Faculty Senate
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

General Education Revision Design Report

Ad Hoc General Education Design Committee
MOA-16/06: General Education Revision

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 16, 2016 the Ad Hoc General Education Design Committee was charged by Faculty Senate President Suzan Ayers to address the recommendations of MOA-16/06: General Education Revision, item five with a minimum of two charges: a) to create (an) alternative model(s) of a revised general education curriculum based on the recommendations outlined in the MOA; and b) to engage the university community in the naming of the new general education curriculum.

Charges:

1) Recommend model(s) of a revised general education curriculum informed by MOA-16/06 that merge(s) proficiencies (as defined in MOA-16/06) with content knowledge by scaffolding intellectual and practical skills across disciplines and curricula for a first reading at the regularly-scheduled March 2017 Faculty Senate meeting.

The committee has devised a model for the revised general education curriculum based on assessable skills to be taught in content courses at three levels: a) Foundation Level – addressing writing, communication, quantitative literacy, and critical thinking skills; b) Exploration and Discovery Level – addressing personal wellness, language and culture, science and technology, scientific literacy with a lab, and a societies and cultures course that reinforces skills taught at the Foundation Level; c) Connections Level – comprising two writing intensive courses concentrating and reinforcing the skills taught and reinforced in the prior two levels. The draft model description is attached.

2) Engage the university community in the naming of the new general education curriculum and present the new name to the Faculty Senate for approval no later than the December 2016 Faculty Senate meeting.

The committee drew up a list of possible new names in fall 2016 and presented them to the faculty via a survey on an Elearning section. The name with the highest number of favorable responses was recommended to the Faculty Senate for approval at its February 2, 2017 meeting.

COMMITTEE ROSTER:

Chair: Mervyn Elliott, Aviation
Vice-Chair: Molly Lynde-Recchia, World Languages & Literatures
Bill Rantz, Faculty Senate Executive Board
Dan Jacobsen, Music, (excused)
Kevin Knutson, College of Arts and Sciences, Advising
Staci Perryman-Clark, English
Dave Reinhold, Associate Provost for Assessment and Undergraduate Studies
Elke Schoffers, Chemistry
Sarah Summy, Special Education and Literacy Studies
Kristina Wirtz, Spanish

RATIONALE

Through learner-centered approaches, the WMU general education program will enable students to:

1. Expand their understanding of human cultures and the physical/natural world.
2. Enhance their intellectual and practical skills.
3. Exercise their personal and social responsibility.
4. Exhibit integrative and applied learning.

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt the new general education model.

ANTICIPATED IMPLEMENTATION DATE

September 2019

Faculty Senate

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Proposed New General Education Model

This program is a result of the recommendations outlined in the Faculty Senate Memorandum of Action 16/06: General Education Revision.

Design Principles:

- This structure targets essential skills, identified here as learning outcomes, by integrating and applying them in content courses.
- Learning outcomes must be assessable.
- In many ways, the proposal follows the principles described in the American Association of Colleges and Universities' Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Initiative, but it is designed with WMU's unique characteristics in mind.[1]
- An important feature of the programming is the sequencing where specified to ensure students are learning skills before developing and applying them.
- The program includes all of the content areas taught in WMU's existing General Education program, adds new skills and content areas, and also the following:
    - Diversity and Inclusion
    - Global Awareness
    - Critical Thinking
    - Sustainability
    - "Real-world" issues or "big questions" chosen by faculty
- The program proposes the same number of credit hours as WMU's existing program: 37 credit hours.[2]
- The program is designed to support student retention and success as well as greater flexibility in pedagogical approaches and experiences.

Level I – Foundations: Four Courses

- Writing
- Communication (oral and digital)
- Quantitative Literacy
- Inquiry and Engagement: Critical Thinking in the Arts and Humanities

The first level will build foundations essential for students' success in their majors and minors and in their careers and lives after they leave Western. These essential skills are proficiency in writing, oral and digital communication, quantitative literacy, and critical thinking. Foundations courses should be taken at the beginning of the student's course of study. All Foundations courses include instruction in information literacy.

Rather than thinking of each course in the program as separate and unrelated, we would like students to make connections between different skills, content areas, and habits of mind. In order to make these connections, faculty teaching the writing and communication courses will be asked to base one assignment on a theme relating to diversity and inclusion, global awareness, or a "real-world" or "big question" topic of their choice.

Courses in the **Quantitative Literacy** category should be designed to help improve the low levels of applied mathematical literacy amongst entering students and help overcome some of the numbers phobia that many students feel. Nearly all career paths require a foundational knowledge of data analysis and the ability to interpret and present results.

[1] See https://www.aacu.org/

[2] Our existing program requires 37 credit hours minimum, but the number of actual credit hours varies according to students' individual choices of courses and the selections made for Proficiency 4, which requires students to enhance one of the other proficiencies or develop another one.

Inquiry and Engagement: Critical Thinking in the Arts and Humanities is intended to be a course category in which students develop their intellectual curiosity through the study of works, artistic productions and materials representative of the human experience from any time period. The course has no prerequisites and may be taken prior to foundational writing. It is conceived to be a relatively small class (25-30 students) with a focus on critical thinking and practice of the following skills: writing, communication, and information literacy. This course could provide the opportunity for team-teaching (with a larger class size) as well as the possible inclusion of extra-curricular experiences. Along with the foundational writing course, it is a prerequisite for the Societies and Cultures course in the next level. An additional goal of the course is to help students feel at home personally and intellectually at WMU and to support student retention.[3]

Level II – Exploration and Discovery: Six Courses

- Personal Wellness
- World Language and Culture
- Science, Technology, and the Human Condition (exact title TBD)
- Scientific Literacy with Lab
  (one of the scientific literacy courses must include sustainability content)
- Artistic Thinking and Practice
- Societies and Cultures
  (either Artistic Thinking and Practice or Societies and Cultures must include diversity and inclusion content)

The courses in the second level will foster students' intellectual growth and personal responsibility. Although they are presented here as a distinct level and in the best-case scenario would be taken after the foundational courses, with the exception of the Societies and Cultures course, these courses may be taken at any point in the student's program. This flexibility will be especially helpful for the increasing numbers of various types of non-first time in any college (FTIAC) students.

The **Personal Wellness** category assumes a broad definition of the notion of wellness and could include courses on physical, spiritual, or mental health and related issues and experiences.

The **World Language and Culture** course category is intended to promote students' global engagement through the study of ways in which communities other than their own order and understand human experience. These thought systems may be explored through a variety of approaches and disciplines. Students may fulfill this requirement through various options, including:

- Completion of second-semester level or higher of any language taught at WMU, including American Sign Language;
- Proficiency examination;
- Transfer credits, Advanced Placement credits, International Baccalaureate credits;
- Study abroad program of at least 6 weeks;
- Documentation that English is already the student's second language through CELCIS graduation, international student status, or other means;
- Completion of an approved world culture course.

There will be two types of courses offered under the **Science and Technology**, **Scientific Literacy with Lab** categories: courses with sustainability content and courses without it. In selecting their courses, students will need to ensure that at least one of the two science courses they choose includes sustainability. DegreeWorks will be able to track this sub-requirement. Alternatively, the Ad Hoc Design/Logistics Committee is exploring the option of including assessable sustainability content at other points in the program.

[3] The AAC&U finds first-year seminar courses to be a high-impact pedagogical practice (https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips). Other high-impact pedagogical practices included in this design include the "big questions" approach; the option for service/community learning activities, writing-intensive courses across the curriculum, collaborative learning (included in the Connections level), and the recommendation for a capstone project within the student's major.

Similarly, courses in the **Artistic Thinking and Practice** and **Societies and Cultures** categories will be offered in two versions, with or without diversity and inclusion content. In selecting their courses, students will need to ensure that one of these two includes diversity and inclusion. As in the case of sustainability, the committee is considering widening the possibilities where diversity and inclusion content could be included and assessed.

In the **Societies and Cultures** course category, students will study and analyze human society, its cultures and environments, or the dynamics of individuals and groups, past or present. In terms of skills, this Social and Behavioral Sciences course builds on the Level I foundational writing as well as the Inquiry and Engagement course, both of which are prerequisites for it. Like the foundations Humanities course, it is intended to be a relatively small class with a focus on further developing skills in writing, communication, and information literacy. It adds additional focus on critical thinking. As in the Humanities course, the Societies and Cultures course could provide the opportunity for team-teaching (with a larger class size) and the possible inclusion of community-based or applied experiences appropriate for this level, such as service-learning projects. It is a prerequisite for the Connections courses in the next level.

Level III – Connections: Two Courses

- Local and National Perspectives
- Global Perspectives

The Connections courses (25-30 students) are taken after the societies and cultures courses and are the culmination of the program. These courses widen the lens of the students' perspectives to engage them in local, national and global issues, both historical and contemporary. At the same time, students will develop reading, writing, communication, and critical thinking skills even further, and also work collaboratively. In these "big questions" or "real-world" issues classes, students will use their skills to address program themes (such as sustainability) or a "big question" that is important to humanity beyond the classroom (such as poverty, democratic movements, etc). This is where integrative and applied learning should take place and here also, there could be an opportunity for experiential learning activities, if appropriate to the discipline. These courses would be ideal for faculty from different disciplines who wish to team-teach on the same subject such as poverty, democratic movements, or health and public policy. The intent of the courses is to enable students to approach a problem from multiple perspectives, interpret information, understand complex aspects, learn to listen to contrasting viewpoints, synthesize them and express an opinion both in writing and verbally. Students may choose from a wide range of disciplines, including areas applicable to their majors or minors.

KEY POINTS

Scaffolding and Skill-Building Through a Pathway Approach
Writing, digital and oral communication, information literacy, and critical thinking are explicitly taught at the Foundation level. These skills are practiced and reinforced in terms of both quality and quantity in Level II societies and cultures courses and then at a more rigorous standard in Level III – Connections. A baccalaureate level writing course within a major remains a requirement of the program but is not included in the minimum 37 credit hours. Connections courses should also prepare students for capstone projects and it is hoped that a capstone course if not already in a program will be developed and offered.

Built-In Prerequisites Reinforce the Skills Pathway

Level I		Level II		Level III
Inquiry and Engagement In the Humanities	→	Societies and Cultures	→	Connections

Flexibility

- Students may take some Level II – Exploration and Discovery courses alongside their Level I – Foundations courses during their first year.
- Students who study abroad may receive credit for one or more of the required learning outcomes (i.e. World Language and Culture; Global Perspectives).
- Transfer articulation agreements with community colleges will be taken into account so that transfer students do not perceive the program as a disincentive to come to WMU.

Faculty-Driven

- Faculty focus groups will participate in the development of learning outcomes and assessment measures corresponding to each of the proposed categories.
- Faculty have increased opportunity for pedagogical innovation, including team-teaching, experiential learning, and the development of topics courses within general education courses.

Assessment

- The AAC&U has developed assessment rubrics that can serve as the starting point for the development of our own WMU-specific assessment measures.
- These assessment rubrics are available for a number of learning outcomes, including critical thinking, global learning, information literacy, integrative learning, intercultural knowledge and competence, oral communications, problem solving, quantitative literacy, and written communication.[4]

Accommodations for Intensive Credit-Hour Curricula
Feedback indicates that it would be helpful for students enrolled in intensive-credit-hour curricula to be able to meet some of the general education program's learning outcomes within their major. The committee is studying this possibility.

Mapping Skills and Content in this Proposal to the MOA – Levels I, II and III as a Unified Program
Specific learning outcomes are addressed within each level. In addition, learning outcomes from the MOA that are a result of the program as a whole are:

- Develop awareness of how everyday actions affect quality of life for all
- Apply different methods of intellectual inquiry, investigation and discovery
- Enable students to exercise civic responsibility and community engagement
- Enable students to become lifelong learners

[4] See https://www.aacu.org/value for more information about the creation of the rubrics. The rubrics are available on the General Education Design Committee e-learning site.

Foundations Level Learning Outcomes from the MOA:

- Demonstrate effective and appropriate oral, written and digital communication abilities
- Demonstrate and apply information literacy
- Analyze and interpret quantitative data
- Increase foundational knowledge of the humanities

Exploration and Discovery Level Learning Outcomes from the MOA:

- Develop creative and critical thinking
- Practice sensitivity to diversity and inclusion
- Develop understanding and practices for personal wellness
- Gain familiarity with a language other than English
- Demonstrate and apply scientific literacy
- Develop practices for planetary sustainability
- Increase knowledge of the sciences, social sciences, and the arts
- Apply different methods of intellectual inquiry, investigation and discovery

Connections Level Learning Outcomes from the MOA:

- Develop global awareness
- Apply ethical, critical, and informed thought within and across disciplines
- Work both independently and in collaboration with others to achieve goals