History of Liberal Education Reform at the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire

The focus of the liberal education reform efforts is to increase the quality of education for UWEC student. Liberal education is no longer a “program” that students check off in 2 years before focusing on their discipline-specific education. Effective liberal education is now a comprehensive approach to learning that is focused on integrating high-impact, immersion experiences across all disciplines and a student’s entire academic career. UWEC can prove to students, their parents and employers that our graduates are the best prepared to be active citizens, able to solve complex problems, because our proposed liberal education incorporates outcomes-based assessment.

APC can support liberal education reform by explicating the following historical and promotional information:

1. The 1947 Truman model, which constrains liberal education to the first two years of a student’s education followed by 2 years of discipline-specific knowledge and skills, does not prepare graduates well to create innovative, socially responsible solutions to complex problems.
   a. (See AAC&U’s “College Learning for the New Global Century”)
2. UWEC is a member of AAC&U, the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education.
3. In 2002 the University General Education Committee (UGEC) was formed to bring a broader representation to General Education (GE) which had previously been the sole concern of the College of Arts and Sciences.
4. Wisconsin chose to be the first official partner state in AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) campaign in March 2005. The LEAP campaign is organized around a set of Essential Learning Outcomes. These learning outcomes are based on a multiyear dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business community; and analysis of the accreditation requirements for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education.
   a. (See AAC&U’s EssentialOutcomes_Chart.pdf). The main point here is that the AAC&U learning outcomes resulted from much research and collaboration, including input from UWEC.
6. During 2006 and 2007, the University engaged in a campus-wide strategic planning process that resulted in the Centennial Plan which established three learning goals: foster purposeful learning, promote connected learning, and accelerate global learning.
7. UWEC Senate approved Liberal Education Learning Goals (LELGs) in 2007. UWEC’s LELGs are based on the Essential Learning Outcomes from the LEAP campaign and are aligned with the Centennial Plan.
8. UWEC Senate approved Liberal Education Learning Outcomes (LELOs) in 2009. The LELOs were designed to facilitate the assessment of student progress toward LELGs.
9. Under the auspices of AAC&U, teams of faculty and academic personnel spent 18 months (2008-2009) creating, testing and implementing rubrics for faculty to use in their courses.
   a. The rubrics assess student progress toward LELOs, which are aligned with LELGs. They can be used with existing student submissions for assignments aligned with specific LELOs.
   b. Faculty teaching in the Bundles tested and revised the integrative learning rubric.
   c. CETL provides workshops to help faculty align assignments with rubrics and tweak rubrics to align them with assignments.
10. In 2010, the Board of Regents approved a revised mission statement for the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire that focused on providing UW-Eau Claire undergraduate students the finest in liberal education.
11. In Fall 2010 the Title III grant to support the reform of liberal education starts. The funded pilot program included “bundles,” which were assessable via rubrics. Collected data support effectiveness of bundles as one form of integrative learning.

In summary, UWEC has been working diligently on liberal education reform since Fall 2005. Countless hours both within our university and in collaborative participation with AAC&U committees have been invested to bring us to our current status. Integrative learning and outcomes-based assessment are the two tenets of liberal education. Both are based on UWEC-approved LELGs. Integrative learning can address a single LELG or multiple LELGs from different perspectives. Student progress toward achieving a LELG is assessed through rubrics aligned with LELOs.