

Report of the General Education Review Task Force and a Proposal for Change Spring, 2012: Summary

I. Introduction

The General Education Review Task Force is preparing a report of its work and a proposal for a new general education program. This document is a summary of the full report. The proposal portion of the full report includes a great deal of detail designed to outline the content of the course categories, expectations about workload, approval processes and detailed suggestions about assessment. This summary provides an outline of the proposed program and a description of the contents of the full report. The full report will be made available after the Task Force has had an opportunity to consider comments from the March public forums.

II. Task Force Strategy

The charge to the Task Force from the Faculty Senate resolution included: (a) an examination of the general education programs of other institutions; and (b) assessment of the perspectives of a broad range of faculty about our current liberal studies program and needed changes. The Task Force immediately undertook a review of the general education programs of scores of other state comprehensive universities. The results of that review are summarized in the full report. We also undertook a review of the recent literature on general education. That review is also provided in the full report. The Task Force considered a number of significant reports on general education (e.g., the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile, a report on degree qualifications, the Liberal Studies Assessment Report and Action Plan, and a proposal for changes in liberal studies from our Honors College). Student Assessment of Instruction (SAI) results for Liberal Studies courses from the past several years were examined. During the fall semester of 2010 a series of well-attended public forums was held where many faculty members and other stakeholders provided their views on the current liberal studies program and their visions for a revised program. The task force invited deans to have their schools or colleges provide position statements on general education. In the fall of 2011 the Task Force considered two formal proposals and discussed each component of the proposals in detail. Also during that semester a comprehensive survey of the WCU faculty was conducted and the results discussed.

A number of concerns about our current program were identified from these sources. Some of these concerns include: (a) too many hours in the program; some majors would like to expand the number of credit hours in their curricula; (b) difficulties encountered by students, especially transfer students, in meeting the upper level perspective requirement; (c) lack of connection between liberal studies and the QEP; (d) inconsistencies within course categories and across categories; (e) perceptions that some course syllabi did not represent the categories they were in; (f) lack of common assessments within categories; (g) an overemphasis on process evaluation rather than outcome assessment; (h) absence of a foreign language competency requirement; (i) over-representation of some disciplines in the perspectives area (e.g., in the 2010-2011 Undergraduate Catalog, 40% of the different courses listed in the Perspectives areas came from 3 disciplines); (j) insufficient opportunities for students to learn to interact with each

other; and (k) wide perception that many liberal studies courses are not rigorous in their expectations for reading, writing and thinking. The Task Force considered each of these concerns in its deliberations.

The Task Force has worked from an assumption that the administration of the proposed program would not differ significantly from the administration of the current Liberal Studies program. However, the Faculty Senate will need to consider possible additional means of oversight of program components and assessment.

III. Learning Goals and Outcomes of the QEP

The Task Force was guided to a significant degree by WCU's QEP. Its goals and outcomes are summarized here for convenience:

The overarching goal of the QEP is to empower students to integrate knowledge and skills from their academic and co-curricular experiences to become intentional participants in their own learning. To that end, WCU hopes to impact students' understanding of self, intellectual flexibility and versatility, and capacity for integrated learning. As a result, WCU expects students to:

1. Identify their aptitudes, abilities, and interests and articulate their future goals and aspirations;
2. Modify their behaviors and values in response to knowledge and skills gained from their academic and co-curricular experiences; and
3. Recognize the synthesis of their university experiences relative to their future education and career plans.

To achieve the expected learning goals, WCU has identified a set of core skills and behaviors (assessable outcomes) that are central to a student's development as an integrated, intentional learner. These core expectations include the ability to:

A) *Integrate information from a variety of contexts*—Students will make connections between personal interest and abilities, programs of study, general electives, and experiential learning opportunities, and other co-curricular activities; and relate the implications/value of these connections to “real world” scenarios.

B) *Solve complex problems*—Students will identify the dimensions of complex issues or problems; analyze and evaluate multiple sources of information/data; reflect on the implications of their solution/decision; and apply knowledge and decision-making processes to new questions or issues.

C) *Communicate effectively and responsibly*—Students will convey complex information in a variety of formats and contexts; identify intended audience and communicate appropriately and respectfully.

D) *Practice civic engagement*—Students will identify their roles and responsibilities as engaged citizens by considering the public policies that affect their choices and actions; by recognizing

commonalities and interdependence of diverse views/values; and by acting responsibly to positively affect public policy.

E) *Clarify and act on purpose and values*—Students will examine the views/values that influence their own decision making processes; take responsibility for their own learning and development in a manner consistent with academic integrity and their own goals and aspirations; intentionally use knowledge gained from learning experiences to make informed judgments about their future plans; and bring those plans into action.

IV. Structure of Proposed Program (39 hrs)

In this section of the summary, we present the outline of the proposed program. Details of each component will be provided in the full report/proposal.

First Year Seminar (3 hrs.)

The primary goal of the (FYS) is to introduce students immediately and dramatically during their first year in college to intellectual life at the university level. Seminars are designed to encourage exploration and active learning as students engage in scholarly discourse about new ideas, distinctive topics and diverse perspectives. With an emphasis on depth rather than breadth, the FYS both contrasts with and complements the introductory survey that is the staple of the first-year student's course of study. Creating a community of learners with enrollment limited to 22, the FYS sets the tone for the value of a liberal studies education and a focus on faculty and student relationships, in an environment that promotes scholarly discussion, significant reading, writing, and active engagement. The FYS must be accessible to all students. If colleges or departments are approved to offer a seminar that is particular (and limited) to their disciplines, they must also offer a different FYS that is open to all students. This is an equal access issue within the guidelines of a General Education.

With regard to the student class-size recommendation, this proposal is consistent with the university mission to provide a distinctive and enriching educational experience. First-year students are enrolled either in English 101 or in the FYS during each of their first two semesters at WCU. These two courses, each with a limited enrollment and an emphasis on reading and writing, provide an enrollment and pedagogical balance, as new students transition to the academic rigor expected of college-level learning. With regard to assessment and oversight, given the shift from the assessment of processes to the assessment of outcomes that affects all programs at WCU, courses in each of the following proposed categories will undergo annual review. While the oversight committee for the new general education program will conduct this review with most of these categories, for some categories of courses, including the FYS and Writing, Rhetoric, and Composition Studies (English 101 and 202), the Faculty Senate should consider the establishment of a specific advisory/review group.

Foundational Experiences (15 hrs.)

Composition (6 hrs.): Administered by faculty in the English Department, we propose a two year sequence consisting of English 101: Writing and Rhetoric, a course that introduces students

to rhetoric, college-level writing, reading, and critical thinking; and English 202: Writing and Critical Inquiry, a research-based course that focuses on interdisciplinary writing, synthesis of diverse materials, formulation of sound arguments, and collaborative learning.

Students would complete 101 in their first year and 202 in their second year, although due to current staffing constraints, such a model is currently difficult to enforce. English 101 is a prerequisite to all other English courses. In each course, students will write at least three essays taken through multiple drafts and generate a final portfolio. They will read extensively and write weekly critical reflections of those readings. They will engage in and utilize in their writing both primary and secondary research. Proficiency in interdisciplinary approaches to research will be demonstrated by a final portfolio of work. Major programs who wish to offer a version of the second writing course in the major must demonstrate the fulfillment of the outcomes and artifacts mandated by ENGL 202.

Oral Communication (3 hrs.): Courses in this category will help develop proficiency in various forms of oral presentation. Proficiency will be demonstrated by a series of recorded presentations that represent the various forms of oral communication identified as essential by the communications faculty (the extensive objectives and assessment procedures developed by the communications faculty will be provided in the full proposal). Those objectives address the basic competencies in the contexts of interpersonal, small group, and public speaking. Major programs that wish to offer an oral communications course in the major must demonstrate the fulfillment of the outcomes and artifacts mandated by COMM 201.

Mathematics (3 hrs.): Courses approved in this area will allow students to interpret, represent, apply, and communicate quantitative information and concepts in verbal, numeric, and graphical form, as well as symbolic form where appropriate. Courses will also provide students with the ability to assess and solve complex problems using appropriate reasoning skills and/or mathematical tools. Assessments will include responses to specific complex problems from final exams, labs, or projects. Students may meet the mathematics requirement by completing an upper-level course in mathematics.

Health and Wellness (3 hrs.): Courses in health and wellness will provide exposure to and understanding of the seven elements of wellness demonstrated by examination and significant project related to individuals' lifestyle, including a significant component of physical activity. Wellness is a broad, holistic concept that involves an ongoing and modifiable process, which requires long-term commitment. The Wellness Core requirement will provide students with a multidimensional set of knowledge and skills to enjoy a high quality of life with positive health outcomes throughout their lifespan. Students will be challenged to explore the active process, awareness, and personal responsibility associated with behavior change that will promote lifelong health. The roles of personal lifestyle, behavior choices, community and the environment will be examined. Students will have the opportunity to participate in an integrated fitness component and/or leisure activity, which will emphasize the crucial role of physical activity in lifelong wellness. Health and wellness decisions are lifelong considerations for any human being, and healthy people have the best chance of contributing fully to their own potential and to the global society in which they live.

The courses will cover the multiple dimensions of wellness (as currently defined by the course textbook and/or the National Wellness Institute) as a full integration of overall health. Students will evaluate credibility of health information developing their personal information literacy for health topics through short papers, reflection journals, and/or small group discussion in class. Students will participate in personal health assessments based on the multiple dimensions of wellness and complete a behavior change project or wellness plan based on their findings. These assessments may include pre and post fitness testing, wellness, and nutritional analyses. The courses will include an integrated physical activity and/or leisure activity component that counts for a percentage of the overall grade for the course as determined by the instructor. The physical activity and/or leisure activity component can be administered by the instructor of record and include regular meeting times or require each individual student to select an activity that matches their ability and interest. The activity component may include quizzes, assessments, journaling, labs, short papers, and/or a cumulative event (such as a 5K race, fitness competition, endurance activity, field trip).

Ways of Knowing (12 hrs.)

Humanities (3 hrs.): The study of the humanities allows students to engage with textual analysis in order to examine the nature of human thought and culture. Humanities courses also aim to encourage students to respect and understand the world around them through the study of individuals, societies and environments in a wide context: historical, contemporary, geographical, linguistic, political, social, economic, religious, technological and cultural. Because these dimensions are expressed through texts and artifacts, students sharpen their reading, interpretative, and analytical skills as they develop a critical understanding of different cultures and traditions. Humanities also encourage a thoughtful examination of the nature of rational inquiry itself and of the values, ethics, and moral dimensions of private and public life. The traditional disciplines in the humanities are history, literature, philosophy and religion.

Humanities courses will introduce students to the humanistic worldview and the skills of reading, writing, and thinking about landmark works that have served to shape human experience. Exposure to and understanding of landmark texts and their historical context will be demonstrated by a significant written projects and examination.

Fine Arts (3 hrs.): Learning in the Fine Arts courses will be concerned with appreciating, interpreting, and critically analyzing creative works and events, as well as understanding the artistic intentions of the creator. Introduction to traditional and contemporary concepts within the various modes of expression will be achieved through an analysis of individual or collaborative works that includes the study of the nature of self-expression and the critical evaluation of works or events as interpreted through their socio-cultural contexts. An important course component will be out-of-the-classroom experiences such as visits to gallery and museum exhibitions, attendance at theater and musical productions and performances, and making visits to artists, performers and writers and attending their lectures, readings and presentations. Courses may have an applied component to provide experience with personal artistic expression in order to help the student understand a creative concept or an artist's intention. Courses in the Fine Arts category must be accessible by students with no prior knowledge or experience in the Arts. The traditional areas of the fine arts are art, theater, and music.

Natural and Physical Sciences (3 hrs.): Courses in this category will expose students to the scientific method and will include laboratory experiences. Proficiency in the scientific method will be demonstrated by examination and significant laboratory report projects.

Social and Behavioral Sciences (3 hrs.): Courses in the social and behavioral sciences will include systematic study of observational and analytic methods of investigating individuals and groups demonstrated by a significant written analysis of data and/or case studies. The social and behavioral sciences provide students with: (a) knowledge of broad concepts for understanding human behavior from individual, community, political, economic or cultural perspectives in a wide range of contexts; and (b) knowledge of methods for dealing with quantitative and qualitative data that help explain or interpret human actions in a wide array of contexts. Courses in this category will be broad enough to provide students with comprehensive theoretical tools for understanding human behavior. Students completing social and behavioral science courses should be able to: (a) apply multiple concepts from the discipline to human behavior in realistic situations; (b) use methods from the discipline to plan the collection and analysis of data from realistic situations; (c) show how alternative theoretical positions from the discipline could apply to particular situations; and (d) discuss the limitations of any disciplinary concepts and theories for completely explaining any particular human behavior.

The traditional disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences are anthropology, cultural geography, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Proposed courses that touch on these disciplines but do not focus on the basic theories, concepts and methods of the disciplines would not be appropriate for this category (but could be appropriate for the Integrative Experiences category). Disciplines will offer no more than two different courses in this category to ensure the ability to use a common assessment.

Integrative Experiences (9 hrs.)

Students will take a course in each of three areas of integrative experiences:

Civic Engagement (3 hrs.): Developing a “sense of place” through the exploration of such topics as environmental issues, state and regional history, diversity, and growth/development in the context of public policies that affect human lives. Students will demonstrate information literacy and complete a significant writing project derived from a service learning component.

Ethical Commitment (3 hrs.): Acting on Purposes and Values: Courses in this category will explore ethical decision making and its relation to personal values framed by the context of multiple disciplines. Students will demonstrate information literacy and complete a significant writing project that integrates individual purposes and values with course content.

Global Awareness (3 hrs.): Students may satisfy this requirement by taking MFL 232 or equivalent (101 and 102 for education majors) or by taking a course designed to increase awareness of the interrelationships among world cultures. As in the case for the major programs participating in the Foundational Experiences, MFL majors will have their Global Awareness requirements met by designated upper-level courses in the major. Students who fulfill the requirement via language will be assessed by examination and one or more written projects. Courses designed to fulfill the requirement must include a significant writing project,

demonstrating information literacy that integrates global issues with students' individual purposes and values.

Courses that meet the Integrative Experiences criteria will foster integrative learning in specified ways via defined linkages. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) defines *integrative learning* as “an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus.” Integrative learning, in other words, transcends disciplinary boundaries and may frequently go beyond the academy itself. This definition is captured within the goals of WCU's QEP, which states as a goal student ability to integrate information from a variety of contexts:

Students will make connections between personal interest and abilities, Liberal Studies[General Education], programs of study, general electives, and experiential learning opportunities, and other co-curricular activities; and relate the implications/value of these connections to ‘real world’ scenarios.

The AAC&U document describing integrated learning goes on to state that “Developing students' capacities for integrative learning is central to personal success, social responsibility, and civic engagement in today's global society. Students face a rapidly changing and increasingly connected world where integrative learning becomes not just a benefit . . . but a necessity.”

The QEP mandates the development of behaviors (outcomes) that are central to a student's development as an integrated, intentional learner. Among the core expectations are the ability to practice civic engagement and to clarify and act on purpose and values. The *UNC Tomorrow* document states the need for global awareness, and the 2020 Commission is working to restate this need in its vision for the future of the university.

Integrative Experiences will be interdisciplinary in nature, courses that synthesize worldviews of multiple disciplines. One model for such a course would be ENGL/BIO 371, a co-taught course that focuses on environmental issues from the dual perspectives of writing and of field work.

Not all integrative courses must use this type of co-taught approach to delivery. Extant courses such as ENGL 209, “Past Times: Literature and History” or BIOL 334. “Biotechnology and Society,” for examples, potentially satisfy the principles of the integrative emphasis and would require minor adjustments to course activities in order to satisfy the outcomes of the new Integrative Experiences category. Courses could also be developed that partner with another course and that share or exchange some percentage of student work product or artifacts. Or, a course could partner in some specific and formal way with a defined student co-curricular activity. It would be the responsibility of the General Education Committee to ensure that a course developed for the Integrative Experiences category and designed in such a way so that it meets the outcomes established by the Program. It is the responsibility of the departments and the deans to demonstrate the administrative feasibility and support for courses to be approved in the Integrative Experiences category.

All Integrative Experiences courses will include a significant writing component that serves to develop students' ability and awareness of information literacy in the form of primary and secondary research derived from various scholarly resources. It is imperative that the traditional student "term" paper citing references from the two or more disciplines (and/or co-curricular activities) does not serve as the sole means for student expression. Research indicates that courses requiring a significant amount of student composition produce the best results in the development of student writing. But other possibilities for student expression exist—possibilities that facilitate the exchange of information across organizational boundaries. These are electronic in nature, easily shared, and typically more generative of student excitement (and engagement). Integrative Experiences courses, then, should establish an expectation of knowledge acquisition and synthesis expressed not only by research-centric writing, formally assessed, but also evidenced by public expression and active feedback via public webpage bookmarks, blogs, wikis, and other collaborative software and channels of social media.

Departments will be limited to two individual course offerings in each category and may not require particular Integrative Experiences courses for their majors, nor may they restrict these courses to their majors. "Intentional Learning" suggests the need for students to shape their own educational experiences according to their interests. But, as long as the course is listed in the major, or if one of the cross-listings of the courses resides in the students' major, the Major Programs may allow Integrative Courses to count as Major Elective courses. There is no limit to the number of co-taught, cross-listed courses that can be offered by any department.

V. Major Changes from Current Liberal Studies Program

These are some of the important changes in the proposed program compared to the current Liberal Studies curriculum:

1. The most significant change is the inclusion of a 9-hour requirement of integrated courses that tie to the QEP with emphases in civic engagement, ethical commitment, and global awareness.
2. An overall reduction of 3 credit hours in the size of the program.
3. A reduction of the 3 credit hours each in the social and behavioral sciences and the physical and natural sciences.
4. The addition of the concept of integrative courses.
5. A shift from the assessment of processes to the assessment of outcomes.
6. An attempt to decrease the number of different courses offered in perspectives categories in order to facilitate consistency in delivery and the conduct of common assessments.
7. Elimination of the upper level perspective requirement.