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Subject: Liberal Ed reform: procedures, progress, and status

Faculty and Staff in the College of Arts and Sciences,

At our College meeting Tuesday afternoon, the faculty members present generally agreed that keeping themselves well informed about the progress (and the proposals) of liberal-education reform on our campus was more difficult than it needs to be. Hoping to remedy this situation, I'm writing to you directly with some specific new information and some helpful links to other resources.

First, a overview of procedures: all curricular changes require faculty approval through the governance process. That means, specifically, that recommendations from ULEC (the University Liberal Education Committee, charged with developing an original proposal for reform) are sent to the APC (Academic Policies Committee) for further review and likely revision. After the APC concludes its work, it will offer a proposal to the University Senate. The Senate will consider the proposal during two consecutive meetings, and in all likelihood will make further revisions.

Faculty and staff who would like to have greater input into the process, but who are not Senators, should discuss reform proposals at the department level and see to it that your collective wishes get transmitted to the APC and, finally, to the Senate.

Please make sure that you and your colleagues become as well informed as possible about these proposals. We can be fairly confident that our general-education requirements will undergo significant change in the weeks and months ahead. You can have significant input into this process if you take the opportunity to understand what is being proposed and debated.

Below I'm including some specific updates and examples of proposed changes, along with links to relevant documents, including all feedback received so far by the governance groups. Among those links is one for you to use to submit your own input, suggestions, criticisms.

Progress and Status: Below is an update about APC's progress on Liberal Education reform this week, from Dr. Jean Pratt, Chair of the Committee:
March 6 APC Meeting Summary: Last week (Feb 28) APC approved changing the Mathematics Competency from 3 credits to one course. APC was scheduled to discuss both the “First-Year Writing” and the “Communication Intensive” requirements from the ULEC proposal. English Chair Carmen Manning and Writing Director Shevaun Watson presented the First-Year Writing Requirement proposal (attached). Discussion of this critical proposal consumed the full hour, pushing both the vote of the “First-Year Writing” requirement and the discussion of the “Communication Intensive” requirement to the next week.

The ULEC proposal is also attached, marked up to show APC actions so far.

Dr. Pratt also forwards these very helpful links to further information:

The Office of Undergraduate Studies hosts the Liberal Education Reform website (http://www.uwec.edu/Undergrad/Liberal-Education-Reform.htm). On this site you will find links to the following:

- **Feb 14 Univ Senate Roundtable Input on Liberal Education Reform** (feedback from the University Senate roundtables)
- **Campus Input on Liberal Education Reform based on ULEC Presentations** (feedback from the Qualtrics survey—this is updated on a regular basis if new input exists)
- **Liberal Education Reform Input** (one-question Qualtrics survey, which is checked and downloaded if new input exists—*please enter your input here*)
- **Liberal Education Reform History** (slides from the ULEC presentation that describe all the past effort and progress invested in liberal education reform at UWEC)
- **GE Review Workgroup’s Final Report** (2009 report from the GE Review Workgroup tasked with GE reform)
- **Strategic Planning Workgroup 2’s Final Report** (2007 report from Workgroup tasked with "transforming learning")
- **University Liberal Education Committee** (contains link to the November 11, 2011 proposal for liberal education reform as well as links to liberal education learning goals and outcomes, membership, minutes, etc.

In addition, faculty and staff who would like to learn more about the AAC&U articulation of learning goals and its VALUE Rubrics for assessing achievement of those goals should consult this part of the AAC&U website: http://www.aacu.org/value/

I'll send further updates, etc, as work and discussion continues on these issues.

Thanks and encouragement to all,

Marty

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**Dr. Marty Wood, Dean**  
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Liberal Education information update:

Curricular proposals and issues under discussion, through 10/24/11

The curricular matters involved in liberal-education reform at UW – Eau Claire are the purview of the University Liberal Education Committee (ULEC), empowered last year by the faculty members of the University Senate. This committee was formed from the old University General Education Committee (UGEC) because the Senate wanted to revise and increase its charge. Instead of merely overseeing curricular actions within existing general-education requirements, ULEC was created specifically to assist the faculty in developing a new set of liberal-education requirements. ULEC has been working for several months on a general framework for exploring what our new model of Liberal Education requirements might look like. While not yet ready for submission to faculty governance, the proposal is available for faculty examination and feedback. To this end, the College of Arts and Sciences Liberal Education Committee recently launched a series of discussion sessions for generating faculty interest in the ongoing development of the proposal and other issues related to liberal-education revision. The most recent session elicited a lot of lively discussion and confirmed the importance of keeping faculty well informed.

One of the more significant challenges to this reform effort is that, unlike any earlier GE revision, this one aims at substantially changing our method of engaging students in liberal-education learning. We know from numerous national studies that our existing course-credit-based "distribution" model, while convenient for administrative purposes, is clearly leaving many students poorly furnished, particularly those from traditionally underserved populations. These students are especially ill served by traditional approaches that assume students can be left on their own when it comes to integrating their learning from various GE courses. That assumption is simply not warranted. Instead, these studies suggest, universities need to provide intentionally integrative learning experiences, and more important, to measure the success of their programs by the outcomes they're designed to produce.

However, as faculty who learned (and have taught) under a course-credit-based set of requirements, many of us do not feel well-equipped to evaluate a proposed new model that assumes an outcomes-based approach, a model that is designed backward (as it were) from what we want to achieve, what we want all of our students to learn while they're here. The inputs – courses taken, credits amassed – are an essential method by which the students learn, but they cannot describe the learning itself. Only the outcomes reveal the learning. However, in spite of our possible lack of confidence individually, we are actually in much better shape than we might think. For one thing, we have access to a wealth of resources for developing faculty expertise in these areas (see the accompanying "Pedagogy" update). But more importantly, faculty and instructional staff are typically better
equipped than they realize. Most of them are doing a lot of this outcome-based work already. This overall approach is not radically different from the skills they’ve developed as seasoned teachers, and should not require a daunting level of re-training. Many if not most instructors already teach to outcomes very naturally, designing our classes based on what we want students to learn. Also, many faculty members are naturals when it comes to assessment. We continuously revise what we do based on the assessment data we collect — exams, papers, etc. While we may not be accustomed to thinking about an outcomes-based approach and assessment at the program level, all it takes is applying the ways we already think about learning (in our individual courses) but on larger and more coordinated scope.

Broadly speaking, the current ULEC proposal builds from the final-report recommendation forwarded in Fall 2009 by the GE Review Workgroup. ULEC’s proposal features an overall minimum number of liberal-education credits (i.e., 42) similar to our current GE program’s requirements. Within the overall minimum, the proposal would also require at least 18 credits of Integrative Learning experiences and up to 24 credits of Liberal Education electives. To ensure breadth, the proposal also requires a minimum of 6 credits (at least two courses) in each of the following categories (similar to our current GE categories): Arts and Humanities; Social Sciences; and Natural Sciences. These 6 credits only count towards the breadth portion of the requirements if they lie outside the student’s major. (However, the proposal would allow students to count two courses from their major prefix among the 42 total liberal-education credits.) The breadth requirement also calls for two classes in race, class, and/or gender issues and one class characterized as “global learning”; the “global learning” requirement could also be satisfied by a semester of study abroad. In addition, the proposal calls for a two-course restriction from any one prefix. Beyond the breadth requirement are an immersion-experience requirement, and competency requirements in math and communication skills. Because these requirements could possibly be met within the 42-credit minimum, the overall credits used to meet university Liberal-Education requirements could be slightly fewer than what is required by our existing GE program. Indeed, one important feature of the proposal is the way that virtually all requirements can be subsumed within the overall total; that is, requirements for such experiences or courses in race/class/gender, ethics, global learning, immersion, liberal-education breadth, and integrative learning, and so on, can be incorporated as part of a bundle or individual course, and need not be added on to the overall requirements.

Finally, in its current form, the proposal preserves our existing requirement for 30 hours of service learning.

Much remains to be determined. Currently under discussion by ULEC is how to include a requirement for ethical reasoning – for example, will it be a single-course requirement or some kind of across-the-curriculum approach? Once the full framework proposal is ready for submission to governance, the next task is defining exactly what criteria will identify a course or experience as meeting the new requirements, especially including “Integrative Learning”; how we will define such
concepts as “service learning,” “global learning,” “immersion,” and so on. Also, final
decisions will need to be made about what to require of transfer students who enter
with partial credits toward their original GE programs; presumably completed GE
programs elsewhere will count as completed here.

The potential impact of any of these criteria or definitions will be significant. For
example, if every Integrative Learning experience were required to include at least
one science or fine-arts course (a restriction that has NOT been proposed), the
outcome for students would be very different from an Integrative Learning
definition that did not stipulate such restrictions.

As these discussions proceed, ULEC will continue to welcome input and feedback
from the faculty in general.
Liberal Education information update:

Pedagogical work and discussions, through 10/24/11

Developing pedagogies that will succeed under any new set of outcomes-based Liberal Education is an enormous task. In the past couple of years, that task has been the focus of the Title III grant funding, and of the faculty and staff who have been working under its auspices. For example, Integrative Learning pilots – most visibly, the “bundles” project – have been launched in order to try out some new approaches and to develop practices that seem promising for large-scale implementation at UW – Eau Claire. An array of “learning communities” of this kind is currently undergoing development and testing with the help of Title III funding. Instructors involved in these pilots and related Integrative Learning projects continue to explore new practices based on the concept of “backward design” – determining in advance what kinds of learning we want students to achieve, and then creating the integrative experiences likely to inspire and enable students to achieve those outcomes. This aim of creating the strongest possible approach to liberal education – not to mention fulfilling the goals of UWEC’s Centennial Plan – continues to guide the work of the many faculty and staff engaged in activities funded by Title III. This goes far beyond researching innovative approaches and trying them out in a class or two; rather, new pedagogical questions arise almost daily among those involved in the bundles. For example, what do such integrative approaches demand of faculty, how well do these pilots function, what sorts of support are needed, which models seem to work best? Is there an advantage to a two-course bundle that could be completed in a single semester? And if so, would such a bundle still meet the outcomes we wish to see from an Integrative Learning experience? Do bundles made up of discrete disciplinary courses (united by a common theme, of course) require an added interdisciplinary “linking” course, or can they promote integrative learning simply from intentional methods employed by all the faculty involved? Can a single course be “integrative”?

Because the Liberal Education curricular proposals now in progress are designed by teachers working backward from the liberal-learning outcomes we want our students to achieve, we need to help our faculty to come up to speed not only on theories and practices about integrative-learning pedagogy, but also about evaluating student progress and success along the way. Title III Advisory members – many of them current and former “bundle” instructors – have been studying actual student-generated assignments in an attempt to gauge the success of our pilot bundles and to inform the design of future bundle assignments. This assessment of student artifacts and of their reflection of integrative learning outcomes will continue to inform our understanding of this kind of learning. It will also guide us in our development of other goals – such as multicultural and global learning – that we have identified as components of our vision for liberal education reform.

Three workgroups are currently meeting to develop different aspects of the reform effort. Depending on the interests and experiences of the many faculty and staff
from all across campus who have become engaged in these projects and who volunteer to participate in the additional work, the work groups have become lively sites of further pedagogical inquiry and professional development activities. Some members have become involved in creating a Liberal-Education Program website intended as a kind of clearinghouse for all campus efforts related to the Liberal Education revision. Others are investigating "connected learning and advising" as those concepts were defined in the Centennial Plan. This workgroup's agenda is to build a connected learning and advising system that will someday help most of our students to become more intentional about successfully achieving UW – Eau Claire’s Liberal Education Learning Goals and Outcomes. Successfully implemented, this system should also reduce students' average time to graduation. As we learn more about these approaches, we will need to include purposeful tools for assessment of this reformed educational project. Connected learning may mean, in the end, that students connect their coursework to their lives and their futures, and are fully intentional in planning their academic careers while here at UW – Eau Claire.

Meanwhile, the third workgroup supported by Title III focuses on building a process for soliciting integrative learning proposals. Once instructors' proposals have been accepted and funded, the work group intends the process to support those instructors as they attempt to implement their integrative learning strategies. This support may come in the form of ongoing seminars, discussions, retreats, and other professional-development activities.