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GSU ARCHIVES

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INNOVATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL PRACTICES

AT GOVERNORS STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Communications

Governors State University

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INNOVATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL PRACTICES

AT GOVERNORS STATE UNIVERSITY

In its Report on New Senior Institutions published in 1968, the Board of Higher Education described the need for a new kind of university, especially adapted to the needs of students coming from junior and community colleges and to which society would look for all kinds of middle management and technological development. In the establishment of Governors State University and Sangamon State University, the Board of Higher Education was recognizing the need for the "liberal arts university" providing programs in the liberal arts and closely related fields, but not emphasizing basic research and discovery of new knowledge. The Report went on to say: "This kind of university is seen as a truly pioneering segment of public education and its mission . . . is one calling for real educational innovation and for thinking in bold new terms."

Further goals for Governors State University were set as a result of a Delphi-like survey of educational needs and objectives. Some 1200 persons in the Chicago area, in Illinois, and throughout the nation participated in that survey. These successive questionnaires provided indications of what our various publics thought GSU should be and should do as it planned its services to the people of the State of Illinois. In addition, representatives from the community have been closely involved in the development of the instructional program. Each college has its own advisory council which provides input and evaluation of these programs.

As a result of these surveys and input from the community, the staff, and board members, it has been determined that the University should be dedicated to community service, urban-oriented, future-minded, innovative and experimenting, concerned with individual and societal needs and values, flexible and able to attract and serve the educational needs of low- and middle-income youth and adults with particular stress placed upon being of service to minority students.

Much attention was given during the planning year to the development of the instructional delivery system. Currently, instruction is centered within four collegial units--the College of Cultural Studies, Environmental and Applied Sciences, Human Learning and Development, and Business and Public Service. Much of the support for instruction is decentralized within the colleges. Student Services, counseling, academic advising, library and learning resources, research and evaluation, and cooperative education, though coordinated centrally, are decentralized in the respective Colleges to effect the most direct functional relationships with students.

Direct faculty to student contact is through the Learning Module which varies in form, time, and value. It may be a seminar, series of lectures, a project, an experiment, independent study, and combinations thereof. It may last a few days, a few weeks, or an entire year. It may have a value of one to eight units of credit. Modules usually start at the beginning of a session but may start at other times depending on the students, type of module, and/or educational facilities.

For the most part, the educational objectives of a learning module are expressed in behavioral, measurable terms. These objectives may be cooperatively developed by the student and the faculty teaching the module. A student receives credit on the basis of the quality and quantity of objectives mastered. Transcripts show the name of the learning module, units earned and behaviors or competencies mastered. No listings are made of objectives not completed or in progress.

Learning modules are interdisciplinary in nature. The interrelatedness of knowledge is stressed. Modules often are coordinated by a team of teachers from a number of disciplines and from more than one college. The curriculum is generally conceived of as interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary.

Much of the work within a module is individualized and self-paced. A high level of support from the hardware and software of educational technology is provided by the Instructional Communications Center, making self-pacing possible.

Most students complete some type of cooperative education program. This work-study experience is planned to support and supplement formal institutional instruction.

The calendar consists of six sessions. A session is an administrative period of about eight weeks at which time students may enroll or withdraw. Six sessions are offered each year. Admissions and registration are continuous processes, limited within the parameters established by the Board of Higher Education for student enrollments.

The University maintains a high level of commitment to the community at large. A mobile Environmental Science Laboratory has provided supplementary support to the science curriculum in area elementary schools. A University choir, stage band, and theatre open to people in the community as well as university students have been organized. With the support of outside funds, research in human services resources is being conducted. The Urban Teacher Education program is the first competency-based teacher education program certified in Illinois by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Outpost centers are in operation in support of the program. The professional staff is committed to the concept of community services as part of its professional work agreement and has reacted both to acute and chronic social problems which exist in the immediate area.

The University is experimenting with new faculty systems. It has received permission from the Board of Governors to dispense with the customary academic rank of professional staff for a five-year experimenting period. All faculty members holding full-time appointments have the title of University Professor. Because of the wealth of talent in the Chicago Metropolitan area, GSU expects to make use of part-time (Community) professors who will be able to relate classroom theory and practical application. The University also has obtained permission and has implemented a cyclical tenure system which provides tenure on a cyclical period of 7 years between reviews after initial one- and two-year appointments.

In the same manner that students accept a number of performance objectives to be completed when they register for a learning module, professional staff members develop, with their unit heads, professional performance objectives for the academic year. These professional work agreements, upon acceptance by the staff member and his unit head, serve as one base for staff evaluation at the end of the year. Other bases include student, peer, community, administrative and self-evaluation.

To maintain relevance and force evaluation, change mechanisms or self-destruct clauses are found in many GSU structures and procedures. The professional ranking system and the GSU organizational structure must be re-evaluated in five years. The internal governance system which includes people from the community, students, teaching staff, and administrators is temporary for two years. The colleges are projected to expand only until they reach about 1500 in enrollment. At that point, two or more new colleges will be formed. A major wing of the university involves itself in research and evaluation, providing constant feedback on the quality of the various operations of the university and stimulating constant innovation.

Governors State University has been in operation only a short time. Many concepts are still in a developmental stage because of restrictions of staff and budget. The University is committed, however, to the continuance of an experimental, innovating posture as it grows in student body, staff and community services.