

**Western Michigan University
Faculty Senate
Memorandum of Action**

MOA – 17/05

Revision of WMU General Education Curriculum

Name of Council(s)/Committee(s):

Ad Hoc General Education Design Committee

Approval Date:

March 23, 2017

Implementation Date:

Upon Administrative Approval

RECOMMENDATION:

The *Ad Hoc* General Education Design Committee recommends that the Faculty Senate adopt the model designed by the committee in revising WMU's general education curriculum.

Mervyn Elliott, Chair, *Ad Hoc* General Education Design Committee

Date: 23 March 2017

Approve Disapprove Other Action
Comments:

Suzan F. Ayers, WMU Faculty Senate President

Date

Approve Disapprove Other Action
Comments:

Timothy J. Greene, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Date

Approve Disapprove Other Action
Comments:

John M. Dunn, WMU President

Date

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Faculty Senate
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Revision of WMU General Education Policy

RATIONALE

Following the passage and acceptance of MOA-16/06: General Education Revision the *Ad Hoc* General Education Design Committee was charged with creating an alternative model or models for a revised general education curriculum based on the recommendations outlined in MOA-16/06. The Design Committee engaged the faculty by presenting their ideas monthly at the Faculty Senate meetings and posting their progress on eLearning and on the website¹. Colleges were invited to create “Dean’s Circles” to provide feedback to the committee and the model has been modified to address the concerns identified by those groups. The model being proposed addresses the concerns raised in MOA-16/06, which was the result of an extensive multi-year review of WMU’s general education program. It will bring about a learner-centered approach to general education that balances acquisition of essential skills and content while prioritizing student-learning outcomes that prepare WMU students to succeed in an ever-changing world.

The scaffolding of skills throughout the program, the strengthening of writing across the curriculum and the appropriate sequencing of content-based classes that include essential learning outcomes, strengthen and enhance WMU’s general education curriculum. The skills developed at the appropriate level will help the student succeed in his/her major program.

The promotion of the four WMU Essential Student Learning Outcome headings in MOA-16/06 will enable students, parents, and faculty to identify the purpose and goals of the program and enable the program to be assessed as a whole.

RECOMMENDATION

The *Ad Hoc* General Education Design Committee recommends that the Faculty Senate adopt the model designed by the committee in revising WMU’s general education curriculum.

CURRENT POLICY

The current WMU General Education Policy (revised fall 2012) and the current WMU General Education Requirements will be revised in accordance with the model recommended by the committee.

PROPOSED LANGUAGE

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

¹ <http://wmich.edu/facultysenate/committees/adhocgenededesigncmt>

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 mind².
- An important feature is the sequencing (where specified) to ensure that students are learning skills before developing and applying them.
- The program can encompass all of the areas taught in WMU's existing general education program, adds new skills and content areas, and also adds the following:
 - Diversity and Inclusion
 - Global Awareness
 - Critical Thinking
 - Sustainability
 - "Real-world Problem" or "Big Questions" chosen by faculty
- The program proposes that students take one course in each of the 12 categories³.
- The program is designed to support student retention and success as well as greater flexibility in pedagogical approaches and experiences.

The program is designed to support the university-wide set of **Essential Student Learning Outcomes** approved in MOA-16/06, which can be traced across the curriculum:

- Expand students' understanding of human cultures and the physical/natural world,
- Enhance intellectual and practical skills,
- Exercise personal and social responsibility,
- Exhibit integrative and applied learning.

Level I – Foundations: Four Course Categories

- 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, students should be encouraged 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 one of the following: sustainability, diversity and inclusion, global awareness, or a "Real-world Problem" or "Big Question" topic of their choice.

Nearly all career paths require a foundational knowledge of data analysis and the ability to interpret and present results. Courses in the Quantitative Literacy category should be designed to help improve the low

² <https://www.aacu.org>

³ The existing general education 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. Hours can thus vary between 33 and 44 depending on course choice, with extra courses required to complete the minimum of 37 credit hours. In the recommended program, the number of credit hours for approved courses is expected to be appropriate to the learning outcomes covered.

levels of applied mathematical literacy among entering students and help overcome some of the numbers phobia that many students feel.

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 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, the Critical Thinking course is a prerequisite for the Societies and Cultures course in the next level. An additional goal of the Critical Thinking course is to help students feel at home personally and intellectually at WMU and to support student retention⁴.

Learning outcomes from MOA-16/06 that are applied to Level I – Foundations Course Categories:

- 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

Sustainability and Diversity & Inclusion in Levels II and III

The program is designed to advance and enhance students' knowledge and practices of sustainability and of diversity and inclusion, as included in MOA-16/06. Learning outcomes for these topics will be developed by the *Ad Hoc* General Education Logistics Committee faculty focus subcommittees. Students will be required to take one course at either Level II – Exploration and Discovery or Level III – Connections that cover outcomes in each of these two areas. Any approved course can include these outcomes within any of the eight categories in the two levels and once approved can be identified as such a course with an additional designation of "S" or "D&I." This will allow students to plan their courses to ensure that these outcomes are covered within a content course while choosing courses that link to their interests, major and Signature Program (if applicable).

Level II – Exploration and Discovery: Six Course Categories

- Personal Wellness
- World Language and Culture
- Science and Technology
- Scientific Literacy with Lab
- Artistic Theory and Practice
- Societies and Cultures

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 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.

⁴ 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.

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;
- Proficiency examination;
- Transfer credits, Advanced Placement credits or International Baccalaureate credits demonstrating an appropriate level of second language proficiency;
- A study abroad program adequate to meet the learning outcomes;
- 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 adequate to meet the learning outcomes.

In the Science and Technology category students should understand the roles and influences of natural science and technology in such things as health, social and economic welfare; the storage, transfer, and processing of information; and the management of society's impact on the environment with sensitivity to ecological interconnections. Courses in this category should help students attain this understanding and should promote the ability to evaluate and participate in the decisions of society regarding science and technology.

The Scientific Literacy with Lab category should contain laboratory courses in the natural sciences which require students to interact with objects of nature and to use instruments that permit careful examination of natural phenomena in either physical or simulated conditions. They require students to use scientific methods to collect and analyze data and to report results.

The Artistic Theory and Practice category should contain courses that provide experiences and develop skills that promote awareness of the imaginative and inventive capacities of the mind and of the aesthetic qualities of works of fine art. Courses may focus on the role of an art or the arts in a culture or on the enhancement of life they provide the individual.

In the Societies and Cultures category, students will study and analyze human society, its cultures and environments, or the dynamics of individuals and groups, past or present. Social and Behavioral Sciences courses should build on the Level I – Foundation writing as well as the Level II – Inquiry and Engagement course categories, both of which are prerequisites for it. Like the Foundations Inquiry and Engagement category, courses Societies and Cultures courses are intended to focus on further developing skills in writing, communication, and information literacy, and thus are envisioned to have relatively small enrollments. As in the Level I – Inquiry and Engagement category courses, the Level II – Societies and Cultures category could provide the opportunity for team-teaching and the possible inclusion of community-based or applied experiences appropriate for this level, such as service-learning projects. This category is a prerequisite for the Level III – Connections courses.

Learning outcomes from MOA-16/06 that are applied at the Level II – Exploration and Discovery Level:

- Develop creative and critical thinking
- Practice sensitivity to diversity and inclusion
- Develop understanding and practices for personal wellness
- Gain familiarity with a language/culture 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

Level III – Connections: Two Course Categories

- Local and National Perspectives
- Global Perspectives

The third level courses (25-30 students) should be taken after the Level II – Societies and Cultures courses and are the culmination of the program. The courses taken for these two categories widen the

lens of 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 "Real-World Problem" or "Big Questions" 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 more integrative and applied learning should take place and here also, is an opportunity for experiential learning activities, if appropriate to the discipline. Courses in this category would be ideal for faculty from different disciplines who wish to team-teach on the same subject working toward the same outcomes. The intent of such courses is to enable students to approach a problem from multiple perspectives, interpret information, understand complex aspects, learn to listen to contrasting viewpoints, synthesize that information 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.

Learning outcomes from MOA-16/06 that are applied at the Level III – Connections:

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

KEY POINTS

Scaffolding and Skill-Building through a Pathway Approach

Writing, digital and oral communication, information literacy, and critical thinking are explicitly taught at Level I – Foundations. These skills are practiced and reinforced in terms of both quality 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 within one of the 12 course categories. Level III – 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

<u>Level I</u>	→	<u>Level II</u>	→	<u>Level III</u>
Inquiry and Engagement		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 12 categories.
- Faculty may 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 WMU-specific assessment measures.
- The AAC&U 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 communications.⁵

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 courses included in the major. Consistent with current practice, it would be permissible for up to six (6) credit hours of courses in the major or minor to also be approved as "general education" courses in this new curriculum. Special exemptions may be made in specific high credit-hour programs.

Learning outcomes from MOA-16/06 that are a result of the program:

- 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

⁵ See <https://www.aacu.org/value> for more information about the creation of the rubrics and downloadable examples.