

## Virginia Mann

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**From:** Michael Schmidt  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 27, 2016 12:24 PM  
**To:** Greig Guthey; Yvonne Meulemans; Virginia Mann  
**Cc:** Edward Price; Jose Mendoza; Jocelyn Ahlers; Andre Kundgen; Paul Jasien  
**Subject:** Re: GEOG 110

Thank you very much for your detailed response to our criticisms.

Many of us are well aware that Physical Geography is accepted on many CSU campuses, and other campuses across the nation. That does not strike us as a particularly compelling argument.

Our hesitancy about this course is borne out of the experience of many of us who were here very early on at CSUSM, when the lower-division GE curriculum was first being forged. Many of us were instructed specifically not to make CSUSM "not just another CSU," but to challenge existing assumptions within the large and bureaucratic CSU system. Many of the goals and approaches advanced during that time proved unworkable, as some of us predicted, but many of us took the basic idealism behind this approach to heart. We were also steeped in teaching general education; I taught nothing but general education in my first two years here. We were inspired by our success in actually reaching students outside of the natural sciences and engaging them in somewhat rigorous work in the physical sciences, rather than the extensive "what is science" stuff that the Guiding Notes you linked recommends be included in areas B1-B3. (As someone who has spent much of my recent sabbatical reading in the Philosophy of Science, I worry that many of the Learning Outcomes suggested on p. 26 may give students a false sense of security and understanding.) Last time I was on GEC, it was clear that the CSU system was mostly interested in making the general education curriculum take up fewer resources, and having it focus on current educational buzzwords. The 2015 Guiding Notes seem to be an extension of that trend, so I would place no intellectual weight on what is probably a mostly political document. I am mostly resigned to the fact that CSUSM will continue to subside to the general CSU level, but I feel it is my duty to point out the elevation we had once attained.

When I wrote about my concern about B1 courses not being "constrained by a focus on a particular application of the physical sciences," I was not thinking about the classification of disciplines, but about my own experience teaching both B1 and lower division Earth Science. When the new requirements came out for Earth Science at the beginning of the century, and I was given the task of planning and implementing ES 100, I found myself uneasy about the amount of material to be covered. It seemed to leave almost no time for students to actually absorb the underlying physical principles of force, energy, density, or the atomic and molecular nature of matter that make so many Earth Science phenomena comprehensible. It seemed that the astronomy, meteorology, geology and oceanography I was covering were just applications of the physics and chemistry that was my background. When I taught ES100, I felt that students were being denied the experience that my GES 100 students were getting of spending enough time to understand how rigorously concepts such as "energy" could be defined, and how a quantitative understanding of such a concept could lead to practical insights. I would have preferred that my ES 100 students had a prerequisite of GES 100; however, I could console myself that these (mostly) future teachers would also be getting an Area B1 course that could focus more on just the physical science fundamentals.\*

I am therefore dismayed when Dr. Guthy argues that "the Chemistry Department has not seen fit to apply for B1 credit has no bearing on whether Physical Geography on this campus does have this credit." It is the nature of the CSU system that we must articulate some courses due to political agreements, so that we do already have to grant B1 credit to CC students coming in GE-certified. But I don't think Chemistry and Biochemistry's considered decision to not submit ES 100 for B1 credit is irrelevant to the question at hand; it reflects the intellectual conscience of the department, our own experience in teaching general education, and our department's long history of collaborating with Liberal Studies in the education of future teachers.

Michael Schmidt