

**A Review of the NJCU General Studies Program
Prepared by the General Studies Coordinating Committee**

**Prepared by the
2009-2010 General Studies Coordinating Committee**

Members:

Jacqueline Ellis (2010)
Hilary Englert
Deborah Freile
Karen Ivy
Arthur Kramer
Fran Moran
John Porcaro
Ellen Quinn
Catherine Raissiguier (2009)
Ivan Steinberg

Submitted to:

Dr. Barbara Feldman
Dean, William J. Maxwell College of Arts and Sciences
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I. Introduction

In 1998, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Ansley Lamar, convened the General Studies Coordinating Committee (GSCC) to examine and recommend changes to the then current General Studies Program.¹ That committee worked throughout the spring and fall of 1998 to produce a proposal for a revised general studies program that was adopted by the University Senate and implemented by the University. The proposal noted in its Introduction that its review and revision of the general studies program was timely since it coincided with the college's move to university status, and that general studies was a key component in forging a new identity: "Among the various initiatives directed toward creating a new identity, certainly one of the most important tasks is the review of the academic programs, and in particular the review of the General Studies Program, which affects all undergraduate students and all departments in the College of Arts and Sciences. The success of the General Studies Program can make a valuable contribution to the mission of the institution in its aspiration to achieve academic excellence as a university and in its commitment to serving the community."² The review and revision by the 1998 committee was undertaken with an acute awareness of the external pressures confronting the university and was implemented just as the university was beginning to develop what would become its Vision 2010 Plan.

The work of the current General Studies Coordinating Committee also occurs at a propitious time for the University. We have just completed a year long self study report as part of our Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation review which included in part, a close study of the University's General Education components. According to the Commission, the primary purpose of the self study exercise is "to advance institutional self-understanding and self-improvement."³ The current Committee's interest in evaluating our General Studies Program is a function of that self understanding and this report will, we hope, be a step towards self improvement. Over the past decade, the external pressures facing the University have worsened. The emphasis on assessment and accountability noted in the 1999 proposal has intensified. The competition for students from neighboring colleges and neighboring states has

¹ Dean Lamar sent a memo to Jack Egan, Chair of the University Senate, to ask the Chair to contact department chairpersons to send representatives to the committee; for more on the history of general studies at Jersey City State College/New Jersey City University, visit: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Content/genstudieshistory.asp>.

² General Studies Coordinating Committee. 1999. "Proposal for a Revised General Studies Program," p. 1. Available online at: <http://www.njcu.edu/dept/deansoffice/generalstudies/designationGSAC.pdf>. Hereafter cited as "Proposal." For a fuller history, visit here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Content/genstudieshistory.asp>

³ Middle States Commission on Higher Education. 2007. "Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report," p. 3. Available at: <http://www.msche.org/publications/SelfStudy07070925104848.pdf>

intensified.⁴ The financial pressures on the University and its constituent parts – students, faculty, departments, and administration – have also intensified. Today we are at the end of the Vision 2010 plan and the University is beginning to formulate a new vision to address the challenges and to prepare the university for a secure and successful future. So once again, we find ourselves well positioned to revisit General Studies.⁵ For inasmuch as general studies comprises a significant and crucial part of our educational enterprise, it is essential to the long term viability of the University that we present as strong a program as possible; one that supports our urban mission and serves our students and the community at large. As the authors of the 1999 report astutely indicated: “Given the urban mission of New Jersey City University, it is desirable to articulate at the start the ways in which its general studies program supports the University commitment to prepare a diverse student body to participate successfully in a global society.”⁶ We also agree that now, as then, “The question before the University is what type of general education program best facilitates the striving of its students toward human excellence.”⁷ The following report addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the current general studies program and recommends that the current general studies program be replaced with one that is more closely aligned with both the University’s mission statement and the University-wide student learning goals, that takes better advantage of our urban setting, and that better facilitates that striving towards human excellence.

II. Background and Assessment Design

The General Studies Program (GSP) created by the 1999 Proposal was implemented in the fall 2001 semester. The General Studies Coordinating Committee (GSCC) responsible for assessment and ongoing oversight of the program was constituted by Dean Fiol-Matta in September 2003.⁸ It convened its first meeting in November 2003, and has continued to meet with a rotating membership selected by the

⁴ A recent study released by the National Center for Education Statistics (an office within the US Department of Education) noted that New Jersey leads the country in migrating college bound students; losing 29,295 potential students in the most recent data collection year (2006). Just to put that in context, Maryland was the state ranked just below New Jersey, with 7,913 students migrating out to other states. See Knapp, L.G., Kelly-Reid, J.E., Ginder, S.A., and Miller, E. (2008). “Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2006; Graduation Rates, 2000 & 2003 Cohorts; and Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2006 (NCES 2008-173).” National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC, table 2, p. 6.

⁵ In beginning this review of its General Studies Program, NJCU is right in step with other institutions of higher learning in the U.S. According to a spring 2009 survey of member institutions commissioned by the Association of American Colleges & Universities, 19% of the colleges and university surveyed reported that they were formally reviewing their general education programs; 22% reported discussing proposals for change, and 18% reported implementing changes adopted within the past five years. See Hart Research Associates, May 2009. *Trends and Emerging Practices in General Education*.

⁶ Proposal, p. 2.

⁷ Proposal, p. 2.

⁸ See Dean Fiol-Matta’s 2007 report to the President’s Cabinet for more: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/lfmreporttocab.pdf>

CAS Dean's Office since that time.⁹ The 1999 proposal recommended an assessment plan and the GSCC spent considerable time and effort over the years to develop and implement a viable assessment protocol.

According to the 1999 Proposal, the aim of the GSP was to ensure that students would be able to master a key set of competencies:

“If the General Studies Program is successful, by its conclusion students will be able to:

- Analyze, synthesize, and evaluate readings in various disciplines
- Express complex ideas orally and in Standard Written English.
- Demonstrate skills in critical thinking and creativity, information gathering and literacy, and quantitative and computer literacy.
- Demonstrate an ability to use the methods of analysis appropriate to the AUR and the areas in the General Studies program.
- Reveal their familiarity with certain basic knowledge in a variety of fields.
- Relate the ideas and knowledge of one area to another.
- Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of disciplines outside their major.
- Evaluate their experience in the General Studies Program.”¹⁰

To accomplish this, all courses within the GSP were required to address specific competencies connected to these learning outcomes. In order for a course to be included in the GSP, the course had to include reading and writing, plus two of the four remaining core competencies of critical thinking/creativity, information gathering/information literacy, quantitative/computer literacy, and oral presentation.¹¹

The assessment protocol that was developed focused on these outcomes goals and competencies. In 2005, the GSCC recommended an assessment protocol that included comparisons with other general studies programs, faculty and student surveys, a review of course syllabi in the First Year Experience and General Studies Area courses, and student performance tests.¹²

⁹ For a full listing of committee membership over the years, see <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/gsccmemberlist0309.pdf>. For a sample invitation letter sent to prospective committee members, see <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/gscclfmemo.pdf>.

¹⁰ Proposal, Appendix 5, page 23.

¹¹ Proposal, p. 7.

¹² The assessment report was submitted to Dean Fiol-Matta in April 2005, see <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/2005assessmentplan.pdf>.

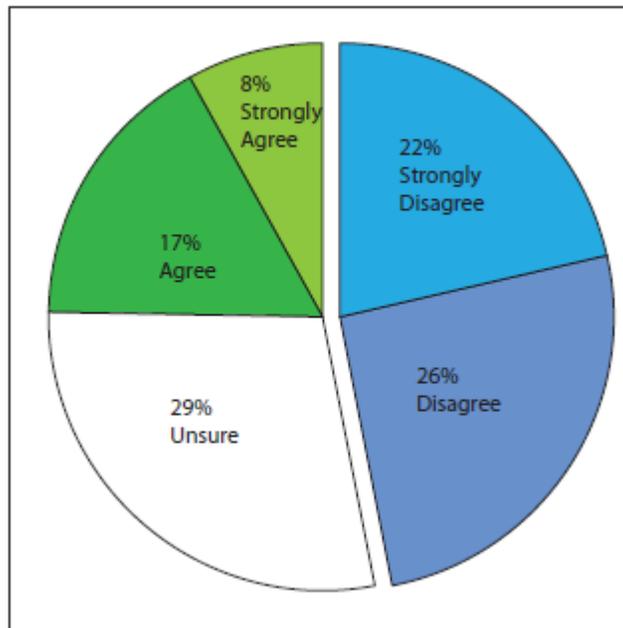
III. Faculty and Student Surveys of the General Studies Program

The GSCC has administered two surveys to faculty (2007 and 2009) and students (both in 2007). The results of each will be discussed in turn.

A. Faculty Surveys

As noted above, NJCU faculty members were surveyed in 2007 and again in 2009. We confine our discussion to the 2009 instrument since the 2007 survey yielded only 14 responses, a number we deemed too small to derive any meaningful insight or information.¹³ The 2009 survey, which garnered 104 responses, showed consistent and substantial faculty disenchantment with the current general studies program. When asked if the current program provided a coherent educational experience for our students, 47.1% of respondents either disagreed (25.5%) or disagreed strongly (21.6%) with the assertion, while 24.5% either agreed (16.7%) or strongly agreed (7.8%) with the claim (the remaining 28.4% were unsure).

All respondents

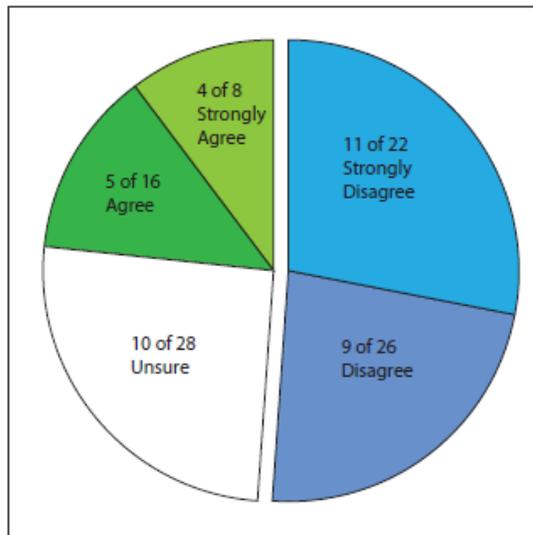


Survey Query One: The NJCU General Studies Program provides a coherent educational experience for our students (102 responses, fractional percentages rounded off)

As can be seen in the charts below, this sentiment was consistent across the various demographic variables we tracked:

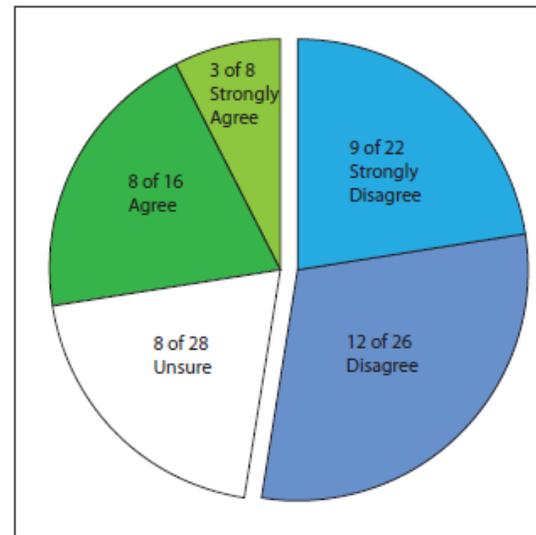
¹³ Nonetheless, the results of that survey are available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/2007facultysurveydata.pdf>. The margin of error for the 2009 survey under review was +/- 5%.

Have taught at NJCU more than 15 years



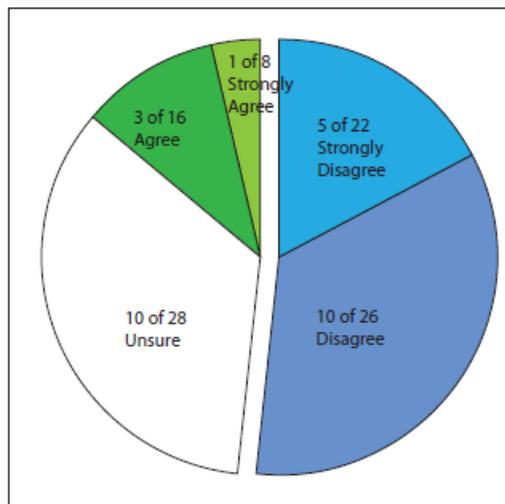
39 respondents.

Among those who teach every semester



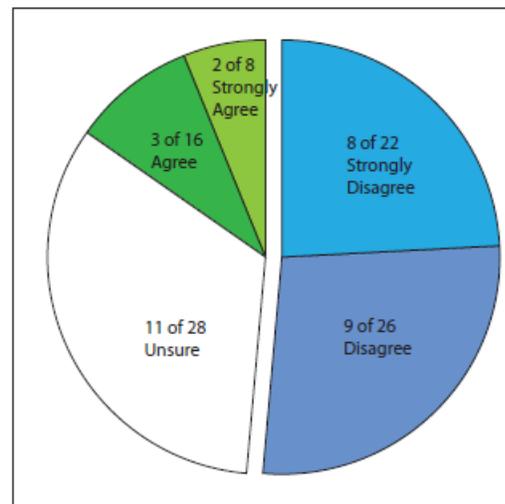
40 respondents.

Have taught at NJCU between 6 and 10 years



29 respondents.

Among those who never teach GS course



33 respondents.

We believe that these numbers are troubling in that, as noted in the preceding, the program was created to achieve quite specific learning outcomes and to provide a consistent educational experience. The disconnect between the goals of the GSP and its evolution over the 8 years since implementation was also evident in a question asking faculty if the GSP “reflects a set of clearly defined goals for student learning and development.” Here, our faculty members again showed substantial discontent with the way the program has developed over the years, with almost 55% of faculty either disagreeing (28.2%) or disagreeing strongly (27.2%) with the statement (17.5% agreed, and 4.9% agreed strongly, the remaining 22.3% were unsure). The numbers were more striking among those faculty who are arguably most informed and in touch with the program; namely those who reported that they taught courses in the GSP every semester.

Of the 41 faculty members in this cohort (amounting to 40% of the total number of faculty members who participated in the survey), better than half reported that they disagreed (11 faculty) or disagreed strongly (12 faculty) with the claim (in contrast, only 2 faculty members reported that they strongly agreed with the statement, 6 faculty members reported that they agreed with the statement, and the remainder were unsure).

The survey included three free response questions asking faculty members to elaborate on what they viewed as the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Before discussing the comments, the committee would like to express its deep appreciation to our colleagues who took the time to provide thoughtful comments and feedback about the program.¹⁴ One of the themes we noticed in the discussion of the strengths of the program was appreciation for the breadth of courses that students experience. Of the 58 responses we received on this question, 31 mentioned the variety of courses offered as a real strength. Some typical responses include: “Students are exposed to a range of disciplinary approaches and subjects. This provides them with an introduction that can inform their choice of major.” Or “It gives students a minimal look at various disciplines besides that in which they major,” or “Provides access to broad liberal arts foundation which is needed to provide context for future specialization.” These results correspond to the self study report, which also pointed to breadth as one of the strengths of the program. But beyond reference to the variety of courses offered, we found faculty expressing little else to recommend the current program (3 responses mentioned the faculty as the strongest part of the program, 2 cited the goals and outcomes of the program, 2 identified the flexibility for departments to offer and for students to choose courses, 2 could best be described as “no opinion” or too vague, one mentioned the advantages of presenting students with different perspectives and one mentioned the writing requirements). Twelve of the 58 responses (20%) to “What do you see as the strongest features of the NJUCU General Studies Program” were critical of the program. These responses ranged from “I don’t see a strong feature” to “None. Let’s get rid of it” to “Nothing! It’s a disconnected hodgepodge of courses” to more pointed remarks about the rationale for and structure of the program: “It does nothing for our students, but helps certain departments with enrollments” or “bread and butter courses for small programs.”

We received 70 responses to the question “What features of the General Studies Program would you most like to see changed?” By far, the most common response (appearing on 17 of the replies) was a variation of “The number of GS credits should be reduced.”¹⁵ The next most frequent revision recommendation had to do with what might be termed the “depth” of the program and the preponderance of 100 level courses (for more, see section VI.B below), with 9 responses making reference to this change. As one faculty member noted, “The General Studies program needs to include depth as well as breadth. The current program provides thin exposure to various disciplines.” After these two issues though, the responses begin to scatter. Other issues raised included strengthening the writing or math requirement (8 responses), increasing the choices

¹⁴ The full set of free response answers is available here:
<http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/2009casfacultysurvey.pdf>

¹⁵ The responses to this section of the survey tended to be fuller than those in the other parts of the survey, and sometimes single responses raised multiple issues, so we made no effort to determine the frequency of responses as expressed as a percentage of total responses.

among courses offered or adding an interdisciplinary component (6 responses), adding science laboratory or language requirements (5 responses), adding more flexibility to the program (2 responses), embracing a more global curriculum (1 response), and maintaining the current program but providing stronger administrative leadership and oversight. Overall, it would seem that the concerns expressed and the revisions offered might be running at cross purposes. After all, how can we both reduce the credit number required (addressing the most common revision) and keep the breadth (the most frequently cited asset)? Similarly, adding depth and reducing credits may also appear contradictory. Yet we believe it essential that a revision of the program find a way to reconcile these seemingly incompatible positions.

The faculty survey included a question asking faculty members to speculate on how they believed students were viewing the GSP. Faculty were asked if “students experience the NJCU General Program as constituting a cohesive curriculum,” and nearly two thirds reported that they disagreed (42.6%) or disagreed strongly (22.8%) with the claim (1.0% said they agreed strongly, and 7.9% that they agreed; the rest were undecided).¹⁶ Likewise, faculty were asked if they thought that “most students are able to locate connections between courses in their majors and courses they have taken to fulfill General Studies requirements” and almost two-thirds (64.4%) either strongly disagreed (24.8%) or disagreed (39.6%) with the statement (14.9% agreed, 5% agreed strongly, and the remaining 15.8% were unsure). These grim assessments were borne out by the two student surveys completed in 2007.¹⁷

¹⁶ We should note that in the free response section of the survey, some respondents questioned the rationale for asking faculty members for their appraisal of student perceptions of the program. One explanation is that faculty perceptions of student opinion can obviously impact the delivery and structure of a course. If a faculty member believes that the students do not care about the general studies program, or that they do not see the course as fitting within a coherent program, then it is unlikely that much class time and effort will be made to try to ensure that students see the coherence or appreciate the program. As the syllabus review discussed later in this report indicates, almost no syllabi mentioned the fact that the course was part of the general studies program

¹⁷ The raw data for the FYE survey are available here:

<http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/2007civstudentsurvey.pdf>. The raw data for the Civilizations survey are available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/2007fyestudentsurvey.pdf>. We should note that the data sets are somewhat problematic. The questionnaires provided for valid responses ranging from A through E, whereas the actual data sets were coded as 0-5. In each of the questions on both surveys, “0” was the most common response. We determined that the “0” indicated a non-response. The percentages we report here reflect the valid percents (that is, we did not include the non-responses in our calculations and based the percentages on the universe of completed questions). This report is the first time the data has been analyzed. Previously, the data was gathered and included raw in reports emanating from the CAS Dean’s Office.

B. Student Surveys

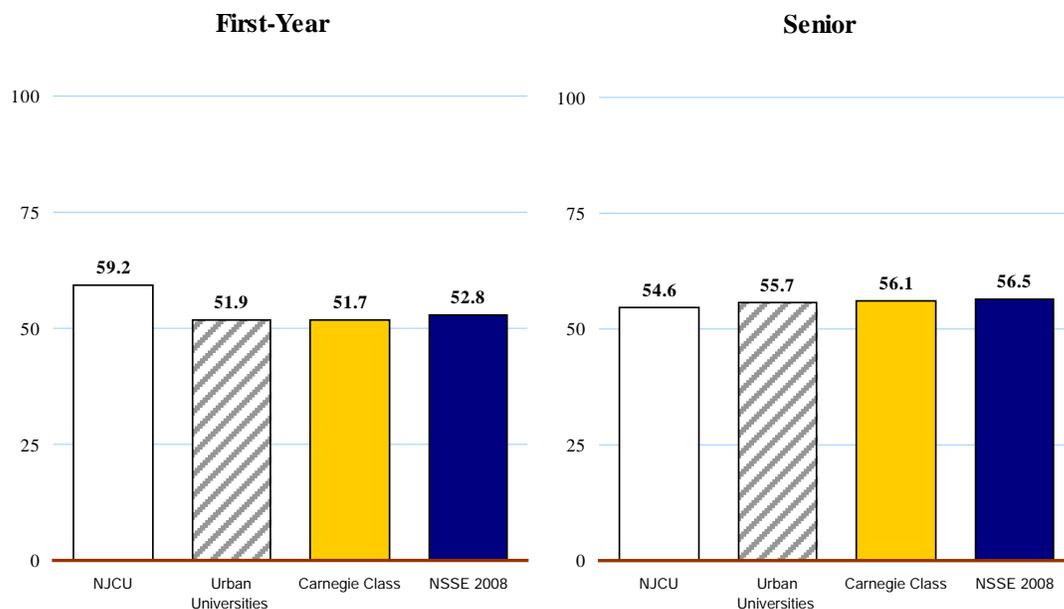
Students in sections of FYE and Civilizations II courses were asked to complete a survey soliciting their opinions about their experiences within the GSP to that point in their academic career.¹⁸ The questions were structured in such a way as to elicit direct student feedback about most of the core competencies intended to be addressed by the program and the University-wide student learning goals.¹⁹ These sections were chosen in an attempt to provide entry and mid-point student self-appraisals of the GSP. What we find in the data is that students became less enthusiastic about the benefits of the GSP between their entry (the FYE course) and midpoint (the Civilizations II course) in the GSP. To the best of our knowledge, no surveys were administered to graduating seniors for feedback on the GSP. However, the University has participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement which did survey seniors and we can glean some information relative to general studies from those data sets. So for example, where 75% of students in the FYE sections responded to the statement that “This course introduced me to new content” with either “significantly” (33%) or “greatly” (42%), by the midpoint survey student responses to a similar statement asking about the whole range of general studies courses completed to that point showed a significant drop off, falling from 75% to 56%. When asked about their overall experience in the GSP, only 34% responded with “significantly” and 22% with “greatly.” Indeed, where a quarter of the FYE students believed that the course either did not introduce new content (4%) or did so only somewhat (21%); that number jumps substantially for the midpoint cohort, with 42% now stating that the courses in the GSP either did not introduce any new information (2%) or did so only “somewhat” (40%).

A similar pattern emerges in response to a statement about learning. 80% of FYE students responded to “This course introduced me to new ways of learning” with “significantly” (43%) or “greatly” (37%). But by the midpoint survey, only 45% responded with “significantly” (34%) or “greatly” (11%) to a similarly worded statement covering the range of courses taken to that point. Again, we see a substantial increase in discontent with the courses in the GSP, with over half of the respondents answering with either “not at all” (8%) or “somewhat” (45%). In the final query in what we can describe as the “overall experience” section of the surveys, better than three-quarters (78%) of the FYE students responded to the statement that “This course introduced me to new ways of thinking” with a “significantly” (38%) or “greatly” (40%). The analogous query for the mid point students – “These courses introduced me to new ways of thinking” – showed a drop off but not nearly as severe as that reported above in the previous two queries.

¹⁸ The questions and frequencies for both surveys are available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/2007studentsurveyfrequencies.pdf>. The margin of error in the two surveys is an uncomfortably high +/- 10%, so we refrained from generalizing from the survey sample to the student population at large. However, we compensated for this in part by drawing on the much more methodologically rigorous National Survey of Student Engagement data in order to supplement the surveys administered by previous versions of the GSCC.

¹⁹ The university wide student learning goals are available here: http://web.njcu.edu/dept/centerfortl/Content/university-wide_student_learning_goals.asp. The FYE survey had no questions relative to the quantitative and computer literacy competency.

Here, we found a reasonably consistent 62% responding with “significantly” (51%) or “greatly” (11%). Yet that consistency masks an overall decline in that the “greatly” dropped 29%, the “somewhat” increased from 17% to 23%, and the “not at all” jumped from 4% to 14%. The general decline in student satisfaction with the academic program as seen in these two cohorts also appears in the National Survey of Student Engagement data gathered in 2008. For instance, on the Benchmark Comparisons for “Levels of Academic Challenge” we see NJCU beginning with a slight edge over various comparative groups, but that relative to these other groups, student satisfaction with the challenges of their academic program drops off over time.²⁰ To be sure the NSSE data is not confined to student attitudes about the GSP, but the GSP comprises a significant part of the overall NJCU educational experience (more than half of the graduation credits required of NJCU students are general education credits, see Section VI.A below).



Levels of Academic Challenge, NSSE Benchmark Comparisons Report, 2008²¹

²⁰ The scores here are derived from combined responses to a series of questions related to class preparation, work effort, campus academic, reading and writing requirements, and competencies addressed in courses, including analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, and application of theories and concepts as well as more general evaluations of work effort

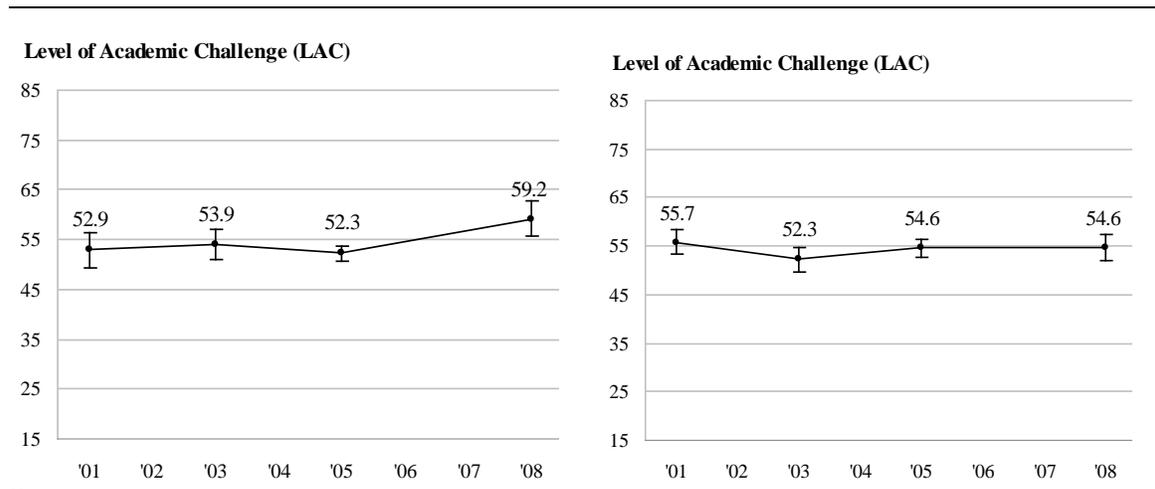
²¹ The 2008 NSSE report also included longitudinal comparisons. See the charts below; the one on the left is for first year students, the one on the right for seniors.

The FYE courses, at least in terms of student perception, seem to be successful in introducing entering freshman to the demands and expectations for college level work. Sixty percent of the students responded with “significantly” (30%) or “greatly” (30%) to the statement “This course helped ease the transition to college life for me” (with 11% reporting “not at all;” 26% “somewhat,” and, somewhat perplexingly, 4% with “not applicable.” For the students surveyed, these courses also seemed to help develop study skills and provide a solid introduction to college level work. In terms of the study skills component, almost three-quarters of the students said “significantly” (47%) or “greatly” (26%) to the statement that “This course has helped me develop better study skills” (with 9% saying “not at all;” 17% “somewhat;” and 2% “not applicable”). Similarly, on the topic of expectations for college level work, an overwhelming majority said the courses either “significantly” (48%) or “greatly” (33%) “increased my understanding of the requirements of college-level work.” And these expectations included those of academic integrity, and again we find convincing support for the benefits of the FYE courses, with 78% of the students saying “significantly” (48%) or “greatly” (30%) to the statement that “This course has increased my understanding of academic integrity.” Only 2% said “not at all.”

If we turn our attention to the sections of the surveys addressing specific learning goals, we find a similar pattern emerging. The following section addresses each of the learning outcomes in turn.

1. Reading

All courses in the GSP are required to include specific kinds of content geared towards instilling specific learning outcomes. The reading requirement mandates that “All courses must assign reading in appropriate texts such as textbooks and journal articles.”²² Appropriately, then, both FYE and the Civ II students were asked about the reading required for the course: “This course has required reading assignments in books or journals.” Here one would expect most students to report strong support for the



²² Proposal, p. 7. FYE courses have a similar requirement. See <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/fyematerial.pdf>

statement since the course in which they were enrolled ostensibly has required just such reading. In both the FYE and Civ II sections large majorities of students (70% and 66% respectively) reported “significantly” (37%; 30%) or “greatly” (33%; 36%). Yet that still leaves almost 30% of the FYE students reporting “somewhat” (20%) or, more troubling, “not at all” (9%); and fully a third of the Civ II students reporting with somewhat (30%) or “not applicable” (3%). To reiterate, all courses in the GSP are required to include reading material, so the fact that about a third of the students reported relatively tepid support for the reading requirements in the GSP coursework to that point in their academic career ought to be at least some cause for concern. We should note too that the reading requirements in the FYE sections should be revamped and/or upgraded insofar as a majority (53%) of the students responded to “Comprehending the reading assignments in this course has been challenging” with “not at all” (20%) or only “somewhat” (33%), and a smaller, but still large 42% of the Civ II students rated the challenge of the overall reading required in their GSP courses as “not at all” (3%) or “somewhat” (39%). Then again, given the number of introductory 100-level courses that a student is likely to encounter in the GSP, perhaps the Civ II numbers should not be that surprising.

2. *Writing*

As with the Reading component, Writing is required in all GSP courses, and the 1999 Proposal further specified that “Assignments requiring writing must go beyond in-class examinations.”²³ And as with the reading component queries, we expected a strong positive response to the statement “This course has required writing outside of regularly scheduled class meeting times.” What we find, though, is that about a third of the students in the FYE and Civ II sections reported “not at all” (7%; 3%), “somewhat” (18%; 30%), or, more disconcertingly, “not applicable” (7%; 3%). The efficacy of the writing assignments was also less than clear to the students in the two cohorts. In the FYE sections, students were asked to respond to “The writing assignments in this course have helped me learn how to communicate my ideas more effectively.” To that, 9% said “not at all” and 13% said “somewhat,” but a strong majority believed they helped either “significantly” (44%) or “greatly” (31%). The midpoint survey broke this issue down into two related statements: 1) “The writing assignments helped me learn how to develop my ideas;” and 2) “The writing assignments helped me learn how to describe my ideas.” In each case, more than a third of the students surveyed seemed to question the merits of the writing assignments in helping to develop their writing skills. In response to the development statement, 6% answered with “not at all” and another 30% with “somewhat;” and to the description statement, 6% answered with “not at all” and 27% with “somewhat.” Granted, that means that a majority of the students in the two surveys did see “significant” or “great” benefit to the writing assignments, yet the number seeing little or no benefit to the writing in these courses seems disturbingly high. Given the widespread perception that our students have weak and/or undeveloped reading and writing skills, the fact that the almost a third of the students themselves are unclear as to the benefits of the writing assignments in their GSP courses should be cause for concern.

²³ Proposal, p. 7. FYE courses have a similar requirement. See <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/fyematerial.pdf>

The Committee members believe that the writing requirement component of GSP should be re-examined and revised.²⁴

In addition to the aforementioned Reading and Writing requirements, all area courses in the GSP must also include at least two of the remaining four competencies:

- *Critical Thinking/Creativity*: “Assignments and/or in-class exercises that require students to solve problems or produce creative work using techniques appropriate to the discipline.”
- *Information Gathering and Literacy*: “Assignments and/or in-class exercises that require students to demonstrate information literacy skills such as using print, traditional, or on-line resources to gather and analyze information.”
- *Quantitative and Computer Literacy*: “Assignments and/or in-class exercises that require students to use data presented in tabular, graphical or other quantitative forms in order to evaluate information critically.”
- *Oral Presentation*: “Assignments and/or in-class activities that require students to articulate ideas/theories/concepts appropriate to the discipline.”²⁵

The student surveys included questions addressing each of these, as well as an additional University-wide learning outcome:

- *Responsible citizenship in a culturally complex world*: “Responsible citizenship in a culturally complex world is characterized by having intercultural knowledge, engaging in the practice of collaborative problem solving, and the practice of civic, ethical, social, and personal responsibility.”²⁶

Our analysis will examine each of these in turn.

3. *Critical Thinking/Creativity*

The two surveys included statements eliciting student evaluation of the impact of the GSP courses on their creativity, and the Civ II survey included a statement addressing

²⁴ It bears noting that the final SACC (Senate and Administration Coordinating Committee) document approving the 1999 GSP included a provision for specially designated “writing intensive” courses, and a subcommittee of the GSCC was charged with reviewing and approving courses for the writing intensive designation. That provision seems to have faded soon after the program was implemented, and currently no courses in the GSP (or indeed the University) are demarcated as writing intensive. For more, see: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/writingintensivecourses.pdf>.

²⁵ Proposal, p. 7 (all quotes are from the same page, same section).

²⁶ http://web.njcu.edu/dept/centerfortl/Content/university-wide_student_learning_goals.asp

critical thinking. In terms of the former, students were asked to respond to two statements: 1) “This course has challenged my imagination;” and 2) “This course has contributed to my creative development.” In each instance, we found students in the FYE courses to be strongly supportive of the statements; with 77% and 76% respectively saying “significantly” (45%; 40%) or “greatly” (32%; 36%) so that we can say that most students were stimulated by their experience in their FYE course. We should note, though, that this still left nearly a quarter of the students reporting either “not at all” (9%; 2%) or only “somewhat” (15%; 21%) to the two statements. When a similar statement was offered in the midpoint survey – “These courses have helped to develop my creativity” – we see a significant drop in student satisfaction with their GSP courses. In the Civ II surveys, while 61% of those surveyed responded with either “significantly” (35%) and “greatly” (26%), we find that nearly 40% of the students in these sections stating that their experience with courses in the GSP to that point in the career developed creativity only “somewhat” (35%) or “not at all” (3%). These results are in line with those we have already discussed in terms of the reading, writing, and overall experience in the GSP; that is, initial enthusiasm for the FYE component that fades as the students continue their course work through the remainder of the All University Requirements (AUR) and General Studies Area (GSA) component of the GSP.

The Civ II survey also included a statement addressing both critical thinking and creativity: “These courses required me to solve problems or produce creative work related to the subject matter as described in the syllabus.” The results here are consistent with the FYE survey in that once again we have a solid majority (72%) responding with “significantly” (36%) or “greatly” (36%), coupled with a larger (27%) but certainly comparable percentage expressing their dissatisfaction with their GSP courses, with 3% saying “not at all,” 3% saying “not applicable,” and 21% saying “somewhat.”

4. *Information Gathering and Literacy*

The two surveys included statements with language taken directly from the GSP Proposal concerning information gathering (the information literacy component was not addressed): “This course required me to integrate print, audio-visual, or on-line resources into my own arguments or analyses.” According to the FYE course approval guidelines, all courses receiving an FYE designation are required to “include an introduction to research skills; therefore, FYE instructors are encouraged to schedule at least one class session in the Irwin [now Guarini] Library for a presentation by the library staff. A graded assignment requiring information gathering/literacy is a necessary part of an FYE course.”²⁷ Students were presented with the statement “This course required me to integrate print, audio-visual, or on-line resources into my own arguments or analyses” and, fully 40% of the students responded with “significantly” and another 40% with “greatly.” Of course that still left 7% saying “not at all” and 13% with “somewhat.” Considering the explicit guidelines for FYE courses cited above, we find it a bit problematic that a fifth of the students did not seem sufficiently exposed to gathering information. While the responses to a similarly worded statement in the Civ II survey –

²⁷Memo from Associate Dean Joe Moskowitz to faculty, 17 July 2000; see <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/2000fyematerial.pdf>

“These courses required me to analyze information gathered from print, traditional, or on-line resources” – saw similar results overall, with 40% responding with “significantly” and a 31% with “greatly;” the “not at all” dropped to 0%, and the somewhat increased to 28%. The numbers here are encouraging since, unlike the FYE courses, not all of the area courses within the GSP are required to include information gathering and literacy as a course objective. The Civ II survey also included a second statement on information gathering that yielded results similar to the “analyze” statement. When presented with “These courses required me to gather information from print, traditional, or on-line resources” almost a third (31%) responded with “somewhat” (28%) or “not applicable” (3%), while 40% answered “significantly” and 28% with “greatly.” These numbers would seem to support data from the syllabus review (discussed below) indicating that the two most common competencies incorporated into the area courses are critical thinking/creativity and information gathering and literacy.

5. *Quantitative and Computer Literacy*

As noted above, the FYE survey did not include any questions relative to Quantitative and Computer Literacy. It also bears repeating that not all General Studies Area courses are required to address every competency. That being the case, the Civ II survey presented students with a fairly broad statement about whether or not courses they had taken to that point had asked them simply to *engage* quantitative data, rather than generate, calculate, or manipulate such data: “These courses required me to use or evaluate data that was presented in a tabular, graphical, or other quantitative form.” Here we found that almost half (48%) of the students responded with “not at all” (3%), “not applicable” (6%), or “somewhat” (39%); with 36% saying “significantly” and 15% “greatly.” While this perceived lack of exposure to quantitative data is problematic, it should be noted that it may also be a function of the fact that, as the syllabus review discussed below demonstrates, very few courses beyond those receiving Area F designation seem to include development of this competency in their course objectives. One of the issues that a new general studies program would need to address is discovering ways to integrate more effectively quantitative work in more courses.

6. *Oral Presentation*

While all FYE courses are required to include at least one oral presentation project,²⁸ not all GSA courses are so mandated. When asked to consider the value of their oral presentation projects, a majority (65%) of the FYE students surveyed responded with “significantly” (17%) or “greatly” (48%). But considering the oral presentation requirement, those numbers are lower than we would expect to see. Indeed, when presented with the statement “The oral presentation(s) I delivered in this course required me to articulate ideas, theories or concepts related to the course subject matter,” fully 9% responded with “not applicable,” 2% with “not at all” and 24% with “somewhat.” An analogous statement in the Civ II survey showed similar results; that is, while a majority of the students (60%) saw value in their oral presentation requirements, a sizeable

²⁸It bears noting that the Committee members are unsure how this requirement could be met in the online versions of FYE courses.

minority (39%) was less enthusiastic. The Civ students were presented with “The oral presentation(s) I have delivered in these courses have required me to articulate ideas, theories, or concepts related to the subject matter as described in the syllabus.” Here, 36% of the students responded with “somewhat” and 3% with “not applicable.” Encouragingly, we had no students saying “not at all” and 30% with “significantly” and 36% with “greatly.”

7. *Responsible Citizenship*

The two student surveys also included statements relative to one of the university wide student learning goals (responsible citizenship) that is not part of the current general studies program. Inasmuch as the current review focuses on the general studies program, consideration of these parts of the survey may initially appear to be beyond the purview of this committee. Yet we chose to include it in this analysis on the chance that any new general studies program that emerges from this review will include this learning outcome, and thus the data presented here may provide a benchmark to help assess the success of future courses in fulfilling this objective.

Both the FYE and Civ II surveys included statements about student understanding of and respect for different social and cultural groups. The Civ II survey also included two additional statements concerning changes in perspective and preparation for participation in the global community. In terms of the common set of questions, students were presented with two closely worded statements: “What I have learned in this course has increased my understanding of diverse social and/or cultural groups” and “What I have learned in this course has increased my respect for diverse social and/or cultural groups.”²⁹ In the FYE survey, students expressed similar levels of support for each. In terms of increased understanding, over a third of the students surveyed (36%) responded with “not applicable” (6%), “not at all” (9%) or only “somewhat” (21%); and in terms of increased respect, just over a third responded with “not at all” (2%), “not applicable” (4%), or only somewhat (28%). The corresponding statements in the Civ II survey showed similar results; with 38% of the students surveyed responding with “not at all” (6%) or “somewhat” (32%) to the understanding statement, and 33% responding with “not at all” (3%), “not applicable” (3%), or “somewhat” (27%) to the respect statement. The two additional civic responsibility statements included in the Civ II survey followed the same general pattern and showed a substantial percentage of students expressing little regard for the ways in which their general studies experience to that point prepared them for life in a global society. When students were asked to respond to the statement “What I have learned in these courses will help prepare me for my role in the global society”, 44% answered with “not at all” (6%) or “somewhat” (38%), with another 32% saying “significantly” and nearly a quarter (24%) with “greatly.” And inasmuch as understanding and respect for diverse groups is a function of adopting a wider take on the world and one’s surroundings, students were also asked to respond to the statement “These courses have given me a broader perspective.” Once again, the responses showed a sizeable percentage (37%) of students expressing little regard for their general studies

²⁹ The corresponding statements in the Civ II survey shorten “diverse social and/or cultural groups” to “diverse groups.”

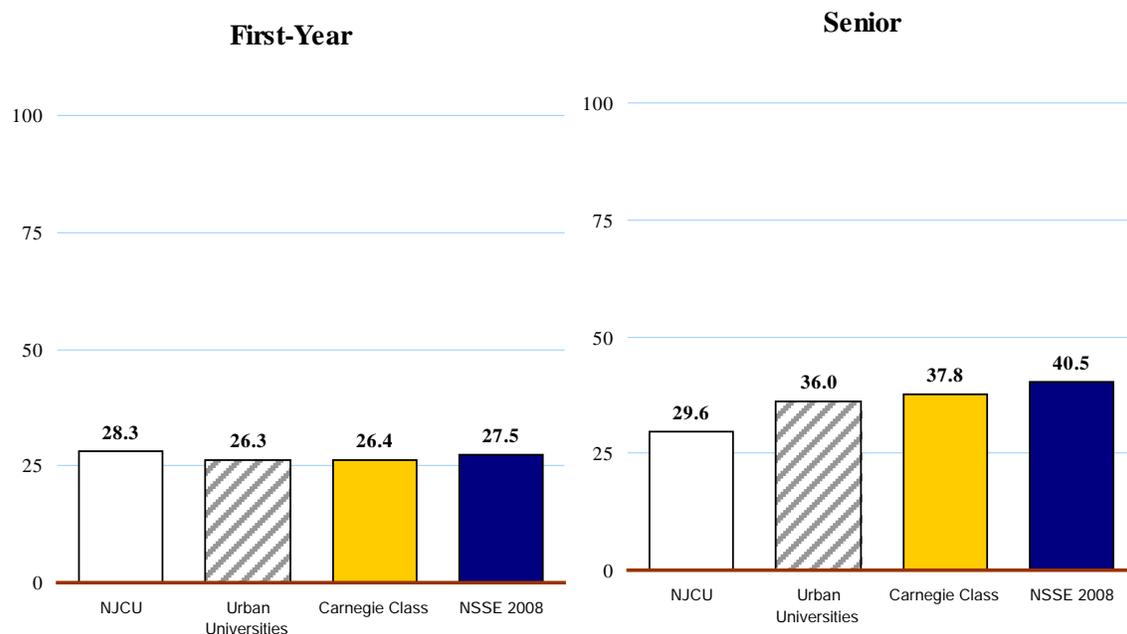
courses, with 5% responding with “not at all,” and nearly a third (32%) with “somewhat.” Another third (32%) said “significantly” and 29% said “greatly.”

C. Summary of Faculty and Student Surveys

In considering the two sets of survey data, we find the faculty and the students surveyed expressing reservations about the efficacy and appeal of the current general studies program. Among faculty members, we believe the data indicate that while faculty members are split on whether the general studies program offers a coherent experience, they tend to agree that the program is comprised of a list of courses that lacks cohesion, has no real goal(s), and fails to provide much of a connection to the student’s major degree pursuit. The NSSE survey data provides a succinct appraisal of student perceptions of their NJCU undergraduate experience. The survey included questions covering each of the following topics, and then the results were aggregated into a common score measuring “Enriching Educational Experience”. The topics included:

- Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, social fraternity or sorority, etc.)
- Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
- Community service or volunteer work
- Foreign language coursework / Study abroad
- Independent study or self-designed major
- Culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.)
- Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own
- Using electronic medium (e.g., listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment
- Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
- Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together

The results are disconcerting, but not surprising given the data discussed above. Once again, we find our entering freshman reporting a comparable experience to their peers at other institutions, but by senior year we are trailing significantly.



Enriching Educational Experience, NSSE Benchmark Comparisons Report, 2008

Clearly, our students do not seem to be deriving the sort of fulfilling educational experience from their undergraduate career as do students at other comparative institutions. The Committee members believe that our current general studies program is a significant reason for that disenchantment. As we discuss below, and as the faculty surveys expressed, our program as currently constituted is too large and too broad to provide the kind of rich undergraduate educational experience that our students deserve.

IV. Syllabus Reviews

Shortly after the 1999 General Studies Proposal was implemented, the University saw substantial turnover in the offices of the Dean of the CAS and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The incoming administration led by Dean Fiol-Matta created two separate committees – the First Year Experience Program Review Committee and the General Studies Coordinating Committee -- to oversee, assess, and modify the FYE and the GSA components of the program respectively. Each of these committees worked with essentially the same assessment protocol (a combination of student and faculty surveys, syllabus review, and performance testing). In this section we examine the two syllabus reviews undertaken by the two committees, beginning with the FYE review. The aim of the syllabus review project was to collect the syllabi from the courses currently approved and offered in the GSP and to determine the extent to which the program criteria were being met in the classroom, at least as manifested in the course syllabus distributed to students at the start of the semester.

A. *FYE Syllabus Review*

The First Year Experience Program Review Committee was created by CAS Dean Fiol-Matta in Fall 2003. That committee created a subcommittee to review syllabi for courses in the First Year Experience Program. The syllabus review subcommittee collected and reviewed syllabi to determine the alignment between the 1999 General Studies Proposal directives and the FYE courses as they had evolved since implementation. The ensuing discussion is derived primarily from the report of that subcommittee to the full committee. According to the 1999 Proposal, FYE courses are structured as freshman seminars where “students explore an intellectually challenging topic with 18-22 of their classmates” and where “[t]he emphasis is on student participation with a goal towards sharpening the students’ critical reasoning, written, and public speaking skills.”³⁰ The academic competencies that were to be addressed in the FYE component of the General Studies Program included: Critical Thinking, Writing, Research, and Public Speaking (“including presentation and debating skills”).³¹ To help develop these competencies, the Proposal stipulated the following:

“Each FYE will have the following academic requirements:

- One 750-1000 word revised critical thinking essay assignment
- One debate, group, or individual oral project
- One research project, utilizing the library and the Internet, which is presented to the class orally.”³²

The subcommittee then set about collecting syllabi from each of the FYE courses (not necessarily each section of an FYE course) and gathered samples from 22 of the 25 FYE approved courses.³³ The subcommittee then reviewed and examined the syllabi to ascertain evidence of eight items:

1. Required reading
2. Graded writing assignments
3. Problem solving/critical thinking/creative works assignments and/or activities
4. Information gathering/literacy assignments and/or activities
5. Graded in-class oral presentations
6. Theme based course content
7. Library visit/instruction
8. FYE course criteria/objectives

³⁰ Proposal, Appendix 3, page 19.

³¹ Proposal, Appendix 3, page 20.

³² Proposal, Appendix 3, p. 20.

³³ The subcommittee’s report noted that of the 3 missing sections, one was for a course that was approved but never offered and the other two were for courses that had recently received approval but had not yet been offered.

Based on that review, the subcommittee presented data indicating that the FYE course syllabi showed each of these, with the exception of library visits and the inclusion of descriptions of FYE criteria and objectives, were generally being addressed in the FYE courses.³⁴

B. *General Studies Area Courses Syllabus Review*

Earlier versions of the General Studies Coordinating Committee included an ad-hoc subcommittee assigned to gather and review sample course syllabi for all General Studies Area courses. The ensuing discussion essentially repeats the report of that subcommittee.

As noted above (page 4), Area Courses in the General Studies Program are required to meet specific criteria: namely, reading and writing, and two of the four remaining core competencies of critical thinking/creativity, quantitative and computer literacy, oral presentation, and information gathering and literacy. Implementation of the GSP included a provision for the establishment of area curriculum committees to review current and proposed GSC courses to ensure that they met the criteria for General Studies designation.³⁵ Courses that were part of the previous GSP were grandfathered into the new GSP providing the course syllabus was “adjusted to demonstrate how it [met] the criteria for General Studies courses.”³⁶ New courses being proposed for inclusion in the GSP were required to move through the regular course approval process, with the addition of an area curriculum committee review following departmental approval and preceding submission to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences.³⁷

In the fall 2004 semester, chairpersons of each of the departments offering courses in the GSP were contacted and asked to gather a syllabus for each of the courses, *not each of the sections of those courses*, that their department offered in the GSP. The subcommittee reported a 95% response rate, with 20 of the 21 departments contacted submitting syllabi for their courses (despite repeated requests, Computer Science did not submit any syllabi). Of the 20 departments who responded, only one – Economics – did not supply syllabi for all of the courses offered. The subcommittee also noted that syllabi were not gathered for Interdisciplinary Studies courses. Once the syllabi were gathered, each syllabus was reviewed in order to determine if the GSP criteria – namely Reading, Writing and two of the following Critical Thinking/Creativity, Information Gathering &

³⁴ The full report is available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/fyepsylreview.pdf>. We should note that the report includes language purportedly taken from the 1999 Proposal, but that this is not the case. Instead, the subcommittee is referencing a document issued from the CAS Dean’s office that was written by one of the members of the subcommittee during his tenure as Associate Dean at the time the FYE program was being implemented (available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/2000fyematerial.pdf>). This bears noting since the syllabus review was based on the criteria established in that document rather than those of the 1999 proposal. The main points where the two documents diverge are on the specific mention of “theme based” course content; the 1999 proposal makes no reference to that (it instead mentions that “Each [FYE] section will be taught by a faculty member who has designed a syllabus based on some issue or idea that excites him or her intellectually” (Proposal, p. 5), and the library visit. The Proposal only mentions “one research project, utilizing the library and the Internet” rather than mandating a visit to the library.

³⁵ Proposal, pp. 9-10.

³⁶ Proposal, p. 10.

³⁷ Proposal, Appendix 4, p. 22.

Information Literacy, Quantitative and Computer Literacy, Oral Presentation – were being fulfilled.

The following section is derived primarily from the subcommittee report:³⁸

- a. In attempting to ascertain whether the two main competencies – reading and writing – were being met in a given course, writing was the more difficult of the two to determine. As indicated above, the guidelines clearly and explicitly indicate that in order for this competency to be met, students must produce written work outside of the classroom. Yet most syllabi submitted for review did not indicate if such writing was required. Moreover, little description was provided for the type of exam being given, a problem since the exam appeared to be the only writing required.
- b. Of the four other competencies, Quantitative/Computer Literacy and Oral Presentation appear to be underserved in the GSP. Beyond the mathematics and some natural science courses, quantitative and computer literacy are rarely mentioned; and only a handful of departments (Modern Languages, Political Science, and African-American studies) require oral presentation skills in a majority of their GSA courses (this reality was borne out in the student surveys mentioned above). As for the other two, Critical Thinking/Creativity and Information Gathering/Information Literacy, the criteria were more than likely being addressed in a course, but often the syllabus failed to specify how and where that would occur. For the review, syllabus directives for a “research project,” “oral presentation,” or take home exam were taken as evidence of information gathering and literacy. Likewise, stipulations for an exam, presentation, or discussion, etc., were taken as indications of critical thinking and/or creativity.
- c. One of the surprising results of the survey was the sheer diversity of syllabus design being used in the GSP. Diversity in design is not necessarily a liability as long as the syllabi all provide the same essential information.³⁹ That, unfortunately, is not the case. The range went from single page affairs that did little more than list the title of the course and the reading schedule (and in one notable case, did not even include that last piece of information), to more elaborate descriptions of specific work required to qualify for specific grades (those seemed to be most common in Psychology). Considering that all of the courses went through the same review process in order to be included in the GSP, and considering the guidelines on syllabus construction included in the faculty handbook, one

³⁸ The original full report, with supporting tables, is available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/syllabusreview.pdf>.

³⁹ The current Faculty Handbook (pp. 95-96) includes university guidelines for syllabus design. Handbook is available here: http://web.njcu.edu/dept/academicaffairs/Uploads/njcu_faculty_handbook.pdf.

would expect to see fairly similar design and information underlying the diversity of disciplines and subjects covered.

- d. Essential information – section numbers, exam types, faculty expectations for students, or the fact that it was a general studies course with specific learning outcomes – was frequently missing from the syllabus. The subcommittee reported, for example, that it was often difficult to determine whether or not the writing requirement was being met because the syllabus under review did not clearly indicate the type of writing being asked of students. Too often the syllabus would refer to “midterm” or “exam” but then provide no information as to the type of exam – in-class vs. take-home; essay vs. multiple choice or other objective format, etc. – or would note that weekly homework was expected with no information as to the nature of the homework. Because the criteria for the writing component specifically mentions writing beyond the classroom and given the ambiguous descriptions of the exams on a syllabus, the review generally opted for an expansive read and counted a mention of an exam as evidence of writing (unless the syllabus specifically indicated an objective examination was being used) in order to determine whether or not the writing component was being addressed.

- e. The kind of information missing (as noted in the previous point) would seem to make it difficult for students to make an informed decision as to whether or not to stay with a course, which is a significant liability since students have a rather limited window to make that determination (the Add/Drop period closes after the first week of class). Given that reality, syllabi should present as clearly as possible the expectations for the course.⁴⁰ The limited information and vague descriptions of work expectations included in the syllabi reviewed here may contribute both to higher than necessary withdrawal rates and lower grade point averages for our students, which in turn negatively impacts our graduation rates.

⁴⁰ Grunert, Judith. 1997. *The Course Syllabus*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

V. Performance Tests

To help assess the impact of the General Studies Program on the educational development of our students, the University administered the Measurement of Academic Progress and Proficiency tests to students enrolled in FYE sections (2007, 2009), Civilizations II sections, (2007,2009) and graduating seniors (2008, 2009).⁴¹ The MAPP tests were developed by Educational Testing Services (ETS) and were designed to “assess general education student learning in two and four-year colleges and universities.”⁴² It does so by testing in four areas – critical thinking, reading, writing, and mathematics – that are then associated with more specific academic contexts: humanities, social sciences, natural sciences. The table below describes the basic structure and format of the test:

Academic Context	Type of Skill			
	Critical Thinking	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Humanities	9 items	9 items	27 items	27 items
Social Sciences	9 items	9 items		
Natural Sciences	9 items	9 items		
Total Items	27 items	27 items	27 items	27 items

Table 1: From “Validity of the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP), p. 2.

The following two charts present the data for each of the 2007 cohorts mentioned.

⁴¹ For a discussion of the procedure for administering the tests, including how graduating seniors were selected, see <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/20090803mappassessment.pdf>

⁴² Young, John. W. 2007. “Validity of the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP).” Educational Testing Service, p. 1. Available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/mappvalidityreport.pdf> . For fuller discussion of NJCU’s rationale for adopting and using the MAPP, see CAS Dean Fiol-Matta’s report to the President’s cabinet, page 3. The report is available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/lfmreporttocab.pdf>. Also see the discussion in Interim CAS Dean John Grew’s report to Vice President for Academic Affairs Jo Bruno, available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/20090803mappassessment.pdf>

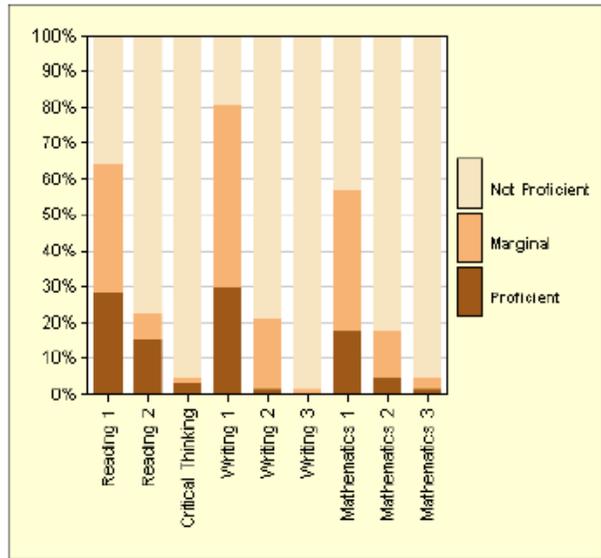
MAPP
Measures of Academic Proficiency and Progress

Summary of Proficiency Classifications
To show how many students are proficient at each level

New Jersey City University
Abbreviated Form
Test Description: Abbreviated Form A
Number of students tested: 81
Number of students included in these statistics: 67
Number of students excluded (see roster): 14

Cohort Name: FYE
Close Date: 07/10/2007
Student Level: All

Skill Dimension	Proficiency Classification		
	Proficient	Marginal	Not Proficient
Reading, Level 1	28%	38%	36%
Reading, Level 2	15%	7%	78%
Critical Thinking	3%	1%	96%
Writing, Level 1	30%	51%	19%
Writing, Level 2	1%	19%	79%
Writing, Level 3	0%	1%	99%
Mathematics, Level 1	18%	39%	43%
Mathematics, Level 2	4%	13%	82%
Mathematics, Level 3	1%	3%	96%



2007 MAPP, FYE cohort (n=81)

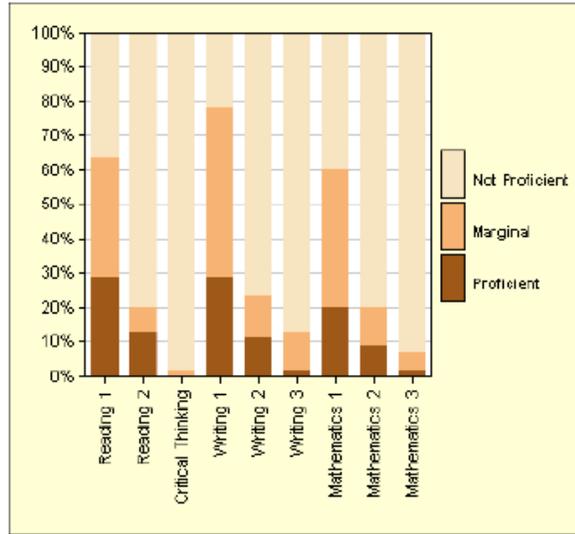
MAPP
Measures of Academic Proficiency and Progress

Summary of Proficiency Classifications
To show how many students are proficient at each level

New Jersey City University
Abbreviated Form
Test Description: Abbreviated Form A
Number of students tested: 58
Number of students included in these statistics: 55
Number of students excluded (see roster): 3

Cohort Name: Civilizations II
Close Date: 07/24/2007
Student Level: All

Skill Dimension	Proficiency Classification		
	Proficient	Marginal	Not Proficient
Reading, Level 1	29%	35%	36%
Reading, Level 2	13%	7%	80%
Critical Thinking	0%	2%	98%
Writing, Level 1	29%	49%	22%
Writing, Level 2	11%	13%	76%
Writing, Level 3	2%	11%	87%
Mathematics, Level 1	20%	40%	40%
Mathematics, Level 2	9%	11%	80%
Mathematics, Level 3	2%	5%	93%



2007 MAPP, Civ II cohort (n=58)

The Committee members concur with Dean Fiol-Matta who, in her report to the President’s Cabinet, concluded that the data showed “little difference in skills proficiency between the incoming FYE cohort tested and the tested rising CIVII [sic] cohort.” In other words, the FYE courses for this group of students did not appear to be providing any appreciable gains in the skill sets tested (reading, writing, and math).

The next three charts present the summary data for each of the 2009 cohorts mentioned. Discussion of the data follows presentation of the data.

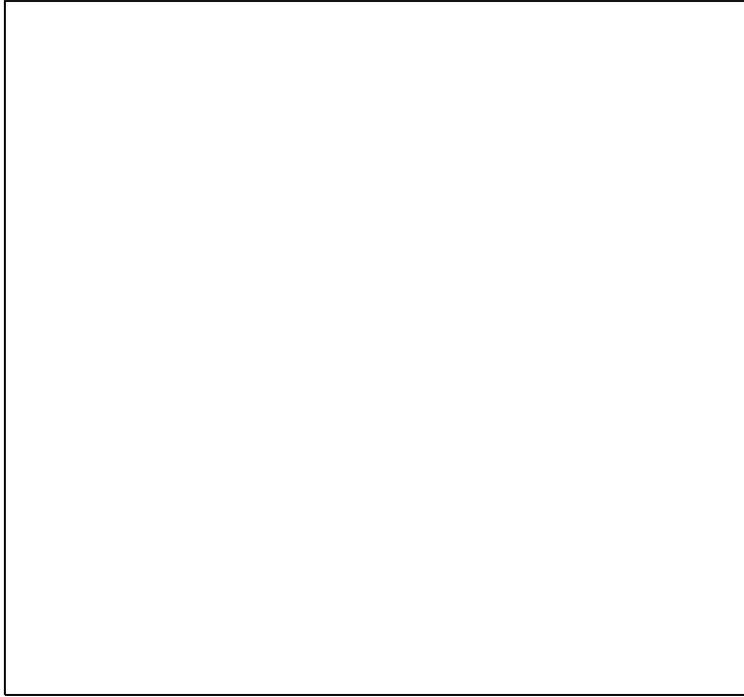
Summary of Proficiency Classifications
 To show how many students are proficient at each level

New Jersey City University Cohort Name: Combined
 Abbreviated Form Close Date: Combined
 Test Description: Combined Student Level: All
 Number of students tested: 141
 Number of students included in these statistics: 119
 Number of students excluded (see roster): 22

Skill Dimension	Proficiency Classification		
	Proficient	Marginal	Not Proficient
Reading, Level 1	31%	38%	31%
Reading, Level 2	13%	13%	74%
Critical Thinking	2%	2%	97%
Writing, Level 1	31%	49%	20%
Writing, Level 2	4%	18%	78%
Writing, Level 3	2%	5%	93%
Mathematics, Level 1	21%	34%	45%
Mathematics, Level 2	7%	14%	79%
Mathematics, Level 3	2%	4%	94%



2009 MAPP summary, FYE cohort, n=141



2009 MAPP Summary Civ II cohort; n=96

Summary of Proficiency Classifications
To show how many students are proficient at each level

New Jersey City University

Cohort Name: Combined

Abbreviated Form

Close Date: Combined

Test Description: Combined

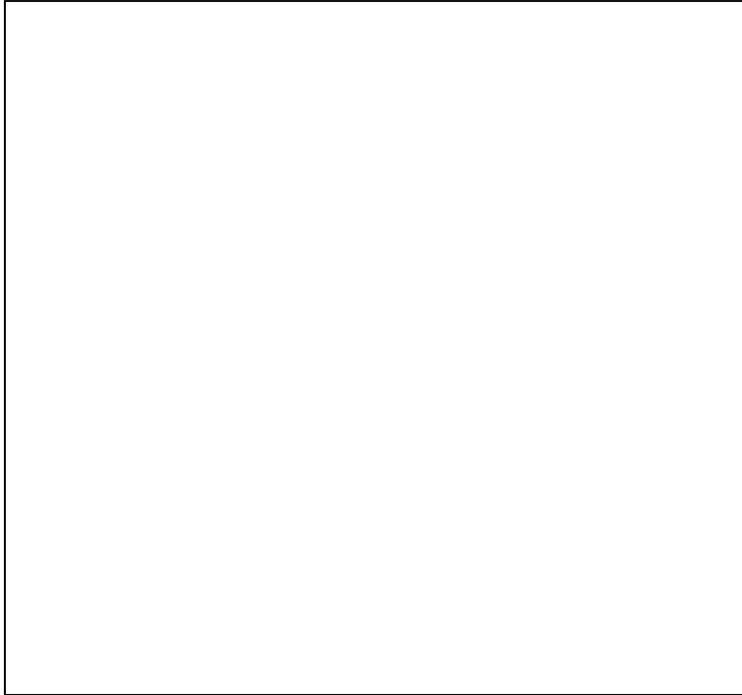
Student Level: All

Number of students tested: 76

Number of students included in these statistics: 64

Number of students excluded (see roster): 12

Skill Dimension	Proficiency Classification		
	Proficient	Marginal	Not Proficient
Reading, Level 1	53%	28%	19%
Reading, Level 2	27%	13%	61%
Critical Thinking	0%	13%	88%
Writing, Level 1	50%	31%	19%
Writing, Level 2	13%	28%	59%
Writing, Level 3	6%	17%	77%
Mathematics, Level 1	36%	27%	38%
Mathematics, Level 2	19%	17%	64%
Mathematics, Level 3	5%	9%	86%



2009 MAPP Summary, Senior cohort; n=76

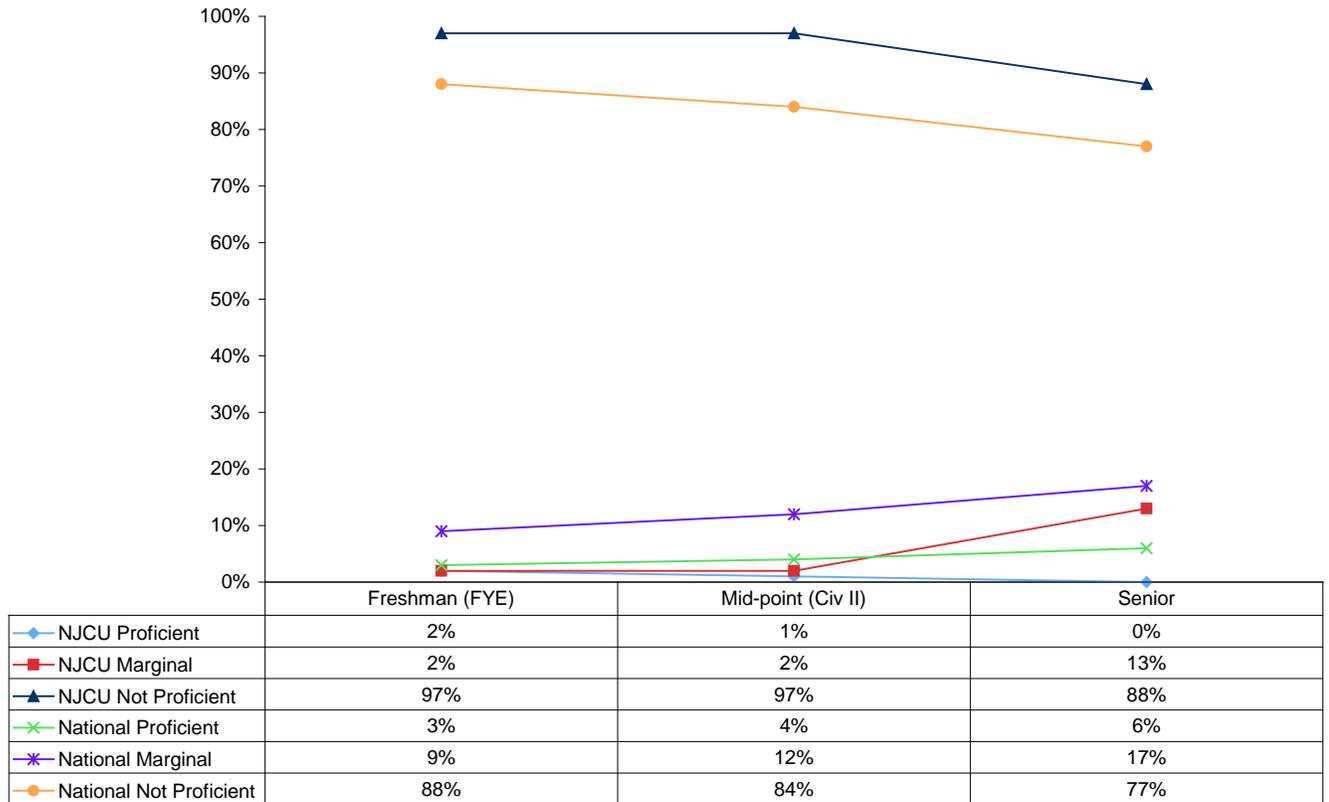
In summer 2009, Dr. John Grew, the (at present) Interim Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs/former Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences analyzed the MAPP data and submitted a report summarizing the data to Jo Bruno, the Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs. The committee concurred with that analysis and reproduces some of its findings below.⁴³ In comparing the scaled scores of NJCU students with their national cohort counterparts in the 2007 and 2009 testings, our students achieved lower scores in all academic and skill proficiency areas than those achieved by the cohort-counterparts nationally. NJCU seniors achieved lower scores in almost all academic and skill proficiency areas than those achieved by the freshman national cohort-counterparts (with the exceptions of Humanities and Critical Thinking). NJCU students achieved lower score increases in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by the national counterparts with the single exception of writing. If we compare the three NJCU cohorts, we find some encouraging news in that NJCU seniors achieved higher scores in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by our freshmen. On the other hand, the Civ II cohort achieved *lower* scores in all academic and skill proficiency areas (and total score) than those achieved by NJCU freshmen, with the exceptions of Math and Social Sciences. As we noted in the section on student surveys, the Civ II cohort was selected as a mid-point measure and included students who had taken courses within the GSP beyond their FYE course.

If we turn to the proficiency levels and compare NJCU students to their national cohort counterparts, NJCU students achieved lower proficiency levels in all areas measured than those achieved by their national cohort counterparts. At the same time,

⁴³ The full report is available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/20090803mappassessment.pdf>.

NJCU students achieved *higher non-proficiency levels* in all skill areas than those achieved by their national cohort counterparts. NJCU seniors achieved lower proficiency levels in many skill proficiency areas than those achieved by the freshman national cohort counterparts. The positive news in the data is that our students showed equal or higher proficiency increases in many skill areas – including Advanced Reading, Intermediate Writing, Advanced Writing, and Advanced Math – than those achieved by their national counterparts. In other words, while the overall level of our senior students compares more favorably to freshman students at our national cohort institutions, the intellectual growth (as measured in movement from Marginal/Non Proficient to Proficient) of our students from freshman year to graduation is at pace with or exceeds the development of students at our national cohort institutions. The graphs below compare the NJCU cohorts and the national cohort counterparts for each of the proficiencies measured in the 2009 MAPP.

Critical Thinking

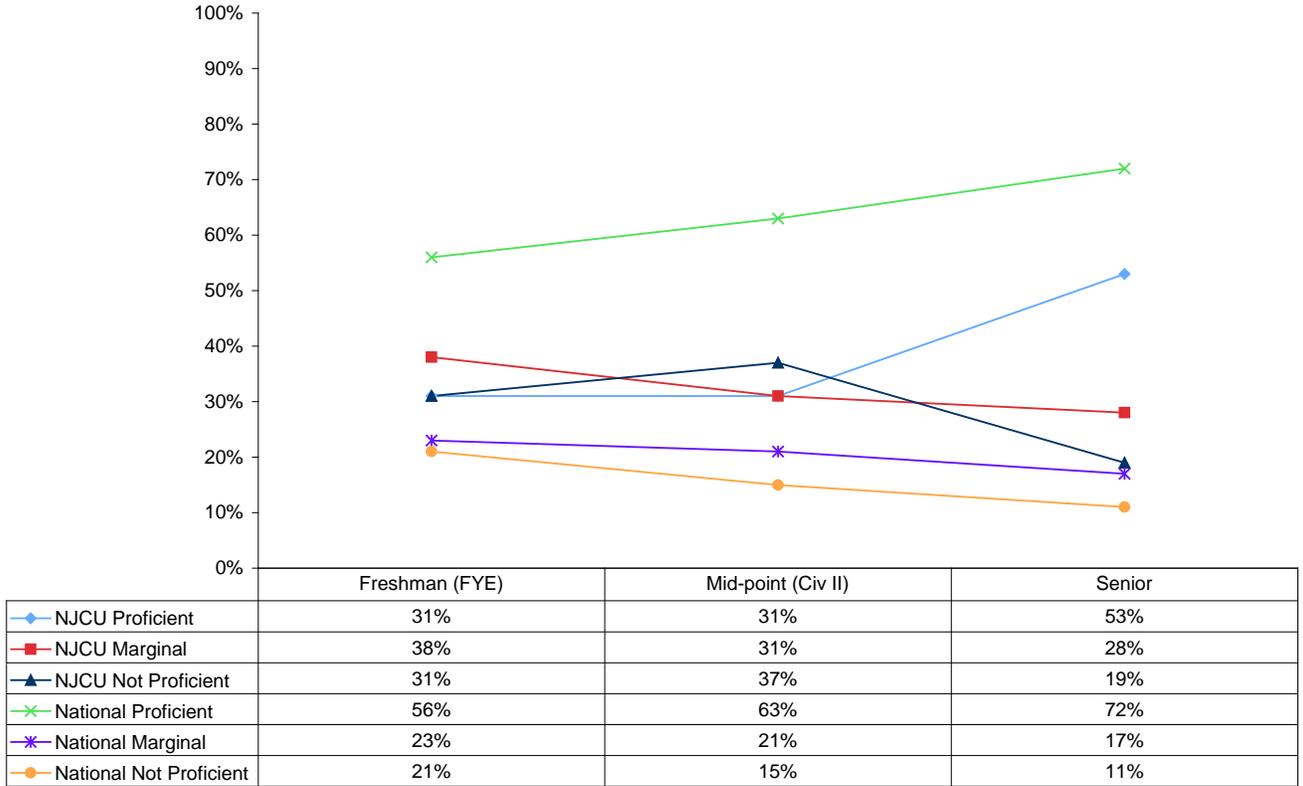


In this data set, we see that NJCU students track fairly closely to the national cohorts, but that at each data collection point our students trail the national cohort. So, for instance, while 88% of the freshman in the national cohort were scored as “not proficient” in critical thinking, the corresponding NJCU percentage was 97%. At the same time, while our senior “proficiency” score falls below the corresponding freshman score at the national comparison group, our senior “not proficient” score matches that of the freshman

national cohort exactly. The other trend to notice is that our proficiency scores actually *declined* over the three data collection points (although we do see improvement in moving from “not proficient” to “marginal.”).

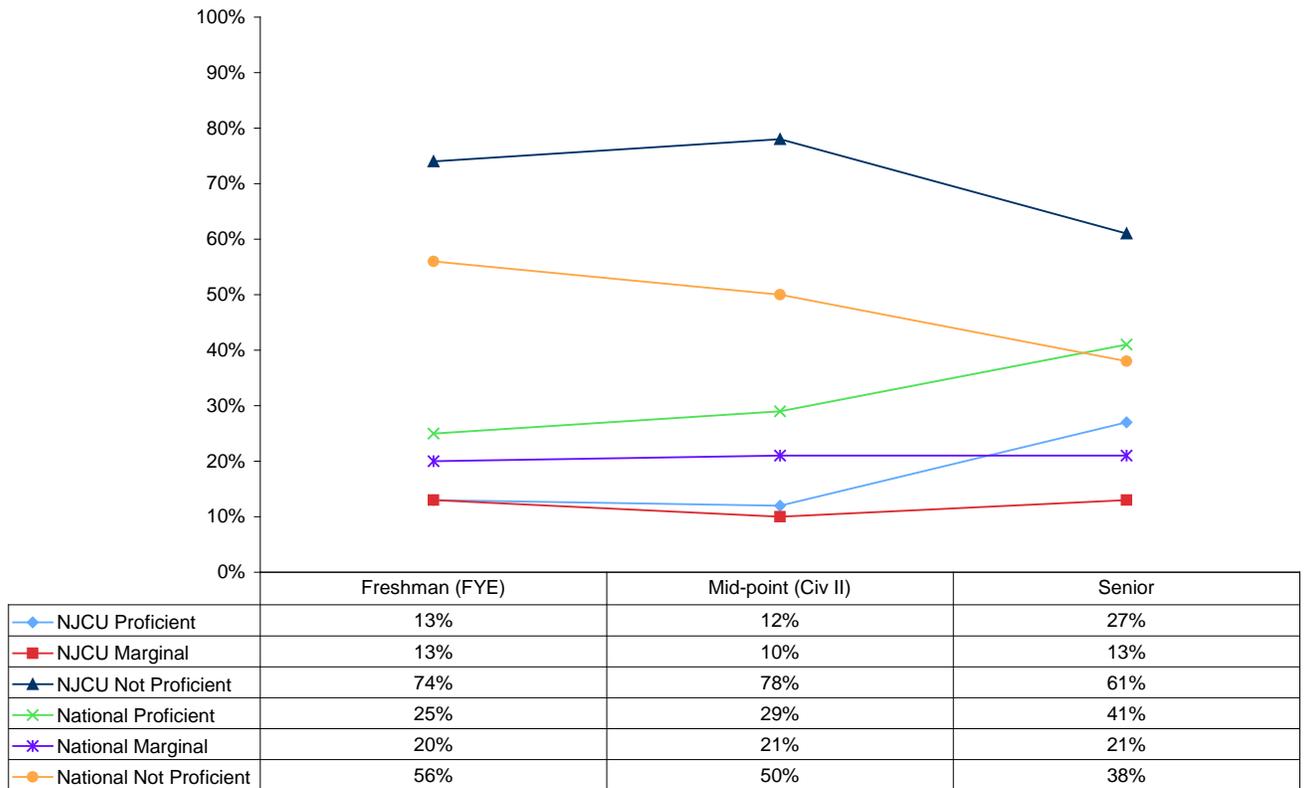
The next data set we examine relates to the Reading proficiencies.

Reading Lev I



2009 MAPP: Reading Level I

Read Lv II

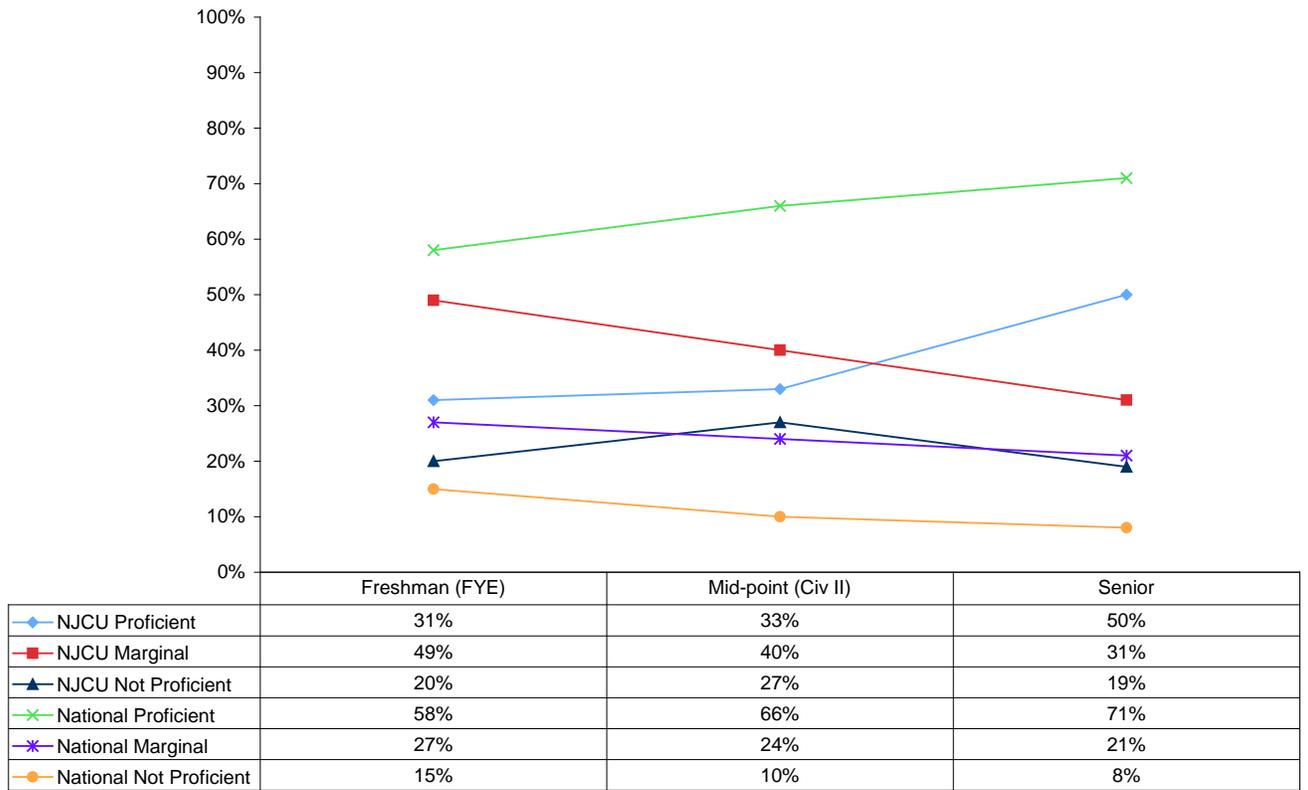


2009 MAPP: Reading Level II

Here we find a similar pattern with that discussed above relative to critical thinking in that once again we find NJCU students following national patterns (that is, Reading Level proficiency improves from freshman to senior year) but they trail their national comparison cohorts (again, our senior proficiency levels – 27% -- correspond quite closely with freshman proficiency levels – 25% -- at our national comparison cohorts). And once again we see our senior proficiency scores (this time in Reading Level I) are slightly lower than freshman proficiency scores in the national comparison cohort.

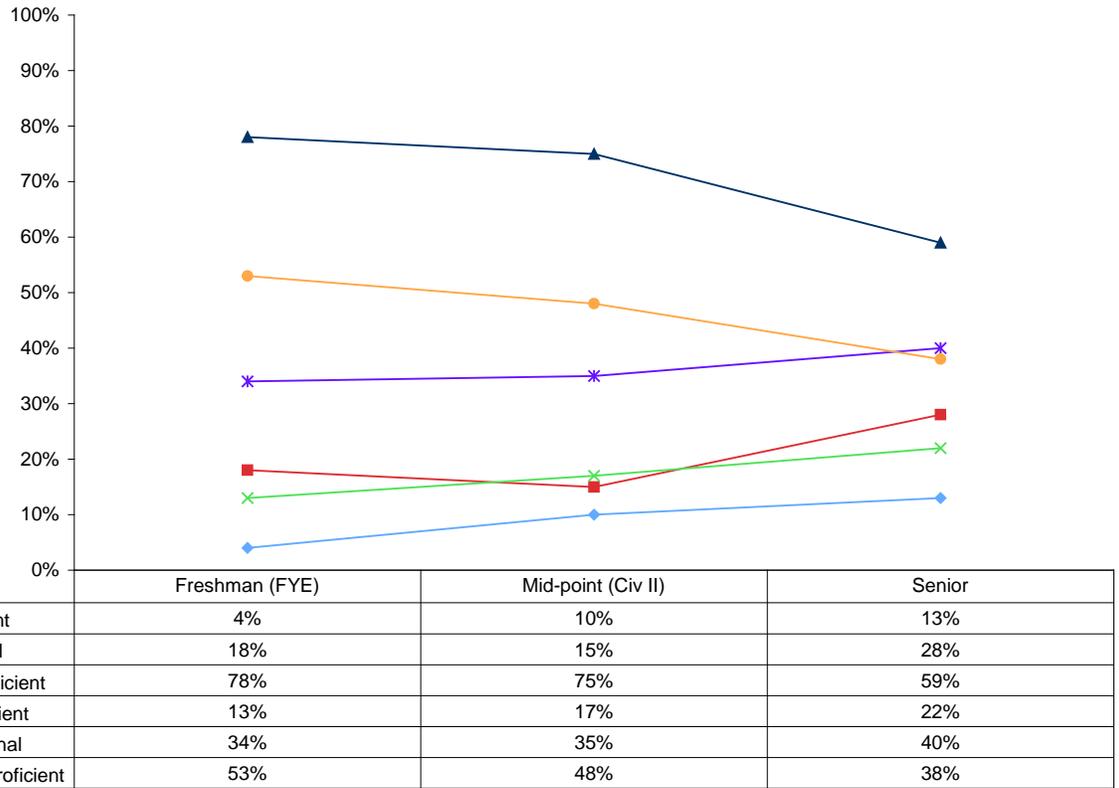
The next data set examines the writing proficiency scores, and these data follow the same overall pattern we have already described, but with two notable differences. In Writing Level I, our students showed more growth than their national comparison cohorts between the mid point and the senior year testing. Yet part of that growth should no doubt be attributed to the other distinctive feature in the data, and that is that our mid point results were so low (indeed, our midpoint “not proficient” results were higher than the freshman results for this variable).

Writing Level I



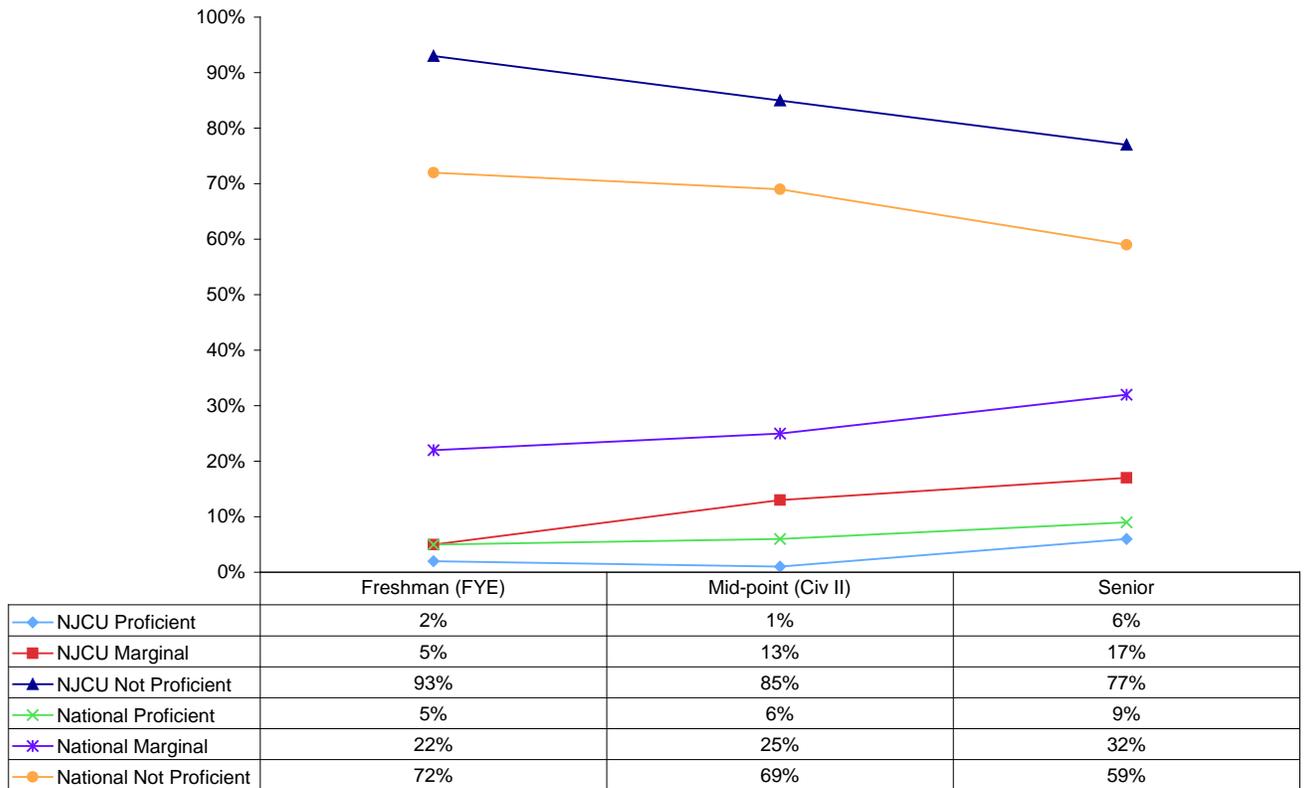
2009 MAPP: Writing Level I

Writing Level II



2009 MAPP: Writing Level II

Writing Level III



2009 MAPP: Writing Level III

Notice that in each of the data sets presented above for Reading and Writing we once again find NJCU seniors achieving proficiency scores that are closely aligned to those of freshman students in the national comparison cohort. But the data for the Writing Level II and III scores are striking for the high levels of non proficiency (e.g., 93% of freshmen and 77% of seniors in Writing III).

The final data presented in the graphs below relate to the Math proficiency scores. The first presents Math Level I, followed by Math Level II. Notice that in both levels, senior cohorts again have lower proficiency scores than the freshman cohorts of the national comparison groups (36% vs. 48% for Math Level I, and 19% vs. 21% for Math Level II). However, as noted above, our students showed greater improvement from the midpoint to senior year than their national comparison groups (17% vs. 8% in Math Level I, and 11% vs. 8% in Math Level II).

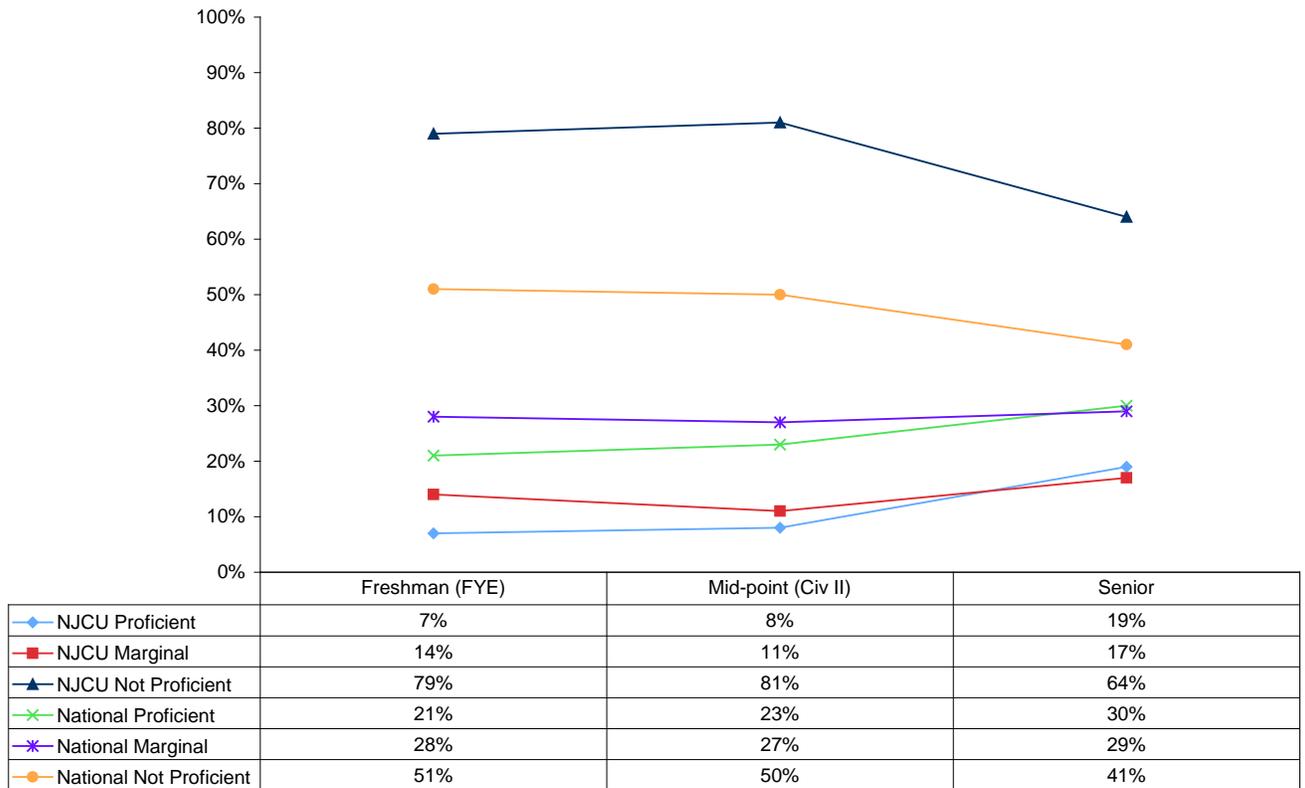
Math Level I



	Freshman (FYE)	Mid-point (Civ II)	Senior
◆ NJCU Proficient	21%	19%	36%
■ NJCU Marginal	34%	36%	27%
▲ NJCU Not Proficient	45%	45%	38%
× National Proficient	48%	50%	58%
* National Marginal	28%	28%	26%
● National Not Proficient	24%	22%	16%

2009 MAPP: Math Level I

Math Level II

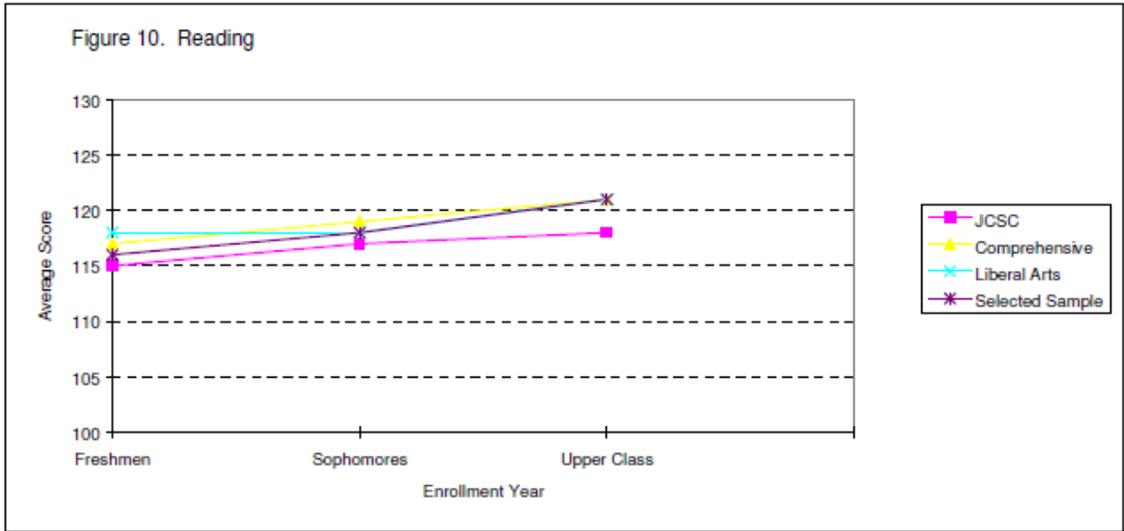


2009 MAPP: Math Level II

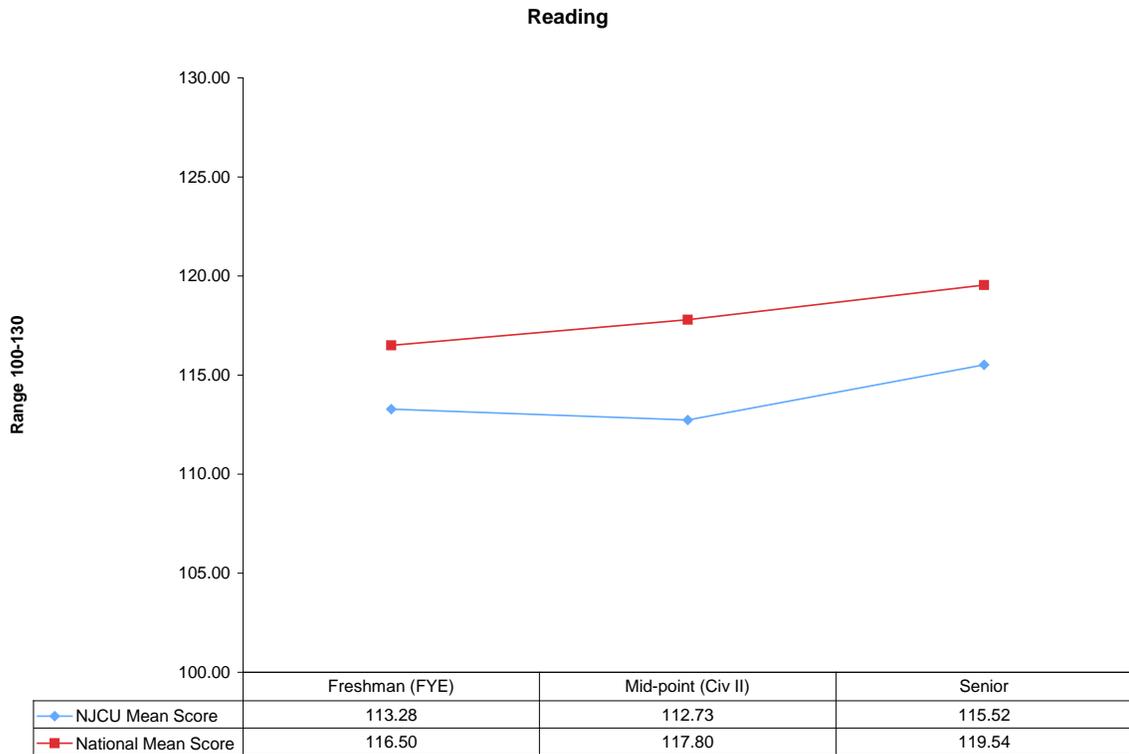
The Committee was also able to compare these most recent data to similar testing administered to students in the pre-1999 General Studies program.⁴⁴ Then, as now, our students performed at levels lower than their national cohort counterparts. What is disconcerting, though, is the fact that the scores for our students do not appear to have appreciably changed after a decade under the current General Studies Program.⁴⁵ Inasmuch as the current GSP was introduced to improve the quality of education and learning of our students, we believe that these data indicate that the current GSP has not been successful.

⁴⁴ The graphs reproduced below depicting data from the 1997 Academic Profiles test are taken from the report of the 1998 Senate Ad Hoc Committee’s empirical evaluation of the then current general studies program. The full report is available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/empiricalstudy1997.pdf>.

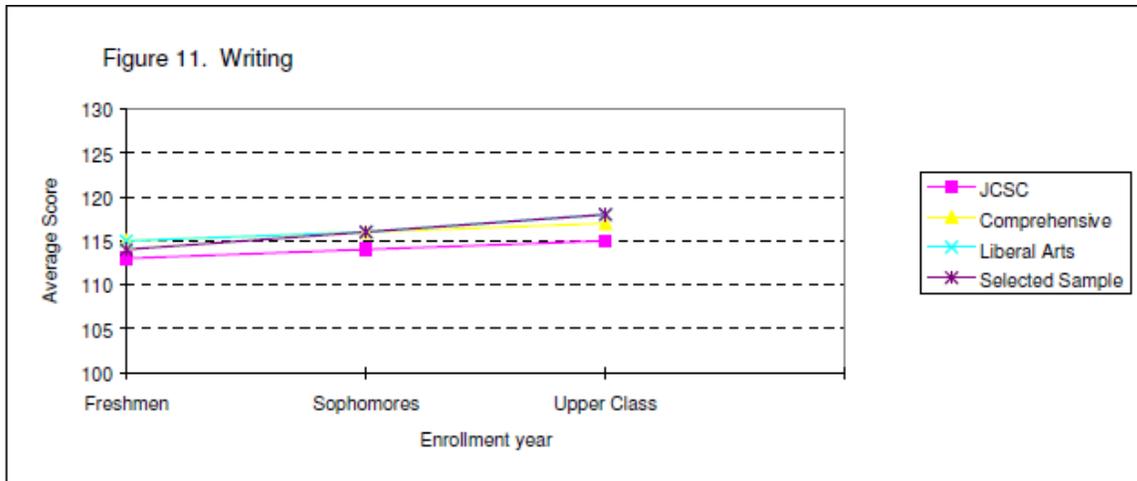
⁴⁵ The 1997 Academic Profiles test was a precursor to the MAPP. Both were developed and administered by ETS, and according to ETS, the MAPP is “identical” to the 2001 Academic Profile and similar to that used in 1990; see Young, p. 4.



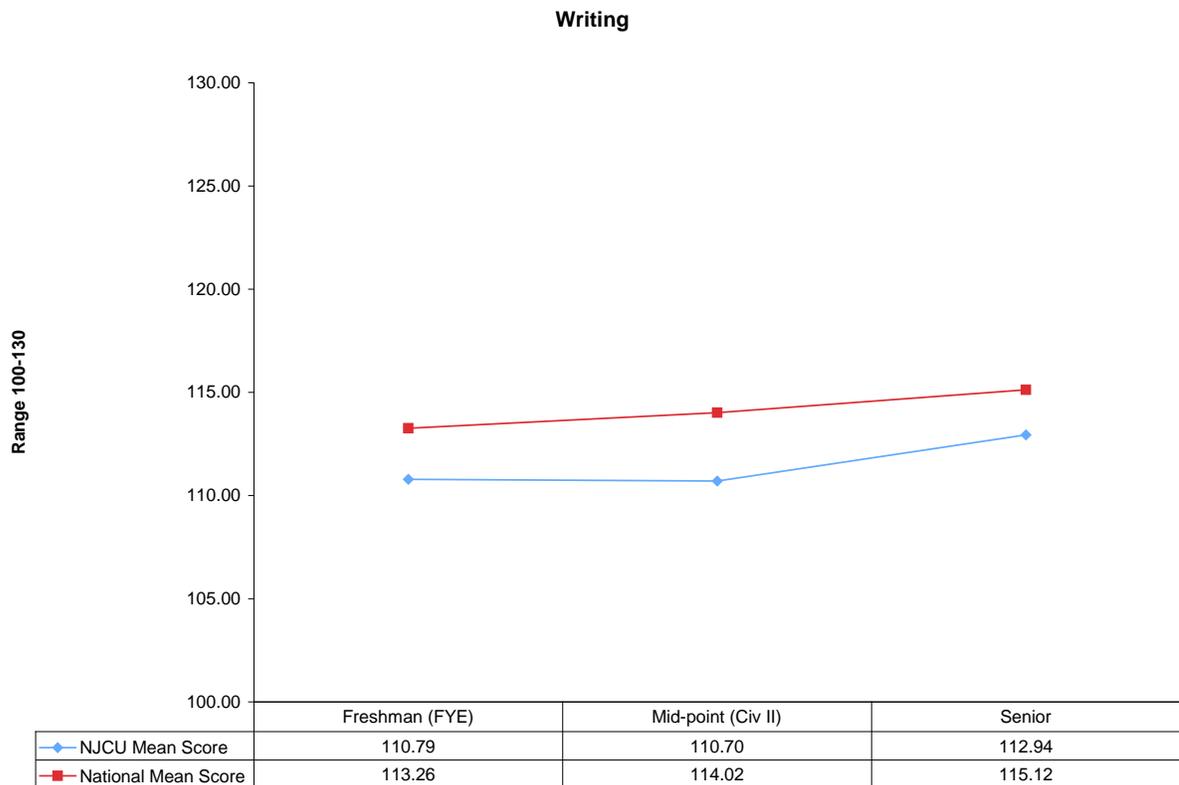
1997 Academic Profiles Data: Reading



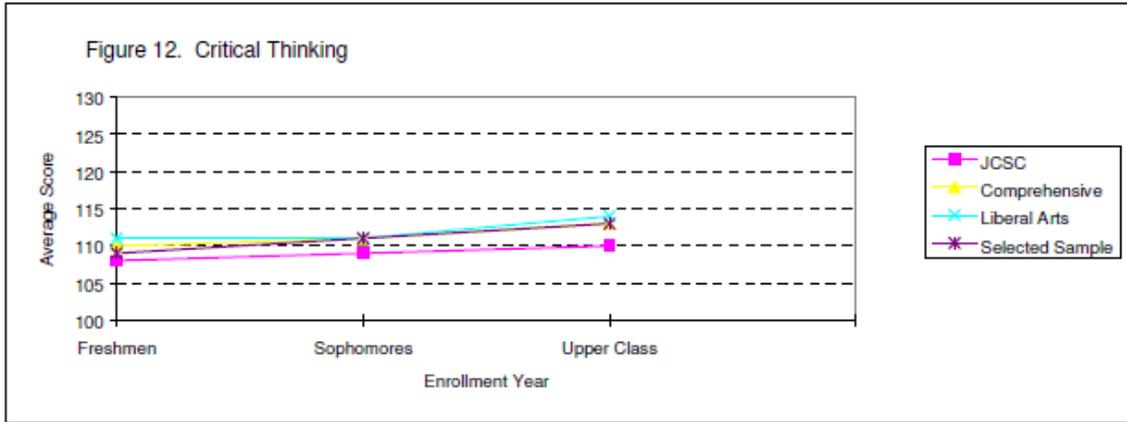
2009 MAPP Data: Reading



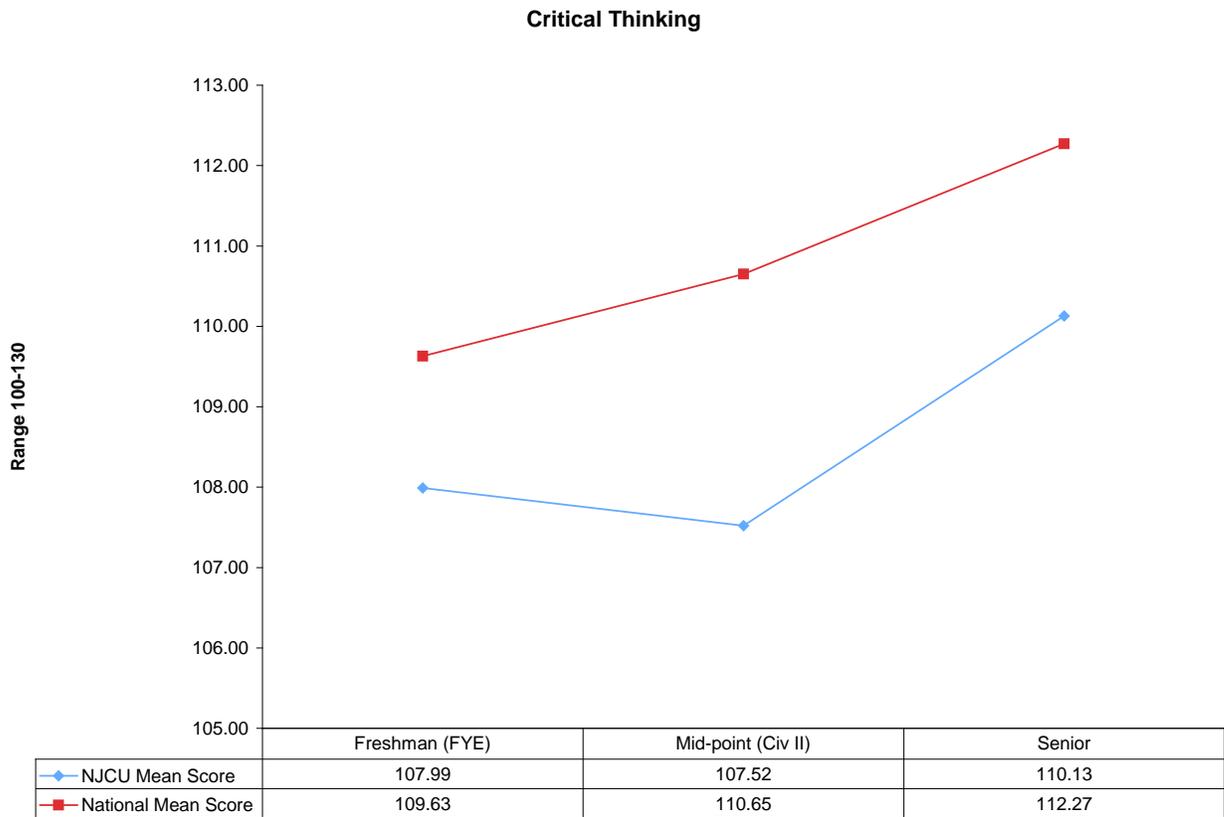
1997 Academic Profiles Data: Writing



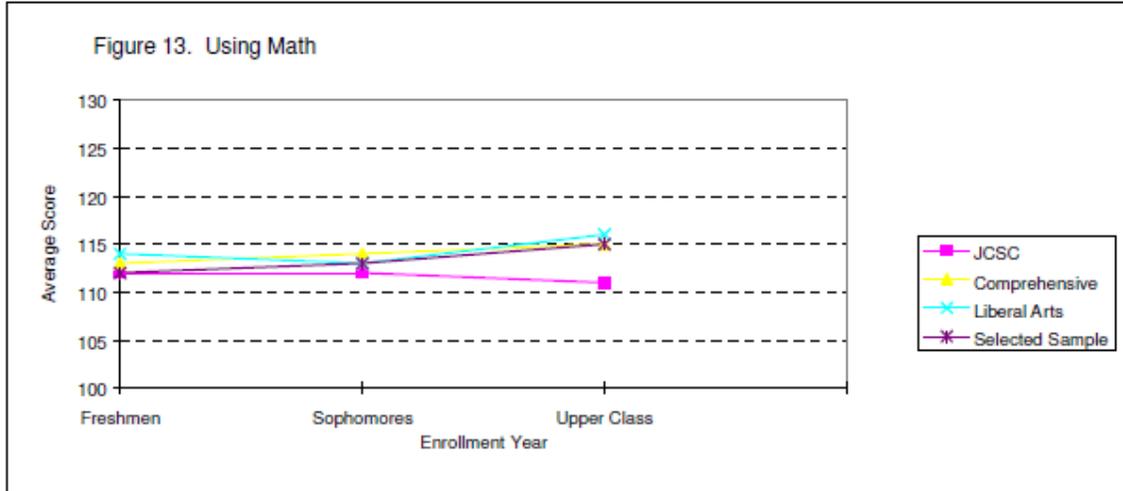
2009 MAPP Data: Writing



1997 Academic Profiles Data: Critical Thinking

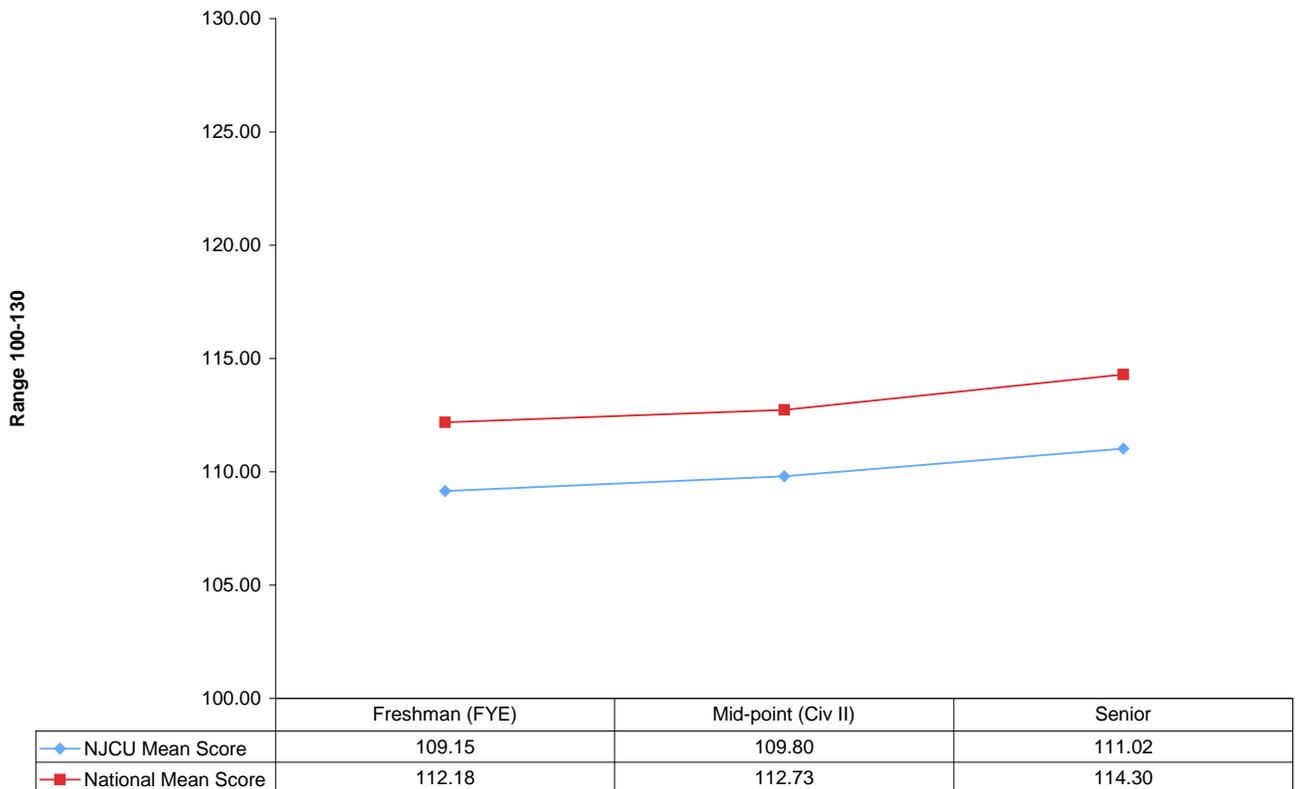


2009 MAPP Data: Critical Thinking



1997 Academic Profiles Data: Math

Math



2009 MAPP Data: Math

The committee recognizes that the 2007 and the 2009 MAPP tests are not without problems. For instance, the senior cohort was missing from the 2007 testing, and in any

event the testing represents discrete testing points rather than a true longitudinal study. Finally, it is unclear what motivations students have in taking these tests and that fact should be taken into account when evaluating the performance results reported here.⁴⁶ Yet similar concerns would be applicable to the 1997 tests, and insofar as the data from the 1997 Academic Profiles tests was sufficient to warrant review and reform of the General Studies program then in place, the Committee believes that the results from the 2007 and 2009 MAPP tests carry the same weight. The Committee believes that we need to refashion a general studies program that is mindful of the skills and talents that our students possess and that better prepares students for successful academic and professional development. The data also provide another strong reminder of the need to develop and maintain a true longitudinal assessment study so as to better monitor the success (or lack thereof) in any general studies program.

VI. Observations and Recommendations

A). Reduce the Number of General Studies Degree Credits Required

General Education, according to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, is “the part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities.” Notice that general studies is *a part of* liberal education, it is not synonymous with “liberal arts” or a “liberal arts education.” This is an important distinction to keep in mind. The 1999 proposal, perhaps reflecting prevailing research at that moment, conflates these two and equates “general studies” with “liberal education.”⁴⁷ This definitional decision helped to shape the overall structure and size of the general studies program in that, unsurprisingly, any department connected to “liberal education” or the “liberal arts” broadly construed could justifiably make a case for its courses to be included in the general studies program. In other words, the perhaps inevitable result of such a definitional decision is creating a general studies program most notable for its sheer size.

As part of the Middle States self study, the Working Group responsible for reviewing the University’s general education offerings spent considerable time and effort examining the General Studies Program, and much of the ensuing discussion derives from that self study report. At present, students are required to take 66 credits of general studies courses; a number equal to just over half (51.5%) of the total credits necessary for graduation. Those of us who have been teaching under and working with the current program for many years may not fully appreciate how large that number appears, but to outside observers it is almost immediately apparent. Indeed, one of the external

⁴⁶The gist of the motivation explanation seems to be that our students probably know the information being asked of them, but choose not to take the test seriously and so deliberately select incorrect answers. Of course the same motivation issue could be raised with any student group, including those in the national comparison cohorts, in which case we would need to determine why our students “tanked” the exam with much higher frequency than their peers at these other institutions. Of course the alternative explanation, and one pointed to in the report to the VP for Academic Affairs cited above, is that the results conform to widely held anecdotal impressions about the skill levels of our students.

⁴⁷ See Proposal, especially pages 2-3 where a series of bullet points begins with “Liberal education...”

consultants visiting for a departmental program review pointed both to the extraordinary size of our general studies program and its impact on our major programs:

“At present, NJCU students face a sixty credit [actually a 66 credit] General Education requirement, surely one of the largest such commitments in any American college. The devotion of so much curricular space to General Education has drained the departmental courses and made it difficult for any of the departments to deepen their offerings to students and to present them in any kind of developmental sequence.”⁴⁸

To put the NJCU program in context, we begin with the Middle States recommendation that institutions should have at least 30 credits of general education (no upper limit is mentioned in their literature).⁴⁹ We also note that the general education recommendation from the New Jersey President’s Council covering New Jersey’s Community Colleges is for a 45 credit program.⁵⁰ We had neither the time nor the resources to test the claim that the NJCU program is one of the largest in the country, but the table presented as Appendix A indicates where NJCU stands in relation to the other colleges in New Jersey and some others in the region that might be migration destinations for our students. Of the 36 colleges canvassed, NJCU is the only institution whose general education requirements comprise more than half of the degree credits needed for graduation. The only other institutions at 50% are Thomas Edison (the “distance learning” college in New Jersey), Caldwell College⁵¹ (a private Catholic college) and Kutztown University in Pennsylvania. If we confine the canvas to New Jersey’s public colleges and universities (see Appendix B), NJCU is the only institution whose general studies program comprises over 50% of the total credits needed for graduation, with the aforementioned Thomas Edison (50%) the only other institution at 50% of the total. And while William Paterson is the next closest at 48.3%, the mean average for the public universities in New Jersey is 36%. That sets NJCU significantly apart from our peer institutions.

Of course graduation from NJCU requires more than completion of the general studies program and accumulating a total of 128 credits. We also require that students complete at least one major course of study. In many majors, the “actual” credits for graduation – general studies plus major – is significantly higher than the published 128 figure. As the table in Appendix C indicates, the William J. Maxwell College of Arts and Sciences offers 51 possible degrees (BA, BS, BFA, plus teacher certification programs; and not counting special “concentrations” within degrees), and of that total, 19 (or 37%) require more than 128 credits to complete, and another one requires exactly 128 credits,

⁴⁸ Lackey, Douglas P. 2009. “Outside Evaluation of NJCU Philosophy and Religion Department: Site Visit 17 March 2009,” p. 5.

⁴⁹ Middle States Commission on Higher Education. 2006. Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation. Available online at: <http://www.msche.org/publications/CHX06060320124919.pdf>.

⁵⁰ See “Comprehensive State Wide Transfer Agreement,” p. 4. Available here: <http://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/PDFs/XferAgreementOct08.pdf>

⁵¹ The Caldwell number is inflated a bit since its general education program includes 9 theology credits that are not part of the public university programs.

which means that 39% of our major degree tracks require 128 or more credits to complete. Within the Deborah Cannon Partridge Wolfe College of Education, students interested in teacher certification are required to pair a certification program (for example, early, elementary, or secondary education) with a major in the College of Arts and Sciences, and those instances are included in the previous calculations.⁵² If we eliminate the teacher certification degrees from the total in the College of Arts and Sciences, then we are left with 36 major degree tracks in the College, with 10 majors (27%) exceeding the 128 credit threshold. The actual number is probably higher since several majors (most notably Chemistry, Biology, Physics) require their majors to take specific general studies courses (Area A primarily) to fulfill part of the major requirements. While that could theoretically save some credits for the student, it would do so only if the student came to the major *before* taking any other Area A courses. The situation is more extreme with majors in the College of Professional Studies (Appendix D), where we find eleven of the sixteen degree tracks (69%) exceeding the 128 credit total.

The last point we would like to note concerns the situation confronting transfer students to the university, especially those with an Associate's Degree. The original 1999 proposal mandated that transfer student transcripts be reviewed on a course-by-course basis to ensure that they "match a specific NJCU course in the University's General Studies Program" in order to receive general studies credits. In its report, the committee also recommended that an ad-hoc committee be created "to review all transfer credit policies following approval of the revised program."⁵³ Initially, this would have resulted in a situation where transfer students would have likely had to enroll in additional general studies courses beyond the other introductory level courses they may have already had at their previous institution but which were determined not to have the requisite correspondence with an NJCU general studies course. We were unable to determine if the ad hoc committee referred to in the document was ever created or if it ever met, but what we do know is that the Comprehensive Statewide Transfer Agreement adopted by the New Jersey President's Council (September 2008) mandates that students transferring from a 2-year to a 4-year institution with a completed A.A. or A.S. degree are exempt from general education requirements.⁵⁴ What this means, of course, is that students who begin their career at NJCU are at a marked disadvantage compared to transfer students in terms of access to a major and timely degree completion (as noted, the community college recommendations in New Jersey are for a 45 credit general studies program, so the exemption means not only that transfer students enter their major study earlier than their NJCU counterparts, but they immediately have an extra 21 credits to allocate and use to supplement their major course of study).

It is the consensus of this committee, as it was with the committee in 2007, and of the Middle States self study group, that the current program dedicates too many undergraduate credits to general studies and that the credit hours for completing the

⁵² On the other hand, a student interested in pursuing certification in special education would be adding a 47 credit program on top of the 60 credit general education program and whatever major requirements may exist. The totals in the table in Appendix C do not include calculations for special education certification. That would mean adding 15 more credits to the teacher certification degree totals indicated in the table.

⁵³ Proposal, p. 10.

⁵⁴ See "Comprehensive Statewide Transfer Agreement," Section A.3. Available here: <http://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/PDFs/XferAgreementOct08.pdf>

program need to be dramatically reduced.⁵⁵ The committee also believes that the university should explore the expansion and incorporation of multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary courses as a potential means to preserve the breadth and reduce the size of the general studies program.

B) Reduce the Number of 100 Level and Introductory Courses Involved

Much as one could have predicted the size of the GSP based on the definitional premises of the document creating the GSP, so too could one have predicted the level of courses offered by the structure of the program created by that document. That is, once the program established a structure giving students a choice among departments arrayed in specific areas, the departments in those areas were effectively competing against each other for students to fill their classes. Each of the departments confronted a Prisoners' Dilemma situation when deciding what level of courses to offer. That is, departments faced the choice of offering meatier and more challenging upper level courses that risked alienating students interested in easier fare, or offering easier introductory level courses that would likely attract more students. If we assume that departments need to attract students to their offerings, then we can construct a game matrix that looks like this:

Choice	100 Level	Upper Level
100 Level	3,3	1,4
Upper Level	4,1	2,2

Where 1-4 represent rank ordering of outcomes from most preferred to least preferred:

- 1 = department offers 100 level courses while other departments in area offer upper level courses (this is most preferred since it would drive more students to the department)
- 2 = all departments in the area offer upper level courses
- 3 = all departments offer 100 level courses
- 4 = department offers upper level while other departments in area offer 100 level (this is least preferred since the department would lose students to the easier courses in the other departments)

The first number in the pair refers to the Row Player's preference schedule, and the second number refers to the Column Player's preference schedule

Given this preference schedule and not knowing what the other departments were going to do, the rational choice for any department would be to offer 100 level courses. Since no department could be certain as to what other departments were going to do with their course offerings, each department could calculate that whatever the other departments were going to offer, it would fare better by offering introductory level courses.⁵⁶ What makes these public choice decisions so vexing is that there is a mutually advantageous outcome (all choosing upper level) had the departments cooperated more. But as is

⁵⁵ See Dean Fiol-Matta's report to the President's Cabinet, p. 7. Available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/lfmreporttocab.pdf>

⁵⁶ A table listing all of the General Studies area courses by name and course number by departments is available here: <http://web.njcu.edu/dept/cas/Uploads/genstudiescoursescurrent.htm>.

always the case in a Prisoners' Dilemma situation, that cooperative outcome is unstable and any department could do immediately better by switching to 100 level courses.

Currently there are 123 courses included in the area distributions of the General Studies Program. Of those 123, 104 (84.5%) are offered at the 100 level, 18 (14.6%) at the 200 level, and one (1%) at the 300 level. To put it another way, there are as many 100 level courses in Area A (Natural Sciences) as there are 200 level courses in the entire general studies curriculum. As the table below indicates, Area D (Humanities) lacks any upper level courses, and Areas A, B2 (Social Science Group 2: Geography, Psychology, and Sociology/Anthropology) each have just one upper level course in their offerings. It is only in Area F (Quantitative and Computer Literacy) where we find a majority of the courses offered at the upper level (Area F is also the only area with a 300 level course, the Geoscience department's GIS II course; 30% of the courses in Area B1: Economics and Political Science are 200 level). Given the profusion of introductory level courses, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the courses (78%) also lack either prerequisites or co-requisites (23 courses, or 19%, include prerequisites; 4 courses, or 3%, include co-requisites).

Course Levels By Area			
Area	100	200	300
A. Natural Sciences	19	1	0
B. Social Sciences			
Group 1	7	3	0
Group 2	11	1	0
C. Arts & Media	14	1	0
D. Humanities	15	0	0
E. Multicultural Disciplines & Languages	31	5	0
F. Quantitative & Computer Literacy	7	7	1

This heavy presence of 100 level courses is problematic for two reasons. First, the 1999 Proposal mandated that “In addition to the distribution of courses among the areas, all students will be required to earn at least 6 credits in courses that have prerequisites. Those 6 credits can be earned in any one or more of the various areas. Departments are therefore encouraged to include on their list of area offerings courses that have prerequisite requirements.”⁵⁷ The logic of the Prisoner’s Dilemma described above helps explain why this “encouragement” was insufficient to ensure that departments would offer upper level courses. As we have seen, departments chose not to heed this recommendation; and this requirement, like the writing intensive requirement or the

⁵⁷ Proposal, p. 9.

inclusion of Peer Assistants in the FYE sections, seems to have simply faded away and never been implemented nor enforced. Second, as the Middle States Self Study report noted, given that the General Studies Program comprises more than half of the credits required for graduation, and that the vast majority of courses in the GSP are 100-level courses, and that many majors require additional introductory level courses as part of the major, it is not only possible but likely that a student enrolled at NJCU will complete a majority of his or her university course work with 100-level courses. The tables below show the percentage of 100 level courses students could theoretically take in each major in the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Professional Studies (no majors in the College of Education require or allow for additional 100 level courses) and if they completed their 66 credit general studies requirements at the 100 level. The calculations in each case were derived from information in the 2007-2010 NJCU Undergraduate Catalog and based on the assumption that a student was interested in taking as many 100 level courses as possible to fulfill the major degree requirements.

100 Level Course Credits by Major

College of Arts and Sciences

	Required	Possible Electives	Total	Percent of Degree
Art				
BA	18	3	21	67.97%
BFA	18		18	65.63%
Biology				
BA	3		3	53.91%
BS	3		3	53.91%
Chemistry				
BS	3		3	53.91%
Computer Science				
BS	6		6	56.25%
Economics				
BA		6	6	56.25%
English				
BA	0	0	0	51.56%
Geoscience/Geography				
BA	9		9	58.59%
BS	9		9	58.59%
History				
BA	3	9	12	60.94%
Mathematics				
BA	6	6	12	60.94%
Media Arts				
BA	6	6	12	60.94%
Modern Languages				
BA	0	0	0	51.56%
Music, Dance, and Theatre				
BA (No specialization)	17		17	64.84%
Philosophy				
BA	12	6	18	65.63%
Physics				
BA	8		8	57.81%
BS	8		8	57.81%
Political Science				
BA	3	6	9	58.59%
Psychology				
BA	3	3	6	56.25%
Sociology/Anthropology				
BA	9	6	15	63.28%

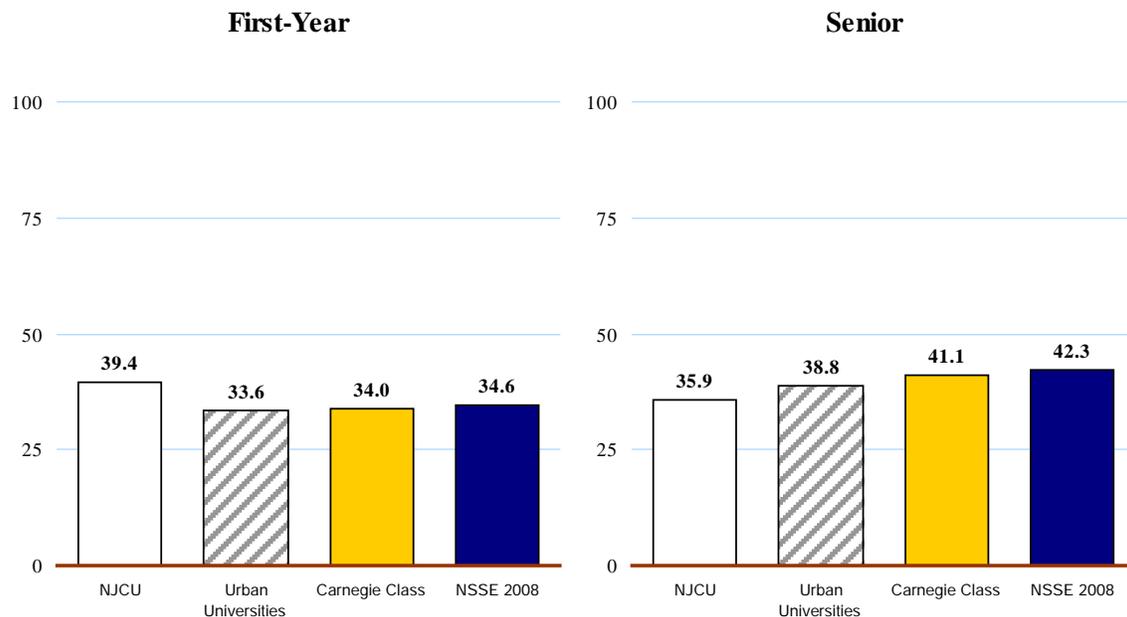
Introductory Course Credits by Major

College of Professional Studies

	Required	Possible Electives	Total	Percent of Degree
Business Administration				
BS	0	0	0	51.56%
Criminal Justice				
BS	6	3	9	58.59%
Fire Science				
BS	3		3	53.91%
Health Sciences				
BS	3		3	53.91%
Nursing				
BS		0	0	51.56%
Professional Security Studies				
BS	6	6	12	60.94%

The preponderance of introductory courses (either 100 level or without prerequisite) also helps put the results of the NSSE data in better context. We do not believe it is too farfetched to see a connection between the declining levels of student satisfaction in their studies and the low level of courses comprising the bulk of those studies. Two more data sets from the NSSE are instructive here. The first is a composite score relating to Student-Faculty interaction that reveals the familiar NJCU pattern; early results comparing favorably with our peer institutions coupled with significant trailing by senior year. The questions in this composite score ranged from the mundane (conversations with faculty about grades) to more advanced (collaborating on research projects):

- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)
- Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance
- Worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements

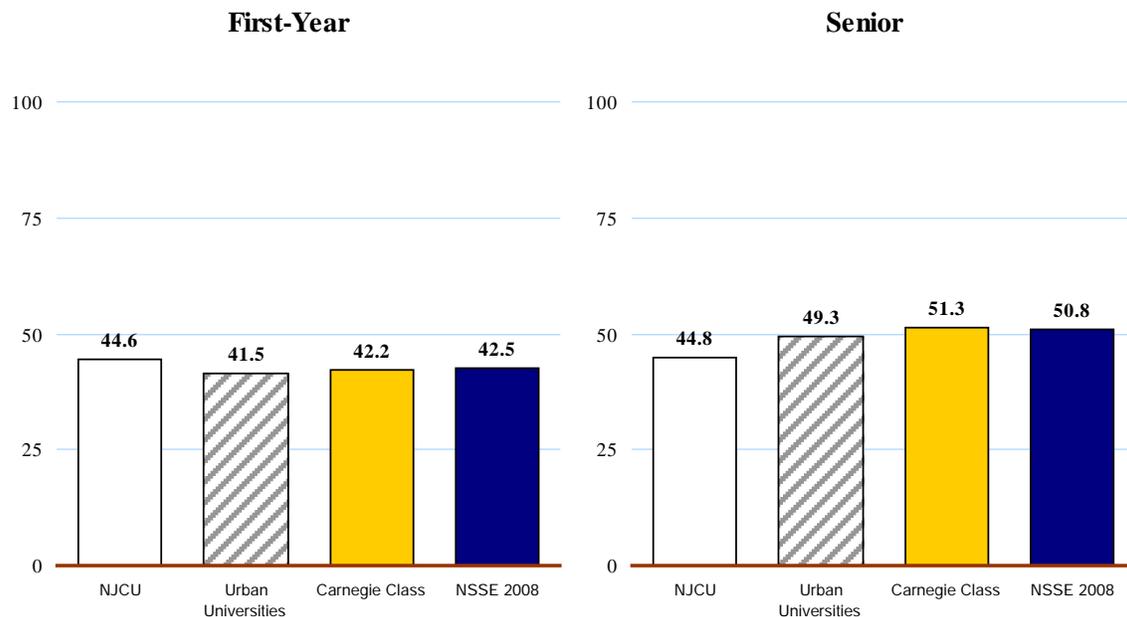


Student-Faculty Interaction, NSSE Benchmark Comparisons Report, 2008

The second set is a composite score for Active and Collaborative Learning. This composite score was derived from questions covering the following topics:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
- Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

In reviewing the results, notice that the scores for our freshman and senior cohort are essentially identical. Surely part of this can be explained by the fact that NJCU students take so many introductory level courses throughout their undergraduate career that they are missing opportunities to work with faculty members in more meaningful projects and capacities.



Active and Collaborative Learning, NSSE Benchmark Comparisons Report, 2008

It is the consensus of this committee, as it was with the 2007 committee and the Middle States Self Study, that the general studies program should be revised to include more upper level courses, or at least courses with prerequisites. The committee is aware that this will have to be accomplished within the strictures of the Comprehensive State Wide Transfer Agreement, guidelines that did not exist when the 1999 program was being developed or when the 2007 committee made its recommendations. Nonetheless we believe it would be beneficial to our students to have a program that could somehow incorporate a more sequenced or “tiered” structure.

C) Improve the Assessment Protocol and Oversight

The 1999 General Studies Coordinating Committee was mindful of the need to have an assessment protocol for the new program and, as noted, the proposal recommended a program to assess the new curriculum. However, the GSCC as it met over the years expressed frustration with the assessment process. The 2007 report to Dean Fiol-Matta, which she subsequently relayed to the President’s cabinet, noted that the original proposal included nearly 50 different learning outcome objectives for the program, a number that was much too unwieldy to assess given the resources available. Clearly, part of the problem with assessment of the program was the state of assessment in general at the university; that is, at that point assessment was still, if not in its infancy surely its toddler years, in terms of development. Over the past five years the University has made great strides in terms of educating faculty about assessment and in incorporating assessment into departmental program reviews.

In addition to the riot of learning outcomes expected for the GSP, another difficulty in assessing the GSP itself, as noted in the Middle States Self Study report, is that because of its size, many students are taking general studies courses from enrollment to graduation such that it becomes difficult if not impossible to distinguish between those

skills and competencies developed through exposure to the GSP and those which are acquired in major or elective courses. Any new program, as Interim Dean John Grew noted in his report to Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs Jo Bruno, needs to incorporate assessment measures (however they come to be defined) more directly and more immediately in the courses which comprise the GSP. Furthermore, the courses in the GSP need to be structured in such a way that the competencies and learning outcomes expected of the GSP are given the same attention as the academic content knowledge for the course. As we saw in the syllabus review, courses rarely acknowledge or publicize the fact that they are part of a coherent program and that that program is designed to develop specific learning outcomes and competencies. The committee recommends that assessment protocol move apace with any overall reform efforts to ensure that assessment is closely integrated into any new program that emerges

D) Sharpen the Cohesion of Courses Included in Area Groupings

In 2007, the General Studies Coordinating Committee recommended to Dean Fiol-Matta, who in turn recommended to the President's Cabinet, that the area designations need to be revisited and redefined so that students (and faculty) can better perceive the specific learning outcomes for a particular area. As her report noted, as presently constituted, it is unclear what courses in an area share beyond disciplinary grouping. The current committee would extend that and argues that within certain areas – particularly Area E, or Areas B1 and B2 – it is unclear what unifies the courses in the area beyond convenience or “turf.” To take the example of Areas B1 and B2, what academic or pedagogical reason can account for separating Sociology/Anthropology, Cultural Geography, and Psychology from Political Science and Economics? Why is History in the humanities grouping rather than the social science grouping? And if History is in the humanities, why is Modern Languages not also there? Or Women's and Gender Studies? Or African and African-American Studies, etc. The point we would like to make is that the 1999 proposal provides no guidance as to what each of the area designations mean, nor what learning outcomes students are expected to attain in courses grouped in a given area.⁵⁸ The committee strongly recommends that any revised general studies program provide specific learning objectives and learning outcomes for whatever area designations are created as well as the underlying rationale for the courses arrayed under a particular area designation.

⁵⁸ The lone area with any sort of definitional identity in the 1999 proposal is Area F: Quantitative. Unlike the other 5 areas, Area F allows for courses to be included from departments not assigned to the area. Departments other than Math and Computer Science can propose courses to this Area, course proposals which would be reviewed by a committee consisting of a representative from Math, Computer Science, and a third member selected by the Math and Computer Science representatives from a pool of candidates submitted by other departments in the CAS. Presumably the point of the committee review was to ensure that the non-Math and Computer Science courses met criteria for that area. No other area had a similar screening process. Indeed, neither the Self Study Working Group tasked with reviewing the General Studies program nor the GSCC has been able to determine if the departments in a given area have ever met to discuss the learning outcomes, objectives, and competencies expected for courses in their area. For that matter, it is unclear if departments discuss internally the aims and objectives of the general studies courses they are offering. See proposal, Appendix 4, p. 22 for a discussion of the Area F guidelines.

E) Tighten the Connection between General Studies and the Vision 2010 Plan

As we noted in the opening section of this report, the University wide learning goals, and the mission and vision statements developed and integrated into the University's Vision 2010 Plan came several years after the adoption of the 1999 General Studies Program. The committee believes that a stronger effort should be made to bring the general studies program into closer alignment with the Vision 2010 document. In particular, a tighter connection between the General Studies program and the University-wide learning outcomes should be developed. We also believe that more can be done with the general studies program to address two of the strategies (Strategy 2: Re-Energize NJCU as an Urban University and Strategy 6: Engage Proactively with Community and Region) that were developed to help define the University's Vision and Mission. We believe that the General Studies Program could become a vehicle to help students, faculty, and the University as a whole connect (or perhaps reconnect) with Jersey City, Hudson County, and the greater New York metropolitan region.

VII. Conclusion

We conclude this analysis of the current General Studies Program by thanking all the members of previous versions of this committee who have contributed to the development and collection of data relative to the program, who have helped analyze and assess the program, and who have put forth recommendations to refine and improve the program we offer our students. We also would like to thank the faculty and students who helped in the assessment process, and to the faculty members who have been teaching in the program. Nothing in our report should be construed as criticizing the effort, desire, or talents of the faculty who are engaged in the general studies program. Indeed, it is the strong commitment to general education among the faculty that is the reason we are hopeful that a more invigorating, enriching, and fulfilling general education program can be developed. General education, as the 1999 proposal indicated, is the foundation for a successful and productive undergraduate experience and it deserves all the heightened attention and scrutiny we give it. We also believe our students deserve the best education we can provide and we believe, based on the information gathered, that the current program is falling short of that goal.

Appendix A

Table 1: General Studies Programs in selected NJ, NY/NJ metro area, Eastern PA, Delaware

School	State	Type	Credits Required	Credits Choice	Total	Credits to Graduate	GS Percent of Grad total
Bloomfield	NJ	Private	13.5	1.5	45*	132	34.09%
Bloomsburg U	PA	Public	23	36	59	120	49.17%
Caldwell College	NJ	Private		60	60	120	50.00%
Centenary College	NJ	Private	16	28	44	128	34.38%
College of NJ	NJ	Public	9	33	42	120	35.00%
CUNY-Baruch	NY	Public	16	38	54	120	45.00%
CUNY-Brooklyn	NY	Public	21	12	33	120	27.50%
CUNY-City College	NY	Public	12	18	30	120	25.00%
CUNY-Hunter College	NY	Public	3	49	52	120	43.33%
CUNY-John Jay	NY	Public	12	27	39	120	32.50%
CUNY-Lehman	NY	Public		38	38	120	31.67%
CUNY-Medgar Evers	NY	Public	21	24	45	120	37.50%
CUNY-Queens	NY	Public	3	36	39	120	32.50%
CUNY-Staten Island	NY	Public		40	40	120	33.33%
University of Delaware	DE	Public	9	37	46	124	37.10%
Drew	NJ	Private	4	40	44	128	34.38%
Farleigh-Dickinson	NJ	Private		35	35	128	27.34%
Kean	NJ	Public	1	39	40	128	31.25%
Kutztown	PA	Public		60	60	120	50.00%
Millersville	PA	Public		51	51	120	42.50%
Monmouth	NJ	Private	32	21	53	128	41.41%
Montclair	NJ	Public	10	34	44	120	36.67%
NJCU	NJ	Public	18	48	66	128	51.56%
Ramapo	NJ	Public	9	21	30	128	23.44%
Rowan	NJ	Public		42	42	120	35.00%
Rutgers-Camden	NJ	Public		48	48	128	37.50%
Rutgers-Main	NJ	Public		36	36	128	28.13%
Seton Hall	NJ	Private	16	38	54	120	45.00%
Stockton	NJ	Public		32	32	128	25.00%
Temple	PA	Public	4	35	39	123	31.71%
Thomas Edison	NJ	Public		60	60	120	50.00%
William Paterson	NJ	Public	15	47	62	128	48.44%
Mean average GS	45.6875						

*note: Bloomfield College uses a 1-credit system; the total shown here reflects conversion to the NJCU 3 credit model.

Appendix B

Table 2: General Studies Programs in New Jersey Public Universities and Colleges

School	State	Type	Credits Required	Credits Choice	Total	Credits to Graduate	GS Percent of Grad total
College of NJ	NJ	Public	9	33	42	120	35.00%
Farleigh-Dickinson	NJ	Private		35	35	128	27.34%
Kean	NJ	Public	1	39	40	128	31.25%
Monmouth	NJ	Private	32	21	53	128	41.41%
Montclair	NJ	Public	10	34	44	120	36.67%
NJCU	NJ	Public	18	48	66	128	51.56%
Ramapo	NJ	Public	9	21	30	128	23.44%
Rowan	NJ	Public		42	42	120	35.00%
Rutgers-Camden	NJ	Public		48	48	128	37.50%
Rutgers-Main	NJ	Public		36	36	128	28.13%
Stockton	NJ	Public		32	32	128	25.00%
Thomas Edison	NJ	Public		60	60	120	50.00%
William Paterson	NJ	Public	15	47	62	128	48.44%

Mean average GS 45.38462

36%

Appendix C

Major Requirements by Department

data collected from 2007-2010 University Catalog

	Major	GSP	Total	Notes
Art				
BA	58	63	121	
BA Teacher Cert	80	45	125	39 in Art, rest elsewhere including 15 GSA credits
BA Art Therapy	89	45	134	
BFA	83	45	128	
Biology				
BS	71	51	122	36 in biology, rest in other sciences
BA	55	51	106	36 in biology, rest in other sciences
BA Teacher Cert	97	39	136	36 in biology, rest elsewhere, 21 of which are GSA credits
Chemistry				
BS	69	66	135	46 in chemistry, rest in other sciences
BS Teacher Cert	104	51	155	42 in chemistry, rest elsewhere, 9 of which are GSA
Computer Science				
BS	51	66	117	45 in Computer Sci, rest in other sciences
Economics				
BS	36	66	102	
BS Teacher Cert	87	60	147	36 in Econ, rest in other areas
English				
BA Writing	42	66	108	
BA Journalism	48	66	114	
BA Literature	45	66	111	
BA Teacher Cert	51	57	108	Includes 3 GSA credits, but catalog omits the COE requirements
BA Teacher Cert	92	57	149	same as above, but including the COE requirements
Geoscience				
BA Geology	35	66	101	
BA Environmental	39	66	105	
BA Earth Science Teach	90	48	138	36 in Geo, rest in other; 12 of which are GSA credit
BA Teacher Cert Elem	54	45	99	18 credits in other depts, 15 of which are GSA credit
BS Environmental	59	66	125	42 in Geo, rest in other areas
BS Geology	64	66	130	44 in Geo, rest in other areas,
BS Geoscience Teach	116	48	164	39 in Geo, rest in other areas, 12 of which are GSA credit

	Major	GSP	Total	Notes
History				
BA History	36	66	102	
BA Teacher Cert	96	24	120	36 in history, rest in other areas, 36 of which are GSA credit
Mathematics				
BA Math	36	66	102	
BA Math Teacher Cert	75	48	123	33 in math, rest in other areas, 12 of which are GSA credit
Media Arts				
BA	45	66	111	
Modern Languages				
BA - Spanish	36	66	102	
BA - Spanish Teach Cert	81	45	126	36 in Spanish, rest in other areas, 15 of which are GSA credit
Music, Dance, & Theatre				
BA	55	66	121	includes courses that must be taken for 8 semesters
BA Music Business	65	66	131	50 in MDT, rest in Business
				includes course that must be taken for 7 semesters
BA Music Ed Teach Cert	109	39	148	91 credits in MDT. Includes 21 GSA credits includes course that must be taken for 7 semesters excludes the COE requirements (see below)
BA Music Ed Teach Cert	150	39	189	Same as above, but adding the COE requirements to the total
BA Music Theater	88	66	154	includes 2 courses that must be taken for 8 semesters
BA Performance	76.5	66	142.5	includes 1 course that must be taken for 8 semesters
BA Piano	77	66	143	includes 1 course that must be taken for 8 semesters
BA Voice	80	66	146	includes 1 course that must be taken for 8 semesters
BA Jazz	83	66	149	includes 1 course that must be taken for 8 semesters
Philosophy & Religion				
BA	33	66	99	
Physics				
BA Applied Phys	70	51	121	35 in Physics, rest in other areas
BS Applied Physics	70	51	121	35 in Physics, rest in other areas
BA App Phys Teach Cert	90	45	135	12 in Physics required, rest elsewhere, including 15 in GSA
				The catalog is a bit confusing since it reads that 36 credits are required, then lists 34 credits of required courses, 12 of which are physics courses, the rest elsewhere. It then lists 35 credits of electives available, 16 of which are physics, rest elsewhere. So it reads as if only 12 credits of physics seems to be required.
BS Applied Phys	69	66	135	31 in Physics, rest elsewhere
Political Science				
BA	36	66	102	
BA Teacher Cert	99	27	126	36 in Poli Sci, rest elsewhere including 33 in GSA credits

Psychology				
BA	36	66	102	
Sociology & Anthropology				
BA - Crime	45	66	111	
BA - Family	48	66	114	
BA - Grad School Prep	54	66	120	

Appendix D

Table 3: Degree Totals for CPS Majors

Major Requirements by Department				
Data collected from 2007-2010 University Catalog				
	Major	GSP	Total	Notes
Business Administration				
BS Accounting	78	66	144	
BS Finance	71	66	137	
BS General	74	66	140	
BS International	80	66	146	
BS Management	74	66	140	
BS Marketing	71	66	137	
BS Retail	75	66	141	
BS Travel/Tourism	72	66	138	
Criminal Justice				
BS	39	66	105	
Fire Science				
BS	39	66	105	
Health Sciences				
BS Community Health	39	66	105	
BS Teacher Cert	95	60	155	59 in Health Sciences, rest elsewhere
BS School Nurse	50+major	60	110+major	Requires completion of BA degree, so the total credits will vary depending on major
BS Teacher Cert	87	60	147	
BS Nursing	83	44	127	36 in Nursing, rest elsewhere including 12 in GSA
Professional Security Studies				
BS	39	66	105	

Data collected from program descriptions in the 2007-2010 Undergraduate Catalog