REPORT FOR THE UNIVERSITY SENATE

University Senate Committee: Academic Policies Committee

Brief History of Issue—why the issue is being considered:

The following motion should be interpreted as a strong sign of support for liberal education, the faculty and staff who are going to provide it, and the students who will experience it. The following motion is not intended to change the approved liberal education framework; rather, the purpose of this motion is to hold students harmless in our transition from General Education to Liberal Education by holding them only to those requirements for which we have the capacity to deliver.

After nearly 10 years of debate and discussion, the University passed a Liberal Education framework. The Chancellor approved and authorized on 5/14/2014 a modified version of the proposed Liberal Education Core framework, with an implementation of the 2016-17 Undergraduate Catalog. However, since May 2014 the University has incurred significant change of focus to budget-related matters, including a reduction in teaching capacity and corresponding course offerings.

Insufficient capacity currently exists in some of the required liberal education learning outcomes, which will result in preventing student completion in a timely manner.

Faculty across campus are working hard to develop course proposals for inclusion in the Liberal Education core simultaneously with providing quality instruction during a time of staff reductions and consequential changes across campus.

Points Discussed by Committee:

1. The Student Senate prefers that all outcomes and learning experiences are required starting Fall 2016 but that students are held harmless during the transition from General Education to Liberal Education.
2. We need 3,000 seats per year in order to accommodate 10,000 students in 4 years. The 3,000 seats incorporates a 500-seat “buffer” for class scheduling issues. An inability to provide 3,000 seats results in a carry-over demand for following years.
3. S3 and IL can be met in the major, which some people did not realize. Therefore, ULEC suggested requiring S3 Fall 2016. APC agrees.
4. The process for faculty/staff submitting proposals and ULEC approving proposals has improved. ULEC has approved all submitted proposals so far this academic year. More proposals are under review at the college level.
5. K4 was originally designed to focus on the creative and visual arts, music, theatre and poetry.
6. Students who take courses in K4 and R3 will have the credits from those courses count toward the 36 required credits of Liberal Education.
7. The S3 outcome is being interpreted too narrowly.
8. Very little difference exists between K3 and K4, so faculty should start submitting proposals for K4. The University needs a better understanding of what qualifies as “creative” thinking.
9. The Liberal Education should comprise new courses rather than a repackaging of existing courses, but it takes much work to propose and develop new courses.
10. The word “experiences” was deliberately chosen during the drafting of the Liberal Education proposal. Study abroad has been approved for an Integrative Learning experience. Other experiences (e.g., undergraduate research) are in the proposal stage. Other musical performances (e.g., Jazz) could possibly be approved. Figuring out how the submission and approval processes related to non-credit-bearing experiences will take some time.

Pros of Recommendation:

1. Requiring learning outcomes in the next undergraduate catalog as soon as enrollment capacity in those outcomes meets the target goal prevents a backlog of students delaying graduation due to unsatisfied requirements, such as is currently the case with the Physical Activity requirement.
2. Additional time would enable faculty and staff to revise (and/or develop) courses.
Cons of Recommendation:

1. Concern that if K4 courses are not required of all students, then fewer students would take those courses (e.g., Art History, Music), resulting in lower enrollment. These areas, which currently participate and contribute heavily in GE, would not be fulfilling a requirement for students under the proposed plan.

2. Concern that a partial implementation will remain a partial implementation, thereby taking away from what the University worked so long and hard to get passed. Not just taking away—not matching, and in fact substantially revising and departing from what was forged as part of a very long and difficult process.

3. The administration and Dr. Carney in the APC have not indicated that there is currently any plan whatsoever moving forward to increase enrollment or provide resources for those outcome areas that are currently indicating seat deficiencies, thereby making the recommendation under its current form appear to be a pretense. If the administration can indicate that this is not the case, it should by all means do so before the APC and the University Senate. Otherwise, this makes #1 under “pros” a moot point and #7 under our recommendations possibly a false pretext.

4. Moving forward piecemeal sends the wrong message to students and families already concerned about the potential for the university to deliver under current budget cuts.

5. Passing a version of the LE Reform that the Senate did not originally sign on to seems to be an undermining of shared governance and a curriculum designed by the teaching faculty and staff of the University and instead a reaction to the climate of education in the state of WI.

6. In one week, S3 went from the unsustainable list to the sustainable. K4 and R3 should be more thoroughly explored within departments by department chairs and faculty before the decision is made to leave port without them.

7. In the midst of the many crises facing the UW System and in particular UW-Eau Claire we cannot afford to publicly identify ourselves with what will likely seem to all too many a pathetic launch of a partial new liberal education program that clearly suggests we are unable to offer what we think is best, even necessary, for our students.

8. This partial framework was never what anyone proposed, and argued for, during the lengthy process devoted to developing the framework and negotiating its ultimate, final approval. It is not a product of what faculty, staff, and students spent over a decade working to produce, nor of any of the guidance, or models, we have drawn from the AAC&U. It maintains no other than a purely pragmatic and largely entirely logistical rationale. Liberal education reform, if it is to mean anything in substance, has got to be about much more than a mere loose hodge-podge of new requirements for all our students, focusing primarily on what is easiest for us to most readily do.

9. The difficulties in arriving at the sufficient number of approved ‘experiences’ in response to the precise requirements for all eleven outcomes is due to mistakes that were made early on in the approval process, and, in fact, due to a lack of an effective vision of how to move from general education to liberal education. Too much time and effort was spent trying to understand rubrics that were overly prescriptive and restrictive and to articulate overly elaborate explanations of what kinds of artifacts would be used to realize particular benchmarks in relation to particular elements within these rubrics—rubrics, for that matter, that never were approved through shared governance. Articulating a well-reasoned explanation of how a course, or other experience, would work to help student realize a particular outcome should have been sufficient. Now the process of approval has been streamlined and made much more efficient but too many people, and too many departments, were ‘burned’ early on, and therefore remain hesitant to propose additional existing courses, and other experiences, for liberal education credit, let alone develop new courses and other kinds of new experiences (especially when we are all doing a lot more with a lot less and at a time in which demoralization is deep and widespread). Spending too much time and energy demanding that faculty and academic staff prove that they knew what they were doing in their fields of expertise, including with courses and experiences they have offered successfully for many years, prevented faculty and academic staff from focusing the time and energy that would have been much better spent developing new kinds of courses and experiences. It should be possible right now to survey the catalog of existing course (and other learning experience) offerings so as to find likely candidates for K4, S3, R2, R3, and IL, and then contact the appropriate departments to ask that these be submitted for liberal education approval, promising an expeditious process of approval. Instead of merely judging what is sent in, ULEC, College Curriculum Committees, and, as useful APC and Academic Affairs, need to be proactive—reach out and find those courses and experiences that are needed to meet targets and then pull these in.

10. Either we think the conversion from general education to liberal education is worthwhile to take on, or we don’t. If we are not ready for this, then we need to be upfront and honest about it, and not introduce a partial change that is neither here nor there.

11. We need to be shifting from getting courses approved to offer for liberal education credit to refocus on what were, and remain, the philosophical underpinnings of the argument to move in this direction in the first place, as well as what we are hoping to achieve, along with why so, in the process of change. And we need to recognize that for the
first approximately five to seven years we will be experimenting, learning, and making (many) adjustments, inevitably. We cannot and should not attempt to prescribe—and proscribe—everything in advance. We also should not be limiting faculty and academic staff academic freedom; we absolutely should be encouraging and supporting this as far as possible. We furthermore need to begin to focus on how we want to sustain and carry over the work to realize liberal education outcomes beyond the core, to the major, to the secondary area of concentration, to electives, to various recognized high-impact practices, and to upper as well as lower level course offerings. We can’t do that as long as we are still stuck in the process of approving formerly general education classes for liberal education credit. We need to try many, if not most, of these erstwhile GE courses out as LE courses, and see what happens, learning and making adjustments as we proceed.

12. A partial framework that really does not satisfy hardly anyone, and which doesn’t make much sense to students will inevitably lead to pressure, and with good reason, to return back to what we had, with general education.

Technology/Human Resource Impact:

1. 

Committee Recommendation:

1. Publish the entire Liberal Education framework in the 2016-17 Undergraduate Catalog as defined in the Liberal Education Core compromise proposal;

2. Count toward the required 36 credits of Liberal Education those credits earned in any course with a Liberal Education designation;

3. Display as “required” on Degree Audits (starting with the 2016-17 Undergraduate Catalog) Liberal Education Learning Outcomes K1, K2, K3, S1, S2, S3, R1, and R2;

4. Display as “required” on Degree Audits for subsequent undergraduate catalogs—as soon as enrollment capacity in those outcomes meets the target goal of 3,000 seats per academic year—Liberal Education Learning Outcomes K4, and R3;

5. Require one (1) experience to meet the Liberal Education Learning Outcome IL for Degree Audits starting with the 2016-17 Undergraduate Catalog;

6. Require two (2) experiences to meet the Liberal Education Learning Outcome IL for Degree Audits for subsequent undergraduate catalogs as soon as enrollment capacity in the IL outcome meets the target goal of 6,000 seats per academic year;

7. Communicate to the campus that the reduction to the requirements in the Liberal Education core is temporary until each Learning Outcome meets its respective enrollment capacity target.
Liberal Education Implementation