Resolution on the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

Whereas,

The Chancellor of the California State University System (CSU) has mandated that all CSU institutions begin using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), an instrument developed by the Council for Aid to Education, to measure the value added by universities as a means of demonstrating accountability to the taxpayers of the State of California; and,

Whereas,

The CLA uses two assessment tasks (performance writing and analytical writing) to measure four dimensions of learning (critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, and written communication); and,

Whereas,

It is not reasonable to expect to accurately assess the aggregate academic performance of an educational institution which offers over 100 academic and cultural programs through eight colleges and numerous centers and institutes by measuring four dimensions of learning in a single assessment tool; and,
Whereas,

The mission of SF State is to create and maintain an environment for learning that promotes respect for and appreciation of scholarship, freedom, human diversity, and the cultural mosaic of the City of San Francisco and the Bay Area, to promote excellence in instruction and intellectual accomplishment, to provide broadly accessible higher education for residents of the region and state, as well as the nation and the world; and,

Whereas,

The results of the CLA are reported in summary form, comparing actual to expected performance without providing the detailed data used to generate these results to participating schools; and,

Whereas,

Funding for the CLA does not completely cover the financial and human resources necessary to implement the assessment, causing other campuses to have to utilize their scarce resources as cash or in-kind incentives to encourage students to take and complete the test; and,

Whereas,

San Francisco State University officials have instead chosen to give the CLA in pedagogically appropriate classes where they could provide some information about student performance, have made the test optional in those classrooms, have not spent our scarce resources to encourage students to take the test, and have still received more completions than required by the CSU; and,

Whereas,
The Chancellor of the CSU is a member of the board of trustees of the Council for Aid to Education;

Be it therefore resolved

That the San Francisco State University Academic Senate supports the development of assessment programs in general in order to inform continuous improvements to the quality of education received by our students as well as to demonstrate accountability to the taxpayers of the State of California and our other stakeholders; and,

Be it further resolved

That the San Francisco State University Academic Senate has serious concerns that the CLA could be misused. It measures academic performance using only four dimensions in a single assessment. Using these results to demonstrate accountability to funding bodies may inhibit the development of academic programs by channeling scarce resources away from programs whose learning outcomes are not easily measured using these criteria (e.g., fine arts, mathematics, ethnic studies) and by channeling limited resources to academic programs that tend to improve the university’s performance on “the test”; and,

Be it further resolved

That the San Francisco State University Academic Senate encourages the CSU to negotiate the release of the detailed data from the CLA to participating schools as a condition of participation so that this research may be used to diagnose and improve educational programs as well as to assess educational outcomes; and
That the San Francisco State University Academic Senate commends San Francisco State University officials for their creative, efficient and effective means of achieving multiple goals in giving the test under required parameters, achieving commendable numbers of completions, not having to expend limited resources on incentives, and taking advantage of the opportunity to allow faculty to learn something about student learning; and,

Be it further resolved

That the San Francisco State University Academic Senate recommends proceeding exceedingly cautiously with any expansion of the use of the CLA test to assess student learning outcomes; and,

Be it further resolved

That the San Francisco State University Academic Senate requests the Chancellor of the CSU to recuse himself from deliberations regarding the CLA and from negotiations between the CSU and the Council for Aid to Education in order to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.