I. History

A. Introduction

1. We wanted to start with consideration of major events that have taken place at UW-Eau Claire—all contributing to the proposal we have before us today. All of the individuals and groups, so many of you here in this room, have been working with an institutional consensus that we need to update and replace—to transform—our system of general education. The proposal for a new Liberal Education program represents the culmination of an immense amount of effort, and is an attempt both to distill a broad consensus and to allow for a considerable range of compromise, while advancing something distinctively new and something prospectively superior to the GE program currently in place.

B. Timeline for Reform Efforts

1. An important starting point in time is 2007, with ideas generated by members of Strategic Planning Workgroup 2: Transforming Learning. Much of their focus was on liberal education.

   a. They worked that summer and fall, releasing a final report in November. In that report, they emphasized the need for greater intentionality on the part of our students in their learning and for us in terms of our curricular planning.

   b. They talked about the value of creating “relevant, issue-oriented contexts” for student learning and the importance of “helping students make connections among varying disciplinary perspectives.”
c. This group’s work resulted in the development of a Title III U.S. Dept of Education Strengthening Institutions Grant.

2. Also in 2007, the GE Review Workgroup began its work. Appointed by the University General Education Committee (UGEC) and sanctioned by then Provost Steve Tallant, this workgroup was charged with reviewing the existing GE program and recommending possible improvements.

a. In the fall of 2009, this workgroup presented its final report. Evidence they gathered led to a recommendation that we revise our GE program such that students would take two multi-course bundles, along with a number of free-standing (non-bundled) elective GE courses.

b. Like Strategic Planning Workgroup 2, the GE Review Workgroup emphasized the importance of intentional educators and intentional students, and they emphasized truly integrated learning.

c. It was really the GE Review Workgroup that brought a national conversation about liberal education to our campus by connecting us to the Association of American Colleges and Universities and, in particular, to AAC&U’S LEAP campaign (Liberal Education and America’s Promise). All of the reform efforts I’ll mention from this point forward, including the proposal, were absolutely centered, as many of you know, in AAC&U and LEAP.

3. Following the GE Review Workgroup’s presentation of their final report, our campus began the work of developing possible strategies for implementation of the bundle concept. The Title III grant has been a critical factor in our ability to design and assess bundles, as well as a number of other models for integrative learning. Title III has also provided tremendous support in the areas of multicultural and global learning. These areas—integration, multicultural, and global—represent signature pieces of our LE proposal.
4. In November 2011, the University Liberal Education Committee (ULEC) forwarded its framework for a new liberal education program to the Academic Policies Committee (APC).

5. During Fall 2011 and Spring 2012, ULEC and APC jointly presented the ULEC framework to all four Colleges. APC established a Qualtrics survey on the Liberal Education Reform website for the purpose of soliciting feedback about the framework. We continue to review new Qualtrics responses as they come in.

   a. Our approach was to work through the ULEC framework systematically, making decisions on each component individually via “straw poll” votes and then returning to the full framework for holistic evaluation and final vote. Campus/community experts and stakeholders representing each component of the framework were invited to APC meetings to inform our discussions.

6. During late summer and the first part of the Fall 2012 semester, chairs and directors developed a proposal for new liberal education learning goals and outcomes. In December 2012, University Senate adopted these goals and outcomes.

7. Spring semester 2013, APC worked to convert the ULEC framework into an outcomes-based proposal that both aligns with the new learning outcomes and captures all of the straw-poll votes on the original ULEC framework.