The Academic Policy and Planning Committee received the following referral from the Senate in September 2017: Consider SDSU’s GE course identification process, both in general and with specific attention to a) course proposals that may be perceived to cross into another department or school’s disciplinary purview and b) double-counting of courses for major and GE. This report presents the committee’s findings and recommendations regarding the referral.

Process and Methodology
The committee interviewed a group of faculty and administrators with years of experience in the GE curriculum review process, including:

- Cathie Atkins, Associate Dean, College of Sciences
- Norma Bouchard, Dean, College of Arts and Letters
- Sandra Cook, Associate Vice President Academic Affairs – Enrollment Management
- Eniko Csomay, Chair, General Education Curriculum and Assessment Committee (Fall 2017)
- Bey-Ling Sha, Chair, General Education Curriculum and Assessment Committee (Spring 2018)
- Larry Verity, Interim Dean, College of Health and Human Services; Chair, Senate Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum (AY 2017-18)

Committee members additionally collected accounts from faculty with recent experience creating and submitting GE curriculum proposals for review.

Summary of Findings
1. SDSU’s GE curriculum does not align with the CSU’s, complicating articulation agreements.
2. There is a lack of shared understanding about the purpose of the GE curriculum, which slows down the course approval process.
3. Changes to GE categories resulting from EO 1100 pose the potential to exacerbate competition for GE courses. There is concern that the “double counting” provision of EO1100 could undermine the integrity and spirit of General Education.
4. There is a lack of transparency and communication about the allocation of instructional budgets across the university. There is widespread concern that department and school part-time instructional budgets are dependent on FTES. There is a perception that FTES concerns motivate the proposal and/or review of some new GE courses.
5. The connection between GE courses and part-time instructional budgets can hinder interdisciplinary cooperation and collegiality in the course proposal and review process.

AP&P views the General Education Curriculum not as the purview of any particular departments or schools; rather, we see the GE curriculum as the purview of the entire faculty. The committee encourages collegiality and cooperation between and across departments and schools in the continued development of the GE curriculum in service to student learning. Cross-disciplinary conversation and collaboration in the development of new courses can yield innovative approaches in education and should be incentivized.

To that end, the committee recommends that the Senate adopt the following general principles and recommendations as guidelines for those originating and evaluating GE Curriculum proposals.
A. General Principles on Cross-Disciplinarity and Course Overlap

Principle 1: Interdisciplinarity is valuable.
The interdisciplinary nature of scholarship often results in a healthy degree of overlap between courses. Different approaches to the same topic or subject matter expose students to multiple paths to knowledge and understanding.

Principle 2: Overlap is not replication.
Overlap in course content should not be conflated with redundancy or replication. Any two courses that a student can take for credit should be distinct in content, discipline, method, and/or approach. The distinction between courses with some degree of overlap should be evident in the course learning outcomes, activities, and assessments.

Principle 3: No Exclusive Ownership of Areas of Knowledge.
No department or school has exclusive ownership of any particular course topics, themes, disciplines, approaches, methods, or areas of knowledge. Each department or school represents a concentration of expertise rather than an exclusive purview. A department or school proposing a course with content that extends significantly beyond its faculty’s general concentration of expertise should demonstrate sufficient expertise to sustain offering that course.

Principle 4: Curriculum Decisions Should be Based on Intellectual and Educational Rationales.
Decisions by review committees about new course proposals must be based strictly on intellectual and educational reasons in the context of a coherent curriculum and not on enrollment or budgetary concerns.

B. Procedure for Dealing with Course Proposals that are Perceived to Overlap Significantly with Existing Courses

1. In proposing a new course, originators should list the courses in the university curriculum that in their judgment might raise reasonable concerns of substantial overlap or replication by review committees. It is the responsibility of originators to review the course catalog and GE course listings to identify potentially overlapping courses. In order to avoid undue delays in the review process, originators are advised to err on the side of caution and to follow the steps outlined in B.2. below with regard to generating that list of courses.

2. A department or school proposing a new course has the responsibility to initiate a conversation with the departments or schools offering courses with which the new course may overlap. The goal of these conversations is to ensure that the courses complement one another and do not substantially replicate one another (see principle 2). While the burden of initiating the conversation between academic programs falls on the department or school proposing the new course, both parties should seek a mutually agreeable outcome with reference to the principles in section A. Originators are encouraged to obtain a letter of support for the new course from the other department or school, though a letter of objection could be submitted. In the event that attempts to contact the other department or school yield no response, course originators are advised to include evidence of a good faith effort to initiate a conversation.

3. In evaluating a new course proposal, review committees should focus on whether a proposed course substantially overlaps with or replicates an existing one. Review committees will need to use their discretion in making this determination. Principle 2 offers concise criteria for evaluation. The goal should be to prevent the possibility of a student obtaining credit for two separate courses that are
essentially the same. When a review committee has a reasonable concern regarding course content replication, and that concern has not been addressed by the new course originator, the committee should require the originator to follow the steps outlined in B.2. above. Where there is no reasonable concern of significant overlap or replication, review committees may consider modest overlap between courses as healthy interdisciplinarity and not request the steps in B.2.

4. Review committees should evaluate the complete proposal before making a decision. In doing so, they should focus on intellectual and educational rationales for the new course. An objection from a department or school should not be treated as a veto, a statement of support should not be regarded as ensuring approval, and a lack of any response from a department or school should not be construed as an objection.

5. When considering category assignments for GE courses, originators and reviewers alike are encouraged to consult the CSU-distributed document “Guiding Notes for General Education Course Reviewers.”

C. Implementation of EO 1100 Revised

1. Implementation of EO 1100’s “double-counting” provision must respect the mission of General Education to give students a broad base of knowledge about the world in which they live, how they impact that world, and how it impacts them. To be approved, new GE course proposals must fulfill all GE requirements and fit clearly and logically within the GE categories for which they are proposed. (See http://advising.sdsu.edu/graduation/nine_graduation_requirements/general_education).

2. In implementing EO 1100 and other Executive Orders, the application of new and revised categories to particular cases should align with the wording of those categories while maintaining reasonable flexibility in interpreting that wording.

While these principles are offered in response to the Senate referral on General Education curriculum, many of these principles could also be applied beyond GE in considerations of discipline-specific curricula.

In preparing this document, AP&P has endeavored to avoid making recommendations that would change or conflict with existing campus curriculum policy. Rather, these principles and recommendations are intended to serve as guides to decision-making. The committee expects that these recommendations will be superseded by policy recommendations from the General Education Task Force.