

Members of the Academic Senate:

We, the undersigned, seek to express substantive concerns regarding the Report of the Task Force on General Education formed by the Chancellor's Office and the ASCSU in March 2017.

The proposed alteration of the "American Institutions" requirement directly contradicts the expressed purpose of the law that mandates the AI requirement for CSU graduates. As the GE Task Force (GETF) report notes, **Section 40404 of Title 5** of the California Code of Regulations states, all CSU graduates must:

**"acquire knowledge and skills that will help them to comprehend the workings of American democracy and of the society in which they live to enable them to contribute to that society as responsible and constructive citizens."**

The GETF proposes this requirement be "integrated into the GE program as a 3-unit core value ... rather than a stand-alone, supervenient graduation requirement." This vague "core value" conflicts with the precision of the law.

The text of Title 5 actually continues as follows:

**"To this end** each campus shall provide for **comprehensive study of American history and American government including** the historical development of American institutions and ideals, the Constitution of the United States and the operation of representative democratic government under that Constitution, and the processes of state and local government."

Not only does the law explicitly make the case for the "comprehensive study" of both "American history" and "American government," but **Executive Order 1061** implementing Title 5 delineates the expected content to be in compliance with the law. Such coursework **"must include"** (1) "a minimum time span of approximately one hundred years" (2) "the entire area now included in the United States" (3) "the role of major ethnic and social groups" (4) "American experience and its derivation from other cultures, including ... three or more of the following: politics, economics, social movements, and geography."

We are concerned that the GETF report translates this as "democracy in the U.S., which **may include** American and California government and history" and reduces this from six- to three-units. As the GETF recognizes, the goal of the American Institutions requirement is pivotal to General Education: to cultivate the skills and knowledge necessary not simply to work, but to live as engaged citizens. But Title 5 requires more than critical thinking skills; it calls for active study of history and government. As recently as October 2018, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation found that only 1 in 3 Americans would pass the U.S. Citizenship test. For respondents under 45, only 1 in 5 would pass. Worse, we know that misinformation and false histories are increasingly being used to influence American politics and elections. The necessity of a strong civics education and of citizens to think historically is only growing. And yet this is precisely the content the GETF aims to dilute.

A letter from the California History-Social Science Project (a network of K-16 teachers) refutes the argument that this content is already covered in K-12. As the CHSSP letter notes, curriculum

is organized by grade level. The American colonial and founding eras are taught in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the 20<sup>th</sup> c. taught as a stand-alone era in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and a semester of U.S. government in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In other words, understanding the intricacies and devastation of colonial American and the philosophies of the American Revolution are intended to be taught to 10- and 11-years old children. The Civil War and its aftermath are challenging for adults, much less 13- and 14-year old students. In practice, teachers grapple with both what they can teach to their students, maturity-wise, but also issues of where students are at developmentally. In some schools, teachers must privilege literacy over content, so that these subjects are never covered at all.

Furthermore, data amassed by the Council on History and American Institutions (CHAI) demonstrates that AI courses do not repeat high school coursework. Frequently our CSU students are shocked to encounter content that had been “hidden” from them or to discover that history and political science are more contested and contingent than they had ever imagined. In university-level survey classes, students interrogate the past in ways that are more sophisticated than is possible for elementary, middle, and even high school teachers. College students are far more likely to take such classes with students who come from different walks of life, opening them up to new ideas and arguments. The modes of analysis, information literacy, and civic engagement in the AI coursework go far beyond the requirements of even Advanced Placement content.

Finally, the CSU is also home to an increasing number of foreign students who have not studied any American history or political science prior to their college education. Many of these students find jobs in the United States and remain here, or use their CSU education to express their experience of American society. For these students, the American Institutions requirement provides a similar touchstone of civics education.

We share in the desire to ensure a timely path to degree for our students to support their success. But we are concerned that suggestions made by the GETF would have the opposite effect. The GETF proposes eliminating double-counting courses that fulfill multiple requirements as reducing the GE to “box-checking.” The reverse is true. Double-counting enables students to finish their coursework in an efficient manner while recognizing the overlap in desired skill sets and breadth of the GE program. There are better ways to support student success. Improve resources that help students pass core classes on their first attempt. Assess financial options (scholarships, tuition, fees) to enable students to prioritize their studies.

At Cal Poly Pomona, we just completed significant GE revision as a part of the semester conversion process. This is our first year under our new framework. If we accept that “Faculty are the experts in both disciplinary thinking and the pedagogical practices required for student learning” – and we do – then we should continue with and assess the work we have done.

If we are to be confident in our CSU graduates, confident in the education that we in the CSU system provide, we must seek to honor the needs of our nation and our world for an educated citizenry. We believe that this is the intent behind Title 5 and we support protecting the AI requirement.