

Western Carolina University

Liberal Studies Program

Approved September 16, 1999

I. Introduction

Chancellor Bardo formed the General Education Review Committee in 1996. Members were assigned to this task as university citizens, not representatives of constituencies, and faculty from all Colleges of the university have served. The Chancellor's charge to the committee was first, to examine and discuss national trends in general education and then, to review our current program. The work of the committee would end with either an endorsement of the current program or the proposal of a new or modified program.

Our discussions began with an extensive examination of the literature on trends and ideas about general education from around the nation. One of the prominent themes in that literature is that a program must fit the identity of the institution for which it is created. The program must fit the interests and abilities of the institution's students and faculty. Thus, we spent considerable time looking at trends and ideas in light of the character of Western Carolina University. The result of this period of study was the Fundamental Principles of General Education document that was distributed to the university community in the Fall of 1997.

The next stage of the review was to develop a specific program that would implement the spirit of the Fundamental Principles and be feasible within the terms of faculty and student interest and abilities and institutional resources. The members of the committee spent a period of many months discussing innovative, creative, and pragmatic ideas for general education. The preliminary result was a program outline that was distributed in the Spring of 1998. Conversations with students, faculty, and administrators helped us determine which of our many ideas were worth pursuing. What is proposed herein is the product of a great deal of reflection in response to the university community's reaction to the earlier outline.

II. Innovations and Continuities

Innovations in the program include:

- The name of the program is changed to Liberal Studies;

- All students must complete 42 hours of Liberal Studies independent of requirements for any degree program;
- The implementation of Academic Learning Communities that will help first-year students bridge intellectual domains and find community;
- An explicit requirement for distributing Liberal Studies beyond the sophomore year;
- The implementation of a Freshman Seminar that will help students establish a connection to WCU and an appreciation of their educational experience;
- The recognition of an explicit first-year experience, which includes a Freshman Seminar and a core consisting of writing, mathematics, oral communication, and Wellness;
- An explicit requirement in Wellness;
- Trust accorded to faculty in their exploration of individual, disciplinary and multi-disciplinary creativity in courses;
- The realization that not all areas of emphasis can be addressed in every Perspectives course;
- A renewed commitment to enhancement of students' "habits of mind" through challenging reading, writing, and research assignments throughout the program;
- No arbitrary limitations on the variety of disciplines invited to propose general education courses within their areas of expertise;
- An administrative structure designed to raise the status and visibility of Liberal Studies and to reward faculty commitment to the program.

The following characteristics of the General Education program have been carried over into the new Liberal Studies program:

- The separation of the Liberal Studies program into basic academic skills (the Core, formerly Foundations) and breadth of discipline requirements (the Perspectives) has been maintained. This separation has been emphasized by the recommendation that the Core be completed in the freshman year and that the Perspectives extend into the upper division.
- The Perspectives component of the General Education program has been kept. The names of the categories have been changed to more conventional titles, and the categories have been described in more traditional terms, in part to facilitate course development and transfer evaluation.
- The Liberal Studies program is separate from the major. Instead of prohibiting major or program requirements from being a part of Liberal Studies, the proposal requires that Liberal Studies electives be taken in cases where a major or program requirement fulfills a Liberal Studies Perspectives category requirement. However, the philosophy that Liberal

- Studies provide breadth to the undergraduate experience outside of the major is actually strengthened by the 42 hour Liberal Studies requirement.
- The General Education program recently opened itself to the opportunity for upper division courses in the Perspectives. The Liberal Studies program has expanded and emphasized this opportunity for breadth at the upper division level by requiring an upper division experience for all students.
 - The idea of common areas of emphasis in the Perspectives is a refinement of the skills requirements of the General Education program. Incorporating all skills into every Perspectives course proved to be too restrictive. However, the need for some consistency and purpose specific to the Liberal Studies program has been maintained through the "areas of emphasis".
 - The importance of an effective and powerful administrative structure has been formally recognized and emphasized in the Liberal Studies program. The position of Director has been enhanced by the designation of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies. The duties of the General Education Committee, including a role in course approval and responsibility for an ongoing assessment cycle, are given to an Oversight Committee, assisted by a Student Advisory Group.

III. Learning Goals of the Program

The learning goals of the Liberal Studies program are designed to be consistent with the Western Carolina University Mission statement. The Liberal Studies component of the curriculum prepares students to become "contributing and informed citizens in a global community." Specifically, the Liberal Studies program enhances WCU's aspirations for students to attain "...the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of an educated person, including the ability to think critically, to communicate effectively, to identify and resolve problems reflectively, and to use information and technology responsibly; an appreciation for the creative and performing arts; and a basis for continued personal development and lifelong learning."

Moreover, the Liberal Studies component of the curriculum aids the attainment of the aspirations for students: "...to display the following traits of citizenship: behavior characterized by honesty, integrity, and responsibility; service to others; awareness of and sensitivity to the concerns of diverse people and cultures; and commitment to stewardship of the natural and cultural environment."

The learning goals of the Liberal Studies program are for students to:

- Demonstrate the ability to locate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information;

- Demonstrate the ability to interpret and use numerical, written, oral and visual data;
- Demonstrate the ability to read with comprehension, and to write and speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience;
- Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze arguments;
- Demonstrate the ability to recognize behaviors and define choices that affect lifelong well-being;
- Demonstrate an understanding of
 - Past human experiences and ability to relate them to the present;
 - Different contemporary cultures and their interrelationships;
 - Issues involving social institutions, interpersonal and group dynamics, human development and behavior, and cultural diversity;
 - Scientific concepts and methods as well as contemporary issues in science and technology;
 - Cultural heritage through its expressions of wisdom, literature and art and their roles in the process of self and social understanding.
- Demonstrate an excitement for and love of learning.

IV. Characteristics of the Program

All students must complete 42 hours of Liberal Studies independent of requirements for any degree program. The 42 hours consists of a three-hour Freshman Seminar, 15 hours in the first-year Core, and 24 hours of Perspectives. The additional requirement that at least three credit hours be completed in the upper division outside of the major will ensure that students have a chance to experience Liberal Studies from the more sophisticated perspective of an advanced learner.

Perspectives Courses and the Major

Departments are encouraged to create courses that best represent their discipline in the Liberal Studies program, including courses that introduce the major. A course approved as a Liberal Studies Perspectives course may be used to meet a major or program requirement. However, when a Perspectives course meets a student's major or program requirement, the *credit hours* for that course will not be counted toward the total of 24 hours of Liberal Studies Perspectives required of every student, although the Perspectives *category* requirement met by the course will be satisfied. In this situation, the student will take an additional elective Liberal Studies course in any Perspectives category outside of the major. The credit hours for this Liberal Studies elective course will count toward the 24 hours of Liberal Studies Perspectives. To assure that the Liberal

Studies program serves the needs of students for breadth in their undergraduate education, credit hours will not count for both Liberal Studies Perspectives and for the major simultaneously.

This provision allows departments to make the decision whether their own introductory courses provide the most appropriate exposure for students in Liberal Studies, or whether their discipline and department best serve the Liberal Studies program with a course separate from major requirements. The opportunity to take courses that introduce the major will aid students in making informed decisions in selecting majors. It is the intention of this provision to assure that students receive a broad exposure to the Arts and Sciences outside of the area of their major, and that majors do not use Liberal Studies Perspectives hours to meet their requirements. It is the responsibility of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and the Oversight Committee to monitor the operation of this provision to see that it works well and fairly, and that advisors implement the spirit of the provision through careful advisement.

Academic Learning Communities

The goal of participation in an Academic Learning Community is to encourage the student to discover and appreciate relationships of disciplines and knowledge and to provide a sense of place within the university community. Academic Learning Communities implement the Student Sense of Place and Integration of Knowledge Fundamental Principles. Academic Learning Communities consist of cohorts of students and instructors in a selection of grouped courses. Participation in an Academic Learning Community is a Liberal Studies requirement. Placing freshmen in an Academic Learning Community in the first semester is a program priority.

Academic Learning Communities will be organized in a variety of formats reflecting faculty and student interests, scheduling constraints, and resources. The accepted formats of academic learning communities will evolve as the university gains more experience with learning communities, and the campus culture reveals the most suitable formats for meeting the needs of our student population. Examples of course groupings might include: a Freshman Seminar, a transitions course, and a writing course; or, a Freshman Seminar, a writing course, and a Perspectives course; or, a writing course, another core course, and a Perspectives course. Students in majors that begin in the freshman year (e.g., Art, Music) can be accommodated by including entry-level major courses in the Academic Learning Community course grouping.

The Academic Learning Community requirement is based on considerable evidence in the literature that student learning, sense of community, and

retention are improved by providing students with an academic structure that facilitates and fosters interaction among students, faculty, and courses. Identification with a set of peers will provide social support while revealing the essentially social nature of intellectual endeavors. Experience with several faculty and staff members who are coordinating course activities will encourage the student to discover and appreciate the relationship of disciplines, knowledge, and extracurricular life.

Upper-level Perspectives Courses

Students must have at least three hours from an upper-level (300 or 400 level) course in any Perspectives area outside of their major. Selected existing upper-level courses in departments may be approved as Perspectives courses in Liberal Studies, and these courses will satisfy this requirement. The development of new upper-level Liberal Studies courses that involve broad, even interdisciplinary, experiences and do not require prerequisite disciplinary courses will be encouraged. Alternatively, a student may propose a contract with the instructor of any upper level course and with the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies to have the course satisfy this upper level requirement, provided that the student satisfies class standing and any other course prerequisites. In this case, specific course requirements, primarily in writing and information use, will be clearly identified or developed to satisfy the Liberal Studies goals and areas of emphasis. Instructors are not bound to accept a contract proposal if they feel the course is not suitable, or if the contract will place an unreasonable burden on the instructor or on the class as a whole.

The upper level requirement is an attempt to overcome the "get it over with" attitude toward the former General Education program, and to act on the belief that liberal studies are lifelong activities. It also affords students the opportunity to make choices about the broadening Liberal Studies component of their education based on the more sophisticated perspective they hold in their junior and senior years of college. This requirement is also intended to help build faculty commitment to Liberal Studies by offering opportunities to teach more mature upper level students within the context of Liberal Studies.

V. The Freshman Seminar

The primary goal of the Freshman Seminar is to introduce students to intellectual life at the university level. The Freshman Seminar component addresses the Student Sense of Place, Liberal Arts and Sciences Emphasis, Fundamental Skills, Integration of Knowledge, Moral Reflection, and Faculty Commitment components of the Fundamental Principles. The Freshman Seminar will introduce students to the importance of Liberal Studies in a university education. It will help students to see the necessity for reasoning and communication proficiencies

as foundations for life-long intellectual and professional growth. The type of exploration of ideas characteristic of a seminar will help students begin to see that important cultural, social, economic and political issues of a global society are not limited to the traditional boundaries of the academic disciplines or the specializations of the professions. The Freshman Seminar should encourage students to discuss serious ideas and develop rigorous intellectual habits.

Freshman Seminar courses will be offered in the Perspectives areas of Liberal Studies and will fulfill one Perspectives category requirement. The Freshman Seminar must be taken by all new freshmen in their first semester. Any Perspectives course section designated by the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and the Oversight Committee as a Freshman Seminar will satisfy this requirement. A Freshman Seminar may be based on a regular Perspectives course, or may be a special course motivated by faculty interest. These special courses can be proposed in any discipline, to fit into any Perspectives category; they need not be from traditional Liberal Studies disciplines. Seminar sections of Perspectives courses will make up part of a department's contribution to Liberal Studies.

Freshman Seminar sections will be limited to no more than 22 students. Most Freshman Seminar sections will be part of an Academic Learning Community. Seminars must have a significant writing component based on rigorous reading and seminar-format discussions. The Freshman Seminar course will perform a balancing act between a required common learning experience for all students who take the course and the freedom for individual faculty to pursue disciplinary interests. The Freshman Seminar course may incorporate common themes, such as examining general modes of inquiry as distinct from discipline-specific studies. The Freshman Seminar could be a home for a common theme for the academic year and the use of a common reading, including participation by the text's author in campus-wide intellectual activities. However, such themes would be of limited importance compared to the instructor's disciplinary interests.

The Freshman Seminar requirement is based on a desire to set a high standard for the academic habits and intellectual dispositions of entering freshmen. It will introduce students immediately and dramatically to the intellectual environment that comprises a university. Freshman Seminar courses that attempt to incorporate non-academic transition issues tend to flounder because faculty feel uncomfortable teaching non-academic issues and thus faculty commitment to such courses is difficult to build and maintain. This program leaves transition issues to those better trained to deal with them (Student Affairs staff and trained, interested faculty), and instead limits the Freshman Seminar's focus to the development of academic rigor and intellectual dispositions. The disciplinary familiarity of the Perspectives areas are the most comfortable environment for faculty to establish rigor and demonstrate intellectual habits. The use of a

common text or theme will provide students an opportunity to see faculty modeling intellectual learning habits by considering a topic that might be outside of their area of specialization.

VI. The Core

The Core provides students with the academic skills and intellectual habits needed throughout the undergraduate experience. The Core addresses the Fundamental Skills, Integration of Knowledge, and Faculty Commitment components of the Fundamental Principles. All students must be able to communicate clearly in written and oral forms, and to deal with numerical information effectively. All students need a foundation for productive lives through their knowledge of sound health, wellness and activity practices. These proficiencies are useful in every aspect of life: in independent and collaborative learning, in the workplace, and at leisure. The Core will be taken by all students who enter Western Carolina University for their first year of college. The Core consists of five three-credit-hour courses:

Writing (6 hours): Two sequential three-hour College Writing courses, taught by the English department, will introduce first-year students to college-level writing. A writing sample coordinated by the English department during orientation assessment will determine placement in the College Writing sequence. The freshman composition program in place is well considered, disciplinarily developmental and subject to constant assessment and improvement. It is based on best practices in composition instruction, and addresses immediately an essential academic skill in the Liberal Studies program, that of communicating ideas in written form.

Mathematics (3 hours): The mathematics course will serve as an introduction to applications of mathematics to daily experience. Emphasis will be on the development of conceptual understanding rather than on computational drill. Projects in which students do mathematical analysis of observations will be required. A significant proportion of the analysis will be statistically based. Students who are placed into, and wish to take, a higher level course will satisfy this requirement by passing the higher level course. However, every student must take a college mathematics course or receive college level transfer credit for a course taken at another institution. Computational tools are the necessary foundations built in secondary education mathematics courses, but applications of mathematics at the university level go beyond basic skills into higher-order reasoning and analysis, and no student should be considered educated without exposure to the use of mathematics in these contexts.

Oral Communication (3 hours): The Oral Communication requirement will address the basic competencies in the contexts of interpersonal, small group,

and public speaking. Assessment during orientation will identify students who may wish to enroll in a section of oral communication designed for those who have a significant fear of public speaking. The first course in the College Writing sequence will be a prerequisite for an oral communication course. The oral communication requirement in the General Education program is a recent innovation that was developed in response to faculty demand and the requirement is continued in the Liberal Studies program.

Wellness (3 hours): The Wellness requirement will provide students with a foundation for lifelong wellness by informing and valuing health and wellness beliefs. The Wellness course includes an integrated fitness activity which will emphasize the crucial role of physical fitness in lifelong wellness. Students will be challenged to make thoughtful and voluntary behavioral changes that will promote lifelong health. The important contribution of leisure activity to the overall balance of life will be explored. The roles of such lifestyle factors as stress and stress management, recognition of obsessive or addictive behaviors, and the development of healthy interpersonal relationships will be examined. Health and wellness decisions are lifelong considerations for any human being, and healthy people have the best chance of contributing fully to the society in which they function.

VII. The Perspectives

The Perspectives component of Liberal Studies recognizes the centrality of the liberal arts and sciences to a university education and to preparation for social and professional responsibilities. Understanding history, culture, and language, the fine and performing arts, science and technology, and ethical concerns is important for developing a broad world perspective and knowledge base. In the Perspectives, students will be exposed to important modes of inquiry, discovery, and interpretation through study of the concepts, principles, and theories of the Liberal Arts and Sciences. The Perspectives implement the Liberal Arts and Sciences Emphasis, Faculty Commitment, Fundamental Skills, Moral Reflection, and Integration of Knowledge components of the Fundamental Principles.

The primary goals of the Perspectives are:

- To promote love of learning and to cultivate an active interest in the Liberal Studies;
- To build on the Core's foundation through practice and refinement of areas of academic emphasis;
- To provide students with a broadened world view and knowledge base;
- To provide experiences in the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences from which connections between disciplines can be revealed;
- To provide an introduction to the challenges of living in a global society;

- To create opportunities for reflection on values, and for discussing differences in values in a critical yet tolerant manner;
- To afford opportunities to make career or disciplinary choices.

Faculty commitment, based on a mutual love of learning, will be built into the Liberal Studies program through trust accorded to faculty to engage undergraduates with the best that disciplines have to offer. Specifically, each department or discipline will offer the best Liberal Studies courses possible. Each course will be taught by instructors who are both qualified and excited about their topics, and each instructor will vigorously engage students in expanding their interest in that subject.

Depth and Breadth

Courses will be specifically designed to offer the student "depth" as well as "breadth". Breadth should not be interpreted to mean that all Liberal Studies courses will be surveys. Breadth will come from the variety of disciplines and teaching styles offered in Perspectives courses, and from effective use of Academic Learning Communities to compare and contrast courses and disciplines. Breadth is understood to include an introduction to a discipline's primary concepts, principles and theories. Depth is concerned with the intensive exploration and application of selected concepts, principles, theories and modes of inquiry.

Each department will choose the category or categories of the Perspectives to which to commit its resources. To ensure that students take courses in a variety of disciplines, departments may offer courses in no more than two of the perspectives categories unless they have the approval of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and the Oversight Committee. Departments must commit to scheduling Perspectives courses in ways that facilitate development of reasonable student course schedules. Departments are encouraged to offer upper-level courses that fit within the Perspectives categories and that incorporate one or more of the Perspectives areas of emphasis. These upper-level courses will provide considerable depth, and might not be offered every semester or in multiple sections.

Areas of Emphasis (Proficiencies, Dispositions, and Experiences)

Academic proficiencies, dispositions, and experiences are grounded in the Program Core and are practiced and expanded in Perspectives courses. These areas of emphasis are integral to the Perspectives curriculum and reflect Faculty consensus on the most important needs of students. They are essential to active learning and serve as the bases of academic rigor, good intellectual habits, and life-long learning.

Every Liberal Studies course will emphasize writing, and its companion proficiency, information use. The Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies will monitor Perspectives courses to see that they provide writing experiences that form a bridge between the first college writing courses and the needs and expectations of the major program. In addition, each Perspectives course will be expected to include emphasis on one or more of the following:

- Critical analysis of arguments
- Oral communication
- Service learning
- Moral reflection
- Cultural diversity
- Any other creative but defensible area of intellectual development that a discipline wants to focus on, and that the program chooses to adopt.

No Perspectives course will be expected to address all areas of emphasis, and each instructor will be free to determine the best means by which these emphases are taught. Instructors also will be expected to document the ways in which learning outcomes in selected areas of emphasis will be assessed.

Categories

All disciplines are invited to propose Perspectives courses. The Freshman Seminar will satisfy one of the Perspectives categories, but the Freshman Seminar hours will not count toward the 24 hours of Perspectives courses that each student must complete. This assures that every student will have three Liberal Studies hours which are to be taken as an upper-level elective in any Perspectives category the student chooses.

Social Sciences (6 hours, courses must be taken in two disciplines):

Social Science courses provide systematic study of observational and analytic methods and findings of those disciplines that focus on the interpersonal functioning and institutional creations of human beings. Courses in this Perspective may focus on the scientific study of the mental and behavioral characteristics of individuals or groups or may focus on the description and explanation of political, economic, or legal institutions. Included will be inquiry into basic social scientific concepts such as mind, behavior, class, society, culture, freedom, government, property, equality, and rights.

Physical and Biological Sciences (6 hours, all courses must include a laboratory or applied component; courses must be taken in two disciplines):

In the biological sciences, students learn to view the human being as having concerns continuous with, though different from, those of other organisms of Nature. In the physical sciences, students are directed toward the definition and solution of problems involving the character of matter, energy, motion, or mechanical/dynamic systems. Study in these courses concern scientific methods. Scientific study includes an appreciation of the tentative character of scientific conclusions: repeated experimental testing is needed in order to confirm assertions, and revision and even rejection of hypotheses is allowed. Laboratory work will be central to theoretical discussions as an experience in the character of scientific work, and will provide an opportunity to experience the environment in which scientific study is conducted.

Science courses at the 100- and 200-level can be used to meet the Physical and Biological Sciences requirement, even if they are not approved Liberal Studies courses, provided that they have a laboratory or applied component. However, science courses that meet major or program requirements will fulfill the Physical and Biological Sciences category requirement only, and a Liberal Studies elective will be required to meet the Liberal Studies Perspectives hours requirement.

History (3 hours):

The study of history introduces students to a distinctive body of knowledge and to the tools of historical inquiry that shape and define it. History locates people and events in space and time, explaining change and continuity, and the diversity of forces shaping events, institutions, and value systems. The subject of study should be of sufficient breadth to convey an understanding of development over time and of sufficient depth to illustrate the complexity of forces that mold events. The study of history should engage students in the experience of interpreting the record of the past and drawing their own conclusions.

Humanities (3 hours):

The role of this requirement is to confront students with landmark texts that embody the Western heritage of humanity's attempts to understand itself. These might be in the form of fiction, poetry, dialogue, essay and other appropriate written forms that embody our literary heritage. The texts chosen for study might be thematic in nature or drawn from a specific ethnic or national tradition. They must be of sufficient breadth and depth to probe fundamental issues regarding the human condition. This study might include narrative form, critical textual analysis, or the study of a language, but the first priority must be to engage students in the exploration of the significance of human modes of being, thought, and values in their lives.

Fine and Performing Arts (3 hours):

Learning in the Fine and Performing 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, visiting 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.

World Cultures (3 hours):

World Cultures courses will involve the study of significant contemporary issues in a global and multi-disciplinary setting. Specifically identified issues of study-- which might include the consideration of ethnicity, gender, religion, or race-- should illustrate the nature of cultural diversity and global interdependence and the challenges of solving problems and reaching understanding across national and cultural divides. The study of world cultures should actively engage students in the experience of synthesis of information from a variety of disciplines which might include the natural and social sciences, history, the humanities, and the arts. It should also emphasize the responsibility of educated people to be informed about current public issues.

VIII.

IX. The Administrative Component

Functions of the Administrative Component

Functions of the administrative component will be based on an ongoing effort to raise the status of Liberal Studies at WCU, and will include:

- Reviewing department and faculty proposals for Liberal Studies courses with the authority to approve, recommend revision, or reject such proposals, and, thereafter, based on sound assessment practices, to review ongoing Liberal Studies courses and faculty;
- Insuring an appropriate schedule of Liberal Studies courses that allow development of suitable student schedules, including examination of the feasibility of scheduling students for their entire first year;
- Recruiting appropriate faculty to participate in Liberal Studies course delivery, Learning Communities, and Freshman Seminars;

- Creation and implementation of an ongoing program of development for faculty committed to excellent teaching in Liberal Studies;
- Development, implementation, and ongoing revision of an assessment program for Liberal Studies, including recommended timely adjustments as needed to insure the integrity and coherence of the program;
- Development, implementation and ongoing revision of a reward system specifically for Liberal Studies faculty, based on sound assessment practices;
- Developing a formal policy and procedure for allocation of faculty positions based on Liberal Studies initiatives;
- Developing of a procedure to interview and inform prospective new faculty concerning expectations for participation in Liberal Studies;
- Orchestrating the phase-in of the new Liberal Studies program.

Transition from the Present Program to Liberal Studies

It is anticipated that the 1999-2001 academic years will be planning years in which new courses will be proposed and all courses, new and revised, will be reviewed for approval by the Oversight Committee. Other administrative details will be developed and implemented. The new Liberal Studies program should begin to serve new students in the Fall of 2001. There will be a period of several years in which both the old General Education and new Liberal Studies programs are in effect for different students. No student will be penalized as a consequence of the transition between the two programs; every effort will be made to facilitate waivers and substitutions between the two programs during the time of transition. The General Education program should no longer be needed in any form by the Fall of 2003.

Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies

The academic attitudes and intellectual habits molded in Liberal Studies will set the patterns for success in subsequent major courses. The retention of quality students will be improved with a more challenging, coherent Liberal Studies program. Thus, the Liberal Studies program deserves greater visibility on campus, a direct voice where resource allocations are being decided, and a clearly defined advocate. Therefore, the direction of the Liberal Studies program will be the responsibility of an Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies.

The Oversight Committee

The Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies will appoint an oversight committee composed of nine advocates of Liberal Studies chosen from among those teaching in Liberal Studies and from areas that are not

primarily responsible for Liberal Studies delivery. Committee members will be limited to three year terms with the possibility of renewal. Membership terms should be staggered so there is some ongoing consistency in the committee membership year to year. As needed, committee members will chair focus groups to address issues in the administration of the Liberal Studies program.

The role of the Oversight committee will be to advise the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and to consider and approve courses for inclusion in the Liberal Studies program. The Oversight committee will consider assessment issues for the program, and will discuss and recommend policy changes as they are suggested. The committee will oversee implementation of the new program.

This Oversight committee should fit into the Faculty Governance structure as the current General Education Committee does. In light of impending changes in Faculty governance, it is impossible to recommend a long-term position for this committee, however it must be connected to the curriculum review mechanism in the new governance model.

Student Advisory Group

The Oversight committee will be assisted by a student advisory group. The Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies will work with the Student Affairs division to identify students who will take such a responsibility seriously, and those students will be invited to join this advisory group. Students should be selected from across the range of class standing and from diverse disciplines.

The Incentives and Rewards System

The goals of establishing a Liberal Studies incentives and rewards system are:

- To encourage the commitment of faculty and thus the institution to Liberal Studies;
- To reward faculty and departments committed to quality contributions to Liberal Studies;
- To protect the faculty who contribute to Liberal Studies in the evaluation process of AFE and TPR and post-tenure review.

Some incentive and reward policies and procedures that might be included in this system are providing financial support for faculty development (travel support for conferences, workshops, visiting consultants); financial support for visiting scholars specifically for Liberal Studies; and some procedure receptive to unique needs of individual Liberal Studies faculty. The system should mandate a defined Liberal Studies component to appropriate departmental AFE, TPR and post-

tenure review documents, or establish separate, parallel Liberal Studies documentation for consideration in AFE, TPR and post-tenure reviews. The Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies will advocate for allocation of funding specifically to attract and reward Liberal Studies faculty participation. The development of a mechanism for rewarding departments or individual faculty with additional student credit hours in their work load for teaching in a Learning Community or Freshman Seminar course is an alternative to direct financial compensation.

Criteria and Procedure for Approval as a Liberal Studies Course

All courses will be reviewed by the Oversight Committee before acceptance as a Liberal Studies course, but departments will be trusted to determine appropriate content and methodology which will only be questioned if assessments determine that a course is not meeting the goals of the Liberal Studies program. Class sizes will be dictated by the needs of effective teaching and learning in a specific discipline. Small class sizes will be strongly encouraged, and the Oversight Committee may ask for pedagogical justification for large class sizes.

Course Proposals must address the following:

- How will this course develop a love of learning and an active curiosity for knowledge?
- How does the course address the Fundamental Principles?
- How does the course address the learning goals of the Liberal Studies program?
- How does the course fit into the chosen Core or Perspectives category? Description should address the characteristics of the category, not merely the traditional inclusion of the discipline in that category.
- For Perspectives courses:
 - How does the course address the writing and information use emphases of the Perspectives?
 - How does the course address other areas of emphasis of the Perspectives?
 - How will attainment of areas of emphasis be assessed?
- What will the overall workload (e.g., number of books read, papers written, projects created, presentations given) of the course be?
- What is the evidence that the faculty is committed to teaching this course with this approach to course content and method? Who will be teaching this course in the foreseeable future?
- If the course is an upper-level course, how will it be designed so that no disciplinary prerequisites are required?

Course proposals consist of the institutional course proposal form (AA-5) accompanied by a Liberal Studies proposal form that addresses the questions stated above. Course proposals are submitted to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, who sends Liberal Studies course proposals to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and the Oversight Committee for consideration. The Oversight committee has the right to approve the course proposal and pass it on to the Curriculum approval network (which may be modified by the new governance structure, but is otherwise assumed to be as it is presently), or to reject the proposal and return it to the department or faculty member with which it originated with suggestions for revision.

The Assessment of the Program

The assessment cycle is an ongoing process that seeks to advance the quality of a program. Assessment data will be sought with the objective of obtaining the perspectives of those most involved with the program, the students and faculty. Assessment must make use of multiple methods of collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, such as focus-group discussions; reviews of syllabi, exams, other course documents; student portfolios; and participant observations and peer observations. Information gathered by assessment will be examined by the Oversight committee and shared with department heads and faculty with the expressed intention that courses will be updated and modified to best meet the goals of the Liberal Studies program. Departments will be required to report to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies on their response to program assessment feedback.

The use of multiple methods of data collection and the effort to obtain multiple perspectives creates the potential for assessment information overload. Those conducting program assessment can neither attend to nor report on all details of the program every semester. It will be necessary to construct an iterative process that will encompass the whole program by focusing on a clearly specified and limited set of themes to be examined in any single assessment cycle. These themes must address program characteristics and goals, rather than elements of individual courses. Assessment strategies should accommodate expressions of diverse points of view. The themes and the strategies to assess them will be modified and updated regularly in response to the results of the assessment cycle.

The new elements of the Liberal Studies program constitute a primary focus of program assessment. These elements include the Freshman Seminar and the Wellness course components of the First Year Core, and the use of academic learning communities and of upper-level liberal studies electives and contract courses. Assessment strategies for evaluating these elements will include: (1) reviewing portfolios of the work products of randomly selected students; (2)

conducting two kinds of focus-group interviews, one with randomly selected students, and another with randomly selected faculty; and (3) review of course documents. Assessment activities for these new elements of the program will be conducted each semester, at least until these elements are clearly established in the program.

A second assessment focus will be the performance outcomes of students who have successfully completed the courses that comprise the First-Year Core and the Perspectives components of the program. Randomly selected students in courses will submit portfolios of work that reflect their achievement in those courses. In First-Year Core courses, these portfolios will be reviewed to assess student proficiency in written and oral communication and ability to deal with numerical information. Perspectives course portfolios will be reviewed to assess student performance in Perspectives courses, all of which emphasize writing and information use and one or more additional areas of emphasis required of all Perspectives courses. In addition, assessment of the First-Year Core and Perspectives components of the program will include review of course documents and two kinds of focus-group interviews, one with randomly selected students, and another with randomly selected faculty. These assessment activities will be conducted for selected courses each semester.

During the implementation phase of the Liberal Studies program, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and the Oversight Committee will prepare a specific schedule and set of procedures for the assessment cycle.

Transfer Students and Non-Fall Semester Freshmen

Transfer students who enter with an Associate of Arts degree from a member of the North Carolina Community College System will have completed the General Education requirements of the articulation agreement with the Community College System. This General Education program will be accepted in place of any requirements of the program specified by this document. If a transfer student has completed the General Education or Liberal Studies program in another institution with which WCU has an articulation agreement, he or she will be considered to have completed the Liberal Studies requirements.

Students who transfer only a part of the General Education program from the North Carolina Community College System, or any part of any other accredited institution's General Education or Liberal Studies program, will have their transcripts evaluated. Each student will be informed as to which Liberal Studies requirements have been met and which still need to be fulfilled. Whenever possible, upper division students will be encouraged to complete their Liberal Studies program with upper division courses or contracts.

Freshmen who enter in the Spring semester will be placed in a section of Freshman Seminar that is offered in the Spring. In cases where a student entering in the Spring can not take Freshman Seminar during the Spring semester, they will take it during the next Fall semester.

For students who have taken some minimal number of transferable credits, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and Oversight committee will make a judgment about whether or not the student should take a Freshman Seminar course or be exempted from this requirement and take Liberal Studies Perspectives elective hours instead. With some experience, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and the Oversight Committee will develop guidelines for making decisions about students who enter with some transferable credits.

Implementation Considerations

- Some components, such as the Freshman Seminar and Academic Learning Communities, might require a phased implementation;
- Class size restrictions may influence loads in departments that have traditionally taught large class sections;
- Teaching mandatory Freshman Seminar sections will necessitate a shift in teaching loads;
- Adoption of a Freshman Seminar depends on a definite and universal faculty commitment to the benefits that this component offers to students;
- All participants will be expected to commit their best teachers to the program, to adhere to relevant class size restrictions, and to carry a fair share of the Liberal Studies load;
- All Liberal Studies faculty will be expected to require a significant, meaningful work load of all students, including readings, writing assignments, projects and other activities.

Procedure for Program Modification

Any participant in the Liberal Studies program, or other University entity, has the right to propose modifications to the Liberal Studies program. Such modifications will be presented in writing to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, who will send them on the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for Liberal Studies and the Oversight Committee for consideration. The Oversight Committee may approve such proposals, or reject them and return them to the originating unit with suggestions for revision. Upon approval by the Oversight Committee, program modification proposals will be passed on to the Curriculum review network. The mechanism of the Curriculum review network will either be

as it is presently, or be whatever mechanism results from Faculty Governance restructuring.