

**CPR FINDINGS AND PLANS  
FOR THE  
GENERAL (INTERDISCIPLINARY) STUDIES PROGRAM  
AT VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**MAJOR FINDINGS ON THE PROGRAM'S QUALITY, PRODUCTIVITY & VIABILITY**

The General Studies program is an interdisciplinary degree housed within the College of Arts & Sciences and is comprised of two tracks. Track I (GSP I), approved in 1986, was the original General Studies program and was designed for active-duty military and non-traditional students. The objective of Track I was to provide these populations with a great deal of flexibility within the major framework, allowing them the opportunity to maximize the use of prior academic credit and create a degree unique to the individual. Track II (GSP II) was implemented in 2001 and is available to all students who meet the 2.5 minimum gpa requirement. This second track is quickly becoming the heart of the interdisciplinary program at VSU.

Students within the GSP have the opportunity to combine three academic disciplines into one degree with a resulting concentration that cuts across the standard barriers that often exist between academic bodies. Students are given the responsibility and authority to create an area of scholarly pursuit that is unique to each individual while still developing the kind of transferable skills that will make them successful both professionally and personally. This program approaches the mastery of knowledge and skills in a unique way by strongly encouraging students to focus on what they wish to achieve and then plotting the best path to reach those goals using a nontraditional combination of academic platforms as a starting point. Students must critically examine their personal and professional goals and objectives, determining where their strengths lie and how best to highlight those strengths. In a sense, students within the GSP must be much more thoughtful and purposeful in the design and implementation of their knowledge base than in many traditional disciplines.

The program review revealed that the GSP has great potential and much room for growth and improvement, and the results and recommendations by the External Review Committee support that idea. General Studies has changed "ownership" 4 times in the last 10 years – two of those changes took place within the last 5 years - thus there has been a lack of continuity in data tracking. What is evidenced by the data, however, is that of the 21 baccalaureate degrees available within the College of Arts and Sciences, General Studies is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the average number of graduates over the last three fiscal years. In addition, the upper division enrollment in the program has nearly doubled over the last 5 years. This growth has occurred strictly by word-of-mouth; there has been no marketing strategy put in place to develop the GSP, again a probable result of the change in "homes" of the program.

Assessment of the quality of advising as well as evaluation of the program's learning objectives are additional areas where opportunity for growth exists. Although the quality of the current advising structure is believed to be effective, there is no structured assessment of the advising process in place at this time. The learning objectives outlined

in the *VSU Bulletin* are met in part by the Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies course required of all GSP II majors. There is, however, a gap in the ability to demonstrate meeting the objectives in their entirety; it is the consensus of both the self-study and the Review Committee that there must be criteria devised by which the program can demonstrate meeting these objectives. The capstone experience may provide an opportunity for such evaluation but will need extensive review and revision in an effort to do so.

One interesting notation by the Review Committee that bears further exploration is the fact that while students with consistently lower SAT scores enter the GSP, they leave the program with GPA's that are comparable or higher than those in the College of Arts & Sciences.

The self-study and the Review Committee agree that GSP is essentially still in its infancy and there is still much to be done. Overall, however, the Committee found the program to be a viable option for students.

### **PLANS FOR IMPROVING THE PROGRAM'S QUALITY, PRODUCTIVITY & VIABILITY**

Plans for improvement include:

- ❖ Develop clear, concise means of tracking data such as when students enter GSP; areas of emphasis selected; exit surveys; alumni job satisfaction; delineate between program tracks
- ❖ Review and evaluate learning objectives, and devise criteria by which the program can demonstrate meeting these objectives
- ❖ Evaluate and revise the capstone experience
- ❖ Implement marketing strategies in the form of brochures and website development
- ❖ Seek out those individuals within disciplines across campus who are eager to invest in the unique opportunity provided by an interdisciplinary degree to form a committee of consultants. These consultants would provide guidance for students whose focus lies within the expertise of those faculty members.

### **NEW RESOURCE ALLOCATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

At this time, the General Studies program has no individual budget; it has simply been absorbed by the OASIS Center for Advising and First Year Programs. The Review Committee recommended that some issues arising from the study, such as advising and revision of the capstone experience, could be addressed by assigning a faculty load or creating faculty positions to help teach, administer and advise within this program.

### **PLANS FOR INCREASING PROGRAM PRODUCTIVITY ABOVE THRESHOLD**

Not applicable.