

Transforming Learning at UW-Eau Claire

Final Report of Strategic Planning Workgroup 2 November 12, 2007

At the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, a student-focused culture and a staff of talented, engaged educators combine to provide an exceptional learning environment. Supplementing these core strengths are cutting-edge collaborative research opportunities, life-enhancing study abroad experiences and a vibrant residential community.

This tradition has served us well, and it provides the foundation upon which we can continue to grow and serve our students. Today's college graduate will be entering a workforce characterized by increasingly sophisticated technology, global competition, limited job security and a demand for innovation and adaptation. These challenges require a heightened level of engagement and adaptability. Furthermore, graduates will enter a world with increasingly finite resources, a growing population, increased conflict and political instability. Thus our best strategy is to produce a graduating class of creative, adaptable, globally minded, lifelong learners. These are our ideal graduates. We propose a series of curricular and cultural transformations on campus to develop our ideal graduates. The transformations are centered around two fundamental goals:

Overarching Goals:

1. **Development of capable, resourceful and engaged graduates operating for the greater good of society. (Intentional Learner)**
2. **Development of a faculty culture that consistently puts student learning first and inspires students to meet high academic standards. (Intentional Educator)**

The ideal graduate benefits from a strong synergy between the Intentional Learner and the Intentional Educator. To develop and reinforce this synergy, we propose the following pedagogical innovations and transformations:

A. Gateway Colloquia:

Establish a series of small, interdisciplinary, seminar-style courses (perhaps 15-20 students). Faculty teams would develop a range of thematic courses. Goals of the Gateway Colloquia include:

- Development of engaged, energized students
- Rigorous reading — for understanding; for criticism
- In-depth questioning and critical reasoning
- Rigorous writing — for expression, for clarity, for learning
- Developing an ability to recognize and pose important questions

- Systematic critiquing and problem-solving skills
- Making connections among varying disciplinary perspectives
- Developing an awareness of value systems
- Awareness of academic readiness issues and University services
- Awareness of campus support mechanisms and opportunities for campus involvement

Mechanisms:

- Courses will be worth 4-5 credits, with 1 credit devoted to co-curricular activities.
- Courses will be multidisciplinary and often team-taught.
- Courses would be newly developed, not slotted into existing offerings.
- Gateway colloquia would replace FYE.
- Course development would be supported by curriculum and pedagogy grants.
- Faculty reassignment time would be provided for curriculum development.
- Initiative stimulates rethinking faculty “student credit hour/seat” loads to encourage interdisciplinary interactions.
- Scheduling would be flexible to support out-of-classroom experiences.

A possible model for organizing the gateway colloquia is to have an umbrella theme such as global societal issues for a significant percentage of the courses. (See Figure 1.) This would maintain focus and continuity throughout the program, while allowing flexibility and academic freedom for instructors as they develop topics for their specific courses. A global theme for the gateway colloquia could also be a platform upon which to internationalize the curriculum.

Potential Colloquia Format:

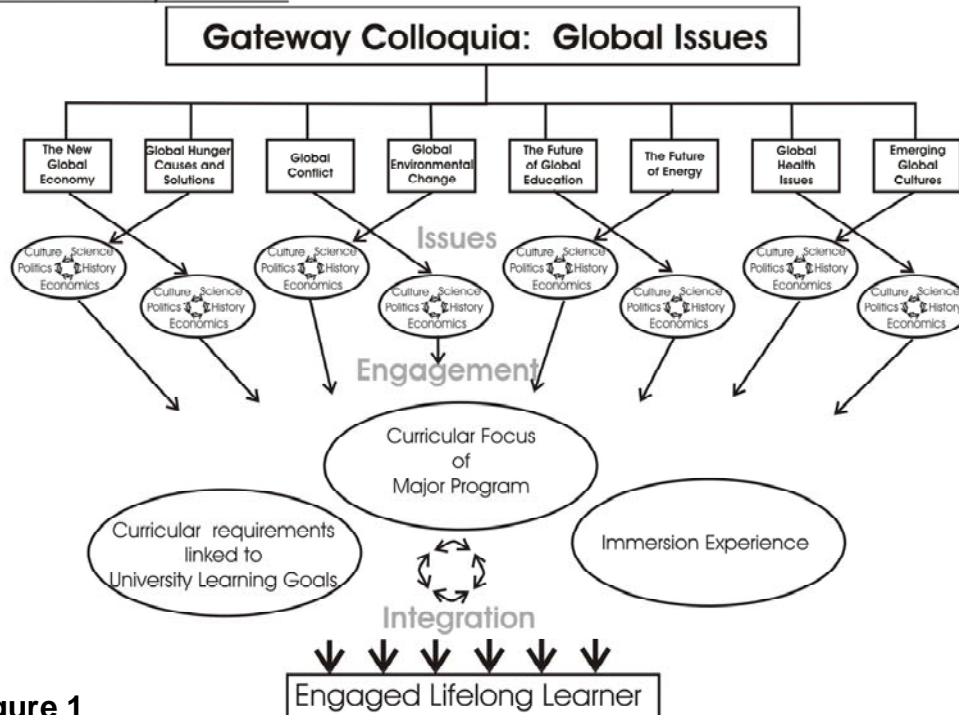


Figure 1

Regardless of specific scope, this diverse range of courses would emphasize open discussion, ambitious assignments, and academic rigor – in a relevant, issue-oriented context.

Time Frame:

- initial pilot plan (~25%) and initial phase-out of FYE in Fall 2008
- full implementation (ca. 100 sections/year) in Fall 2009

B. Immersion Experience

A key component in the development of engaged, lifelong learners is a semester-long immersion experience, in which participants would become deeply involved in a rich, stimulating extracurricular activity designed to foster true engagement, inspire critical thinking, and provide time for time for in-depth analysis, interpretation and reflection.

Examples of an immersion experience include:

- Study abroad semester designed to meet objectives of significant intellectual growth
- Study abroad semester with a significant service component
- Domestic service project, such as VISTA or AmeriCorps
- Internship (including student teaching and student nursing)
- Collaborative student/faculty research project involving several months of laboratory or field work, followed by a semester or more of data compilation and analysis
- Service-Learning semester (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, Katrina relief)
- National Student Exchange with a significant service or research component

Characteristics of an immersion experience:

- One-on-one mentoring
- Significant analysis/interpretation/reflection component
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Community engagement
- Professional presentation
- Challenges in unfamiliar contexts

Mechanisms:

- Revise university graduation requirements to incorporate an 8-16 credit semester-long immersion semester.
- Include credits from immersion experience as part of a revised GE distribution system.

- Rethink faculty time allotment to permit 48 credits over two years instead of 12 credits/semester.
- Provide targeted ORSP and Differential Tuition funds.
- Establish a coordinating office/system/clearinghouse.
- Provide faculty credit for one-on-one mentoring.
- Establish a grant/scholarship program – needed to ensure access for all students.

Time Frame:

- Pilot programs in 2008 and 2009
- Full implementation as degree requirement Fall 2009

C. Revision of the GE Distribution System

Beyond the creation of *Gateway Colloquia* and the *Immersion Experience*, we propose that the GE distribution system be revised. A revised system should maintain a provision for academic breadth, but with more flexibility than in the current system. In addition, we propose an integration of the GE system with a revised *University Assessment Plan* that will presumably follow directly from the revision of the *UW-Eau Claire Baccalaureate Goals*.

The Provost's Office has already commissioned a GE Revision Workgroup. We suggest the following principles to guide that group in formulating the distribution component of GE.

Guiding Principles for a Revised Distribution System

- The current GE system lacks flexibility, and impedes development of intellectual independence by dictating too many registration decisions for students.
- Credits from *Gateway Colloquia* need to be accounted for (either by counting those credits for distribution, or reducing total GE credits).
- The revised *Baccalaureate Goals* should form the basis of at least part of the GE curriculum, and a revised assessment system should be designed in conjunction with the University graduation requirements.
- Degree requirements should be structured *exclusively* to serve student learning and intellectual development.

We also propose to the GE Revision Workgroup that a revised distribution system fulfill the specific goals of (1) academic breadth and (2) integration of GE with University-wide assessment. Below are possible implementation strategies. These are meant as an example for the GE Revision Workgroup to consider as that committee formulates a specific plan and receives further advice via campus-wide discussion.

Objective #1: Academic Breadth

Create and approve a simple, balanced, and flexible provision that requires a minimum number of credits across a few *general* areas, perhaps 9-10 credits in each of the following: social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. The lack of academic “sub-categories” creates flexibility necessary for the goal-based distribution provision described below. Also, since the stated goal is *academic* breadth, a GE designation may be unnecessary.

Objective #2: Integration of GE with University-wide Assessment

Create a parallel distribution provision that is based explicitly the soon-to-be-finalized *Baccalaureate Goals*, viz.

- Knowledge of Human Culture and the Natural World
- Creative and Critical Thinking
- Effective Communication
- Individual and Social Responsibility
- Respect for Diversity among People

In this system, a set of courses would be listed under each Goal, and students would be required to take a specified number of courses from each group. Direct Assessment data would be collected from these courses, and the results would be used by instructors to revise the courses, and considered by curriculum committees during the update/re-approval process. To make any such assessment plan tractable, it will be desirable to reduce the number of approved courses to a fraction of the current large number of GE courses.

A proposed sequence of steps to meet *Objective #2*:

- 0) Finalize the revision of the *UW-Eau Claire Baccalaureate Goals*.
- 1) The Assessment committee *and* curriculum committees work together to formulate *Outcomes* based on the revised *Goals*, and formulate course “categories” based on Goals and/or Outcomes.
- 2) Faculty/Departments submit (concise) course paperwork to curriculum committees to have courses (mainly existing courses) assigned to specific categories.
- 3) Direct assessment materials (like that provided currently via the web Portfolio) would be collected from these courses, and evaluated by the task force that currently reads portfolios.
- 4) “Close the Loop”: Assessment results would be fed back into the curriculum revision and evaluation process. These data would be provided used by instructors for “optimizing” courses, and the results would be considered by curriculum committees during the course update/re-approval process.

Mechanisms:

- This plan does not require a major curriculum development effort. Rather this is a new, resource-neutral protocol by which most of our existing GE courses are offered, assessed, and updated (in an *integrated* manner).
- There would presumably be almost total overlap between these “goal/outcome” distribution credits and those that meet the “academic” distribution. That is, the initiative is not to create two different sets of courses, but merely to apply two different kinds of guidelines to one set of courses.
- Additional university-wide graduation requirements (e.g. Cultural diversity and Foreign Culture, possibly Math and English competency as well) are straightforwardly integrated into this system.
- The revised distribution system is designed to provide additional credits for purely elective purposes.

Timeline:

- Spring 2008: Revision of *Goals* completed.
- Fall 2008: Development outcomes and courses categories, and formal approval of new graduation requirements based on them.
- Spring 2009: Course paperwork submitted and evaluated.
- Fall 2009: Full implementation – to coincide with *Gateway Colloquia* and *Immersion Experience*.

D. PASSPORT: an on-line student-centered advising protocol

An online portal system, called **PASSPORT** (**P**urposeful, **A**daptable, **S**trategic **S**cholarly **P**lan **o**f **R**eflection and **T**ransition), will be an academic variant of Facebook. It will be tool for students as well as faculty and staff (both academic and leadership). University learning goals will be infused in the system; students will develop personal objectives to meet those goals through all university experiences, including (but not limited to) coursework, leadership opportunities, and service learning. Students will be introduced to the concept in orientation, and begin the portal in their gateway course. This tool would help students become more engaged and intentional in planning and assessing their learning experiences. It will be designed to foster a mindset of personal attainment as opposed to one of merely meeting externally imposed requirements. The portal system will allow students and advisers to review semester and four-year goals and the short- and long-term means to attain them. This tool would help advisers of all kinds (official faculty, organizational, and peer) view a holistic and historical picture of an advisee quickly and easily.

Benefits:

- PASSPORT is intended to be a progressive, growth-oriented tool designed to integrate student learning, student development, advising, personal and professional assessment and career planning.

- The system will be integrated into the whole university community as a primary tool for tracking progress. It will be a meaningful requirement.
- Students would be required to participate, but would be encouraged to choose their original work that best exhibits attainment of a goal.
- Educators could alert students with specific interests to opportunities and resources quickly and easily.
- Students could allow access and permissions differently (faculty might see grades; peers might not).
- When students indicate interests, matching opportunities and options could be provided by the system.
- A co-curricular transcript could be developed from a student's PASSPORT data. Resumes and recommendation letters could be enhanced with detail from the system.
- Qualitative and quantitative data about what our students find transformative will be available to the university. We will also have opportunities to observe growth over time in an individual student.

Mechanisms:

- PASSPORT *replaces* both degree audit and portfolio, combining both of these functions.
- System would link to D2L and to University registration functions
- Implementation will have an impact on academics, advising, residential life, service learning, student leadership, and career planning (at a minimum).
- Should be required of all students beginning Fall 2010, to coincide with completion of curricular revision, as well as development of Gateway courses and Immersion Experience. Student Senate should be consulted as soon as plan is adopted.

Timeline:

- Spring 2008: Decision making body (committee or administrative group) makes a decision to purchase as system (like the open source portfolio system at UMD) or create one. Appropriate staffing would be considered in LTS. Committee will call for pilot volunteers from all end-user groups to help make decisions.
- Fall 2008: Software would be purchased and modified, or developed. A committee representing future end users will help with this process.
- Spring 2009: Faculty and Staff pilot participants will test system, and training for other users (advisers, hall directors, student leadership advisors, career services folks, etc.) will take place. Gateway courses and the Immersion Experience will be integrated into the system).
- Orientation 2009: Students will sign up for pilot groups.
- Fall 2009: Pilot launches with a small group (10%-20%) of incoming students (Gateway colloquium instructors would participate in the pilot (5-10 instructors would teach 100-200 students).
- Orientation 2010: Program launch for all students.

E. Cultivation of Intentional Educators

The following three objectives will foster a cultural shift at UW-Eau Claire to support and value intentional, transformative educators. The expected outcome is that faculty will be prepared and motivated to make student learning the foremost criterion in course design. Faculty should be equipped to develop courses that inspire high academic performance. Faculty as mentors and intellectual role models should also help students appreciate the intrinsic value of the liberal arts.

Objective #1: Expand high-level visible leadership for teaching and learning.

- Create a Dean for Undergraduate Studies (or a similar position) to integrate and coordinate initiatives for creating intentional educators and learners.
- Encourage departments to review and then align their DEP's with the university's educational mission and values.

Objective #2: Coordinate, unify, and expand programs that support development of the intentional educator.

- Establish a 10-month contract for the first year of a new faculty member's appointment; design and implement a "faculty college" for the added month.
- Provide curriculum and pedagogy grants and/or release time to redesign courses or develop new ones that emphasize engaged and intentional student learning. Pay attention to cultural relevancy when redesigning the courses.
- Provide workshops to prepare faculty for interdisciplinary teaching.

Objective #3: Integrate assessment of student learning with curriculum and instruction.

- Complete revision of baccalaureate goals and learning outcomes to align with the university's mission.
- Revise, develop, and implement assessment of student learning to include classroom-embedded assessment.
- Develop and implement workshops on culturally relevant assessment methods.

Timeline:

The revision of baccalaureate goals has already been formulated and awaits approval via governance channels. Implementation of classroom-embedded assessment is ongoing through the current director of University Assessment.

A Dean for Undergraduate Studies could be in place for the start of the 2009-10 academic year. That individual could direct the development of a full-scale "faculty college" to begin the following academic year.

Synopsis

The initiatives presented above all support the overarching goals of developing Intentional Learners and Intentional Educators. Much overlap and interdependence can be found within the initiatives, as suggested in Figure 2. It is hoped that the campus will consider the set of initiatives as a package and thereby realize the added benefits of the whole.

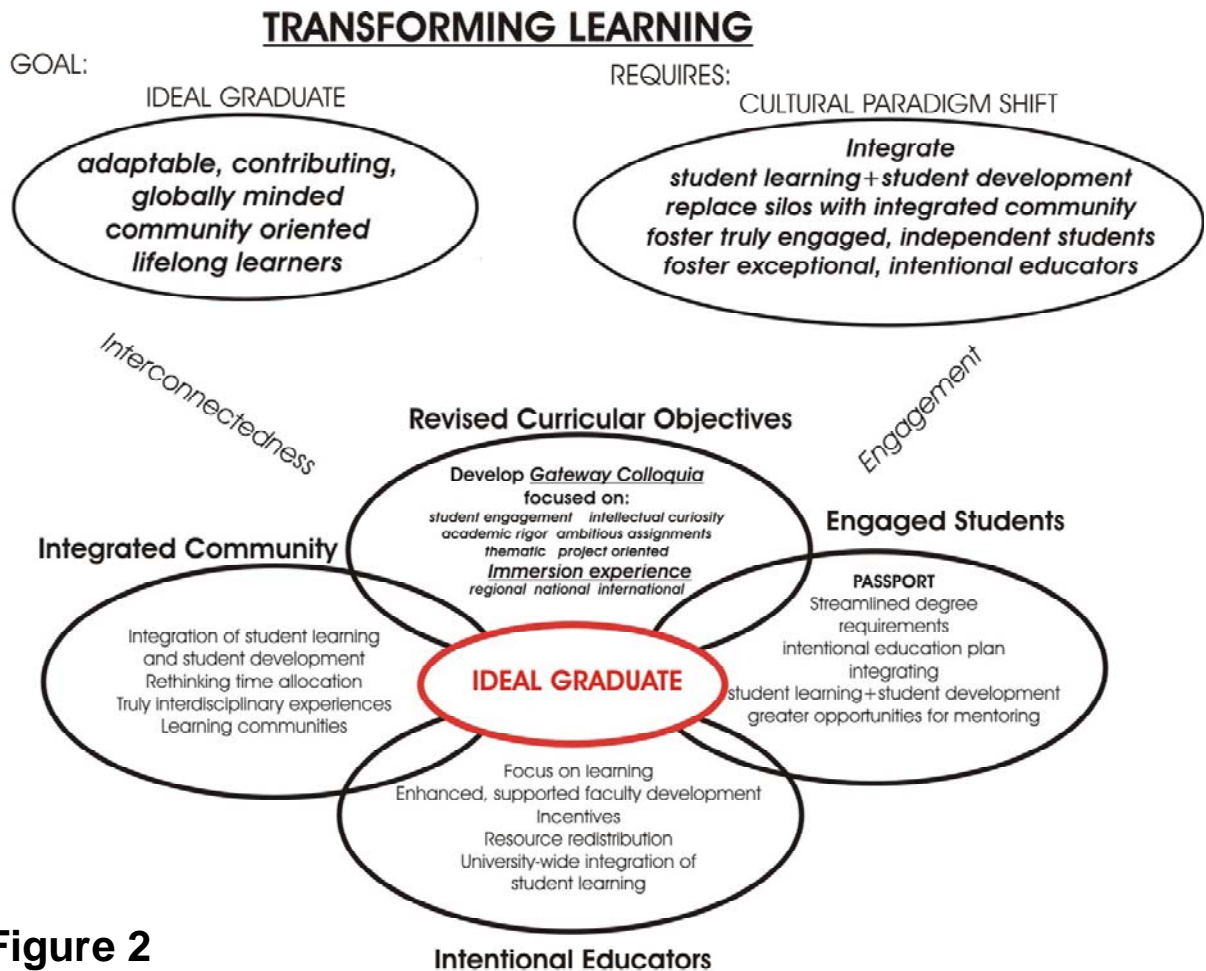


Figure 2