal Poly Pomona devote substantial time and energy to offering humanities and social science GE classes, a merger with such a department would be a merger of competitors; LS and IGE have constructive and collegial relationships but few competitive tensions.

Of course, the interests of LS must also be given weight in evaluating this proposed merger. The AP Committee has determined in consultation that the LS faculty are willing to be constructive and collegial in working with IGE colleagues, but like the IGE faculty they are concerned about a merger dictated by fiat from above rather than a comprehensive consideration of the ground-level needs of students, faculty, and staff.

The AP Committee has examined a memo from the Provost outlining resource commitments for the merged department: Beyond those resources already committed to LS, the merged department would receive 6 WTUs per academic year for a faculty coordinator to manage the IGE program, 1 WTU per summer to work on student recruitment, and a 5% pay increase for the LS department's Administrative Support Coordinator. This is adequate support, though hardly generous. The cost savings to the university are quite modest.

The burdens on the LS Department Chair will likely increase, even with much IGE-specific work being delegated to a faculty coordinator. The AP Committee hopes that an expanded pool of faculty to serve on key committees will partially alleviate some of the burdens of an expanded department, but there will clearly be work in the transition. Faculty and staff workloads in the merged department will require close attention from the CEIS leadership team, the faculty and staff unions, and other involved parties, to ensure fair and equitable treatment of the people responsible for the successful operation of the merged department.

Another concern that the AP Committee closely examined involved the merger of two Lecturer pools. We have received assurances that when a department offers multiple distinctive programs (as is the case in several departments on this campus), work is offered based on relevant expertise and experience, with entitlements and priority applying within pools of qualified instructors. In other words, a Lecturer in one pool could not take priority over a Lecturer seniority in the other pool, even if both pools of Lecturers are under the auspices of the same department. There may be specific occasions on which a Lecturer from one group is qualified to teach in the other program, but those will be very particular circumstances that depend on the nature of the course on offer and the expertise of the particular instructor.

Regarding the rationale that IGE offers no major and thus cannot justify resources via current metrics, the AP Committee has significant concerns. First and foremost, many departments at Cal Poly Pomona devote a very large fraction of their efforts to educating non-majors in GE and service courses. Departments in the College of Science and College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences have particularly significant stakes in this matter, though other departments should also be concerned. If graduating majors is the most significant factor in a department's resource allocation then the implications for General Education and service courses (e.g., the foundational math and science courses taken by STEM majors across departments and colleges) on this campus are bleak: Why should a department devote effort to high-quality offerings for non-majors?

Moreover, IGE faculty are not disconnected from the task of successfully guiding students through a sequence of courses. While they do not offer a major, IGE courses

do not always map one-to-one to GE categories; completion in full of a suite of classes is necessary to satisfy a suite of GE categories. This concern with successful completion of a sequence is akin to the task facing faculty in major-offering departments, and also closely related to the task facing, for instance, math faculty who must help students (most of them not math majors!) through several semesters of calculus and differential equations. If these tasks cannot justify resources, all faculty should be deeply concerned about the administration's commitment to core elements of undergraduate education.

Perhaps the most significant concern to be raised about the current state of IGE, one that might well justify significant changes (though not the changes mooted here), involves lower-division IGE enrollments. Overall IGE enrollments are reasonably strong, due to upper-division synthesis enrollments, but enrollments in the lower-division sequences have not always been strong. It is likely that a significant factor in the problem is that recruitment into IGE generally starts during summer orientation, and the opportunities for IGE to recruit students have diminished in revamped online orientations of late. Some members of the AP Committee are familiar with distinctive GE programs at other universities, programs that bear certain resemblances to IGE. Recruitment into such programs works most effectively when initiated long before orientation and registration; often the process begins before would-be freshmen have even submitted college applications.

It is not within the scope of this report to recommend a particular recruitment strategy for IGE. However, we see no indication that focusing primarily on one major (LS) is the best way to recruit for a broad, interdisciplinary program. Regardless of the ultimate disposition of this referral, if IGE is to thrive then recruitment strategies must receive significant attention and be supported broadly in the university. A merger with LS need not impede such efforts, but it is hardly a necessary component of such efforts.

In light of these facts, the AP Committee has doubts about whether this merger will be of great benefit to either the LS or IGE programs. It is clearly not an organic effort of the concerned faculty. The issues raised by this top-down effort signal that the Senate must be even more vigilant in scrutinizing any future reorganization proposals for academic departments and give less benefit of the doubt rather than more.

We recommend approval of this referral in part because it is the least-bad option on offer for IGE, and because the proposed receiving department will be conscientious, collegial, and constructive, even if not thrilled with the work brought by the merger. It is also important to note that this move was ultimately supported during the consultation process, and the IGE faculty share the view that this is the best way to move forward under the circumstances. The Committee thus divided on the matter, with 7 yes votes, 1 no, and 3 abstentions. By a majority vote, the Academic Programs Committee

recommends that the Interdisciplinary General Education Program, and the associated faculty, be merged into Liberal Studies, with the transition taking place in the Summer of 2022 and being completed by Fall 2022.