

Final Report and Recommendations
General Education Task Force

Writing Group Subcommittee

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Executive Summary

Need for Gen Ed Revision

Our current General Education program was developed more than 22 years ago when WestConn was a college. Needless to say, much has changed over the past two decades. Both the WestConn community and external reviewers have pointed to the need to restructure our Gen Ed curriculum. The demographics of our student population have changed dramatically, and as the current model lacks clearly articulated educational objectives, students can avoid important skill and knowledge areas. NEASC, perhaps not surprisingly, stated in its report that “little evidence of either evaluation or assessment of the general education program exists” and “more effort should be undertaken to ensure coherent and understandable general education requirements.” These sentiments are echoed in a Connecticut State University survey of WestConn graduates and in the increase of state mandates for program assessment.

Background of Gen Ed Task Force

The General Education Task Force was established to review the general education curriculum and make recommendations. Dr. Linda Vaden-Goad, dean of Arts and Sciences, initiated the first meeting in December 2002. Over the next two years, the group met regularly to discuss various aspects of the Gen Ed curriculum. To encourage broad participation, Gen Ed Task Force meetings were open to all faculty members. In addition, deans were asked to send representatives. Although informal, the group included representatives from all three schools and the Haas Library at most meetings. Discussion was stimulated through a variety of means, including an examination of Richard J. Light’s Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds (Harvard UP, 2001), a review of internal and external documents and the collection of data from WCSU students and faculty.

Subcommittee Project

In Spring 2004, a subcommittee of the Gen Ed Task Force was awarded a Summer Curriculum Development Grant to review the documents generated by the Task Force and to develop recommendations. These recommendations will next be submitted to the entire Gen Ed Task Force for discussion.

Foundation Data

The subcommittee’s recommendations are based primarily on the following sources:

- “Educated Person” model developed by the Task Force (see Appendix 1)
- Feedback from students through focus groups and Honors Seminar projects (see Appendix 2)
- A survey of faculty (see Appendix 3)
- An examination of benchmark schools (SUNY, in particular) (see Appendix 4)
- University Mission Statement (see Appendix 5)

Underlying Philosophy

Our goal was to develop a Gen Ed program that encourages students to embrace the importance of a general education and to commit to life-long learning.

Specific Recommendations

1. Establish a permanent General Education Committee
2. Require First-Year Seminar
3. Increase and enhance the Writing Intensive requirement
4. Add an Information Literacy requirement with an emphasis on library resources
5. Restructure the current General education areas into educational objectives
6. Require students to maintain E-portfolios to facilitate “ownership” of the Gen Ed experience
7. Modify advising system to better serve students and faculty

Area of Concern

1. Integrate the teaching of technology and the teaching of ethics into courses across the curriculum

Implementation Recommendations

Based on the most critical campus needs, we recommend the following as top priorities for phase-in:

1. Establish a permanent General Education Committee
2. Increase the Writing Intensive requirement
3. Require First-Year Seminar
4. Introduce the Information Literacy requirement

Recommendation 1

Establish a permanent General Education Committee

Rationale

Clearly, the formation of a new committee to specifically address general education requirements may seem overly bureaucratic and redundant when CUCAS has already been formed to:

- Develop an academic program which shall be required of all students regardless of major, and
- Review all proposals for change in courses, programs and academic standards for the need, potential duplication and conformity to University policy.

(Faculty Handbook Supplement 1, p.29, August 2002)

However, several important arguments in favor of the formation of such a committee have come to light and bear consideration:

1. The state has recently issued principles and recommendations that the general education curriculum be formally, regularly and coherently reviewed and assessed:
 - a. From state principles (paragraph 4): a CSU "... institution must coherently define how its system of general education articulates these expected skills, knowledge, and abilities and how it will integrate them into one another and within the overall mission and educational philosophy of the institution."
 - b. From state recommendations (second bulleted item): "... each college and university in Connecticut have in place, and specify, its process for developing, implementing, and nurturing its general education program."

Accordingly, we may want to make our commitment to general education more visible to the external community generally and to the state higher education councils specifically. A new committee devoted solely to general education program review could achieve this goal.

2. The recent NEASC report (December 2003) described current general education requirements in a generally favorable way, but noted that "more effort should be undertaken to ensure coherent and understandable general education requirements." As a result, regardless of current governance structure, we need to go beyond what is currently in place.
3. Students are troubled by a perception that there is little coherence or importance to the current general education requirements. The requirements are perceived as "arbitrary in the way courses are assigned (or not) to a gen ed category" (Student focus group report from 24 April 2003). This perception of arbitrariness and lack of coherence needs to be addressed in a more holistic piecemeal, manner.

4. Schools (e.g. SUNY Geneseo) with similar missions, budgets, and demographics and with reputations for strong general education curricula have standing committees devoted exclusively to overseeing the general education requirements and how they fit within the broader framework of school mission, higher education goals, and state mandates.

With the preceding in mind, we propose the formation of a standing Senate committee devoted exclusively to the oversight of the general education curriculum charged with making proposals consistent with broader goals and requirements. These proposals would be submitted for review in accordance existing CUCAS review procedures before discussion and decision by the University Senate and administration.

Objectives

The proposed General Education Committee would submit proposals to CUCAS and the University Senate while maintaining a broad perspective of the goals of the general education curriculum here at WestConn and in higher education generally. This committee would ensure that general education offerings and requirements match WestConn's mission, state general education requirements, and the ultimate goal of producing educated citizens. To this end, the committee's tasks would include the following:

1. To review regularly the WestConn general education requirements in light of recent scholarly work on the subject, the university mission, state mandates and recommendations, and measures of effectiveness and satisfaction from students, faculty, alumni, and community members.
2. To make specific recommendations for change to the general education curriculum to submit to CUCAS and the University Senate for review, discussion and approval.
3. To review requests from faculty, departments, students, and administration for changes, additions, or discontinuance of any element of the general education program.
4. To ensure that the outcomes of general education courses are directly related to specific general education goals and objectives.
5. To review proposals from students for individualized general education programs, thus providing the opportunity for those students who are sufficiently motivated to create a well-rounded program of their own devising. Such proposals must be reviewed and signed first by the student's advisor.

Implementation

The committee shall be composed of the following members and abide by the following rules:

- Four faculty, one from each school and one at-large, each elected for three-year overlapping terms. During the committee's first year the "at-large" member and the A&S member will be elected for a three-year term, the SPS member will be elected to a two-year term, and the Ancell member will be elected to a one-year term to ensure subsequent three-year overlapping terms.
- One librarian elected by the library faculty to serve a three-year term.

- Each school dean to serve for one year on a rotating basis, so that in any given year there is one school dean on the committee.
- One student member, selected by SGA, serving a one-year term.
- A quorum is four members.
- The chair is elected annually by a majority of the committee.
- The secretary is rotated monthly.
- The committee shall meet monthly during the fall and spring semesters on the first Thursday of every month, unless a schedule change is agreed to by five of the seven members at the first meeting of the year.
- Meetings shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order, revised.
- Annual reports to be sent to CUCAS, Senate president, and the Academic Deans of all three schools.

Recommendation 2

Require First-Year Seminar

Rationale

Western's Mission includes the following statement: "We strive to meet the educational needs of a diversified student body through instruction, scholarship and public service." This statement implies a commitment to develop a general education curriculum that prepares our students for more advanced courses and to fulfill goals after graduation. Since our student population includes students who are not optimally prepared for college, our Gen Ed curriculum must be responsive to the educational needs of these students.

According to data from the U.S. Dept. of Education, the percentage of the high school population enrolling in college is projected to increase until at least 2013. Presuming that Western will want to maintain or increase enrollments, we will have to confront a greater number of incoming students with marginally acceptable academic preparation. Therefore, more students will need to develop academic skills early in the University's curriculum sequence to provide the foundation for success in upper-level courses.

First-year seminars have been used by universities for more than 100 years to help provide students with necessary college survival skills and have been implemented for a number of reasons. A national survey conducted by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (2000) found universities using a first-year seminar for developing study skills, career planning, cultural diversity, time management, campus resource review, and a variety of academic skills (e.g., writing, critical thinking, etc.). These seminars vary in terms of grading, content, credit hours, teaching methods, instructor background, course administration and other format characteristics. Regardless of the specific characteristics of the course, the most frequently cited objectives are to develop essential academic skills, ease the transition and adjustment of students to the college environment, and provide an orientation to campus resources and facilities.

The literature includes several studies that support the efficacy of these seminars. Raymondo (2003) reviewed some of these studies and concluded that the research supports higher retention levels, improved academic performance and higher graduation rates for first-year seminar participants. National data indicate that first-year seminar participants perform better than non-participants on a number of measures including academic skills, GPA and retention (see Appendix 6). Additionally, Dr. Mary Nelson, professor of Psychology, implemented a first-year seminar program at WCSU beginning in 2002 and has been collecting data since. Based on the success of first-year seminars as reported in the literature, we propose that a first-year seminar be a required course in the Gen Ed curriculum for all incoming and transfer students with fewer than 12 credit hours.

Objectives

The purpose of the Western's first-year seminar is to develop or reinforce all or most of the following skills / knowledge and college adaptation areas in our incoming students.

- critical thinking
- communication
- information literacy (library resources)
- working in groups (roles, leadership, negotiation, etc.)
- study management and personal monitoring
- orientation to university resources, advisement process, etc.
- applied computer literacy (e.g., Word, PowerPoint, Banner accounts, etc.)
- social responsibility / ethics / service to the community
- explore academic and career directions
- orient students to the development of e-portfolios for the purpose of documenting academic accomplishments

These objectives are based on data collected by the Gen Ed Task force specifying skills needed by our students. The task force used benchmark schools, a survey of Western's faculty and other guiding documents (i.e., Educated Person model) to determine these objectives. In the survey of Western's faculty, a first-year experience course ranked 12 of the 47 knowledge and skills areas as being important for preparation for advanced courses. Only academic skills (i.e., reading, critical, thinking, communication, library research, computer application, basic mathematics) and ethics, scientific methods and working in groups ranked higher as being necessary for preparation for more advanced courses. The specific knowledge areas (e.g., arts, social sciences, physical sciences, history, etc.) all ranked lower than a first-year experience course. (See Appendix X)

Implementation

We recommend a continuation of the first-year seminar model for the Gen Ed requirement. We also recommend that the permanent General Education Committee monitor the first-year seminar and incorporate any appropriate changes based upon ongoing assessment measures.

Faculty training is essential to the success of the first-year seminar program. There must be consistency in how course objectives are delivered across sections. For the first-year seminar to provide the necessary foundation for more advanced courses, each instructor would need to incorporate all the areas specified in the course outline. Ongoing consultation among faculty who teach the first-year seminar is also essential for feedback and monitoring accomplishment of objectives.

As the first-year seminar program at Western evolves, it may be possible to develop more content-focused curriculum. For example, first-year seminars may be developed by departments or individual faculty based on a discipline or areas of faculty interest. While the content of the course may vary across section, the objectives and skills areas that are incorporated into the course should not vary.

Phase-in possibilities

Implementing a new required course in the Gen Ed curriculum would require a considerable commitment of resources. Assuming a freshman class size of approximately 1,000 students, with 25 students per section (the cap on the current first-year course), 40 sections of the first-year seminar would be needed in one academic year. There are currently six (6) sections offered for the Fall 2004 semester. The most desirable implementation method would offer the first-year course to all first-year students in their first semester.

Assessment

Assessment methods include standardized pre/post testing, tracking retention and tracking GPA throughout the college years. For purposes of longitudinal evaluation, the current assessment measures should continue to be collected and analyzed.

Student portfolios or e-portfolios could be initiated in the first-year seminar and students could develop a plan for maintenance of the portfolios during the entire university curriculum. Samples of these portfolios could be evaluated upon graduation.

The permanent Gen Ed Committee in consultation with the first-year seminar program director and/or team will be responsible for assessment and evaluation of the first-year seminar program.

Conclusions

The first-year seminar course has the potential to accomplish several objectives of the Gen Ed curriculum, increase student retention and assist in university assessment. The success of the current first-year seminar program at Western points to a high probability of the seminar being a good foundation for the revised Gen Ed curriculum.

References

Raymondo, James C. 2003 The Effects of an Abbreviated Freshman Year Seminar Program on Student Retention and Student Academic Performance. By: Research for Educational Reform, Vol. 8 Issue 2, p46, 10p

U.S. Dept. of Education, NCES: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment Survey," various years; and Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Model. (See reference table 10.)

Recommendation 3

Increase the Writing Intensive requirement

Rationale

Writing is a fundamental skill that students must master if they are to be successful at the university and beyond. In its mission statement, WestConn lists “strong skills in communication, problem solving, and critical thinking” among its top objectives. A survey of faculty confirms the importance of writing to the university community. WestConn faculty rank “written communication,” “critical thinking,” and “reading” as the most important skills students will need after graduation.

Recent national studies, including “The Neglected ‘R’” (College Board 2003), however, point to the fact that many first-year college students are not adequately prepared for college-level writing. This trend is evident at WestConn as well. In Fall 2004, for example, WestConn is offering 11 sections of ENG 098. Additionally, many college students have little or no experience incorporating outside research into their own writing.

At present, only one Writing Intensive (“W”) course is required to fulfill the general education requirement at WestConn. National studies and data about our own students suggest that one course is not enough.

We propose to augment the current “W” course requirement with an “AW” (Advanced Writing Intensive) requirement. Under current guidelines, to earn a “W” designation, a course must: “1. involve research [appropriate to the assignment]; 2. involve the student in the writing process; 3. require at least one substantial piece of polished or ‘finished’ writing.” An “AW” course would follow these guidelines with the following additions:

- Must be completed within the first 70 credit hours, so that students can no longer wait until their last semester to fulfill the writing requirement
 - Must include a research project of at least 2,500 words (not including Works Cited)
 - Must incorporate the evaluation and use of nonfiction publications to support a sustained argument or study
 - Must include instruction about how academic writing differs from other genres
- Ideally, “AW” courses will be taught in the major, so that students will learn how to enter their particular discourse communities before they begin advanced coursework.

Objectives

The objectives for adding the “AW” requirement are as follows:

- To help students improve their ability to write effectively at the university and beyond
- To introduce students to academic writing as a genre
- To help students learn to evaluate and incorporate outside sources into their own arguments
- To teach students the conventions of their own discourse communities
- To help students improve their critical thinking and reading skills
- To stress the importance of writing as a means for conveying ideas and for learning about the self as it relates to the world

Implementation

Many departments already have courses on the books that could fulfill or could easily be adjusted to fulfill the “AW” requirement. The “AW” course, however, need not replace the capstone course already in place in many majors. Rather, an “AW” course could be viewed as preparation for the capstone course.

At present, all transfer students must take a “W” course at Western, and it seems reasonable to require that they take an “AW” course as well. Should a department choose not to develop an “AW” course for its majors, an “AW” course in the broader discipline (humanities, business, or social sciences, for example) could be developed to fulfill the requirement. As with “W” courses, the enrollment for an “AW” course should be capped at 22. Ideally, the enrollment would be capped at 18-20 students to provide the optimum opportunity for student-faculty interaction.

Assessment

The “AW” course could be assessed a variety of ways, including the following:

- Student portfolios
- Entrance and exit exams that require the use of secondary sources
- A review of course syllabi, sample assignments, and student essays

“AW” courses should be reviewed regularly by departments and by a permanent Gen Ed Committee to ensure that they are meeting the basic requirements.

Conclusion

Many of our first-year students are not adequately prepared for college-level writing. Adding a second writing course would signal how highly we value writing at the university. Moreover, this requirement would help to ensure that all juniors have been introduced to academic writing and to the research process. In effect, students would be ready to do the kinds of writing their professors expect in 300- and 400-level courses. They would also be better prepared to communicate effectively beyond the university.

Recommendation 4
**Add an Information Literacy requirement
with an emphasis on library resources**

“Information literacy programs, based on an educational philosophy which stresses active, resource-based learning, need to be incorporated into university curricula so that students acquire the skills and knowledge which are necessary to enable them to become independent learners.”

(Adapted from ACRL statement on information literacy, 2000)

Rationale

In today's Information Age, which has been associated with exponential increases in the number and range of information resources, in addition to rapid advances in computer technology and telecommunications, the need for individuals to be information literate is stronger than ever before. As a result, the importance of information literacy in higher education is increasingly recognized by national standards and accrediting bodies and educational institutions around the world.

Objective

According to the Association of College and Research Librarians (ACRL), an information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent of information needed
 - Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
 - Evaluate information and its sources critically
 - Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base
 - Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
 - Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information legally and ethically
- (ACRL 2000)

A formal information literacy program, grounded in the general education curriculum and reinforced in the disciplines, would prepare WCSU students for information challenges within and beyond their academic careers. The current proposal requires all students to fulfill two (2) information literacy requirements at different levels within the general education requirements and recommends a third outside of the general education curriculum:

1. one before 30 credits (i.e. in the freshman year) at the 100 level [REQUIRED]
2. one between 30 and 60 credits (i.e. in the sophomore year) at the 200 or 300 level [REQUIRED]
3. one beyond 60 credits (i.e. in the major) at the 300 level or higher [RECOMMENDED]

Each course level would have specific information literacy outcomes, based on the discipline and the ACRL Information Literacy Standards and Outcomes (see Appendix

¹ Wilfrid Laurier University (Canada) Proposal <http://www.wlu.ca/wwwlib/infolit/execsumlitreview.html>

7). In the lower (100)- level courses, outcomes and options may look similar as the beginning concepts spill over from one discipline to another. Once students reach the advanced level or the major courses, the faculty can be confident that students have been introduced to the basic concepts and can be expected to produce research at a higher level of sophistication.

Implementation

This proposal follows the “writing intensive” or W course model already established in the general education curriculum; that is, faculty or departments would choose to have certain courses designated as “information literacy intensive”, denoted by IL.

Options for faculty/departments to offer “IL” courses including the following:

1. Identify existing information literacy competencies
Individual instructors or departments who offer general education courses could identify activities and assignments within their syllabi that introduce or reinforce information literacy concepts, using the ACRL standards as a guideline. The activities and outcomes would be reviewed by the proposed General Education Review committee and would be measured against a pre-defined list of level-specific IL outcomes approved by the aforementioned committee and the University Senate (and based ACRL guidelines in Appendix A). Once the course was determined to fulfill the information literacy requirement, it would be designated as IL in the course catalog and course offerings.
2. Library services
Faculty could work with librarians to design and implement specific activities to fulfill certain objectives cooperatively with the library faculty. Library services could include:
 - a. traditional library instruction sessions
 - b. guided research sessions conducted outside the regular class meeting time
 - c. online tutorials developed by the departments and liaison librarians
 - d. librarian/faculty designed assignments to introduce and apply specific concepts.
3. Co-Requisite/4-credit course
A faculty member could propose a 4-credit general education course, or a course with a co-requisite, in which the fourth credit would be reserved for the skills and competencies instruction necessary for success in the college environment. Information literacy would be a significant portion of such a course, although it could also include technology skills, writing and skills labs, academic advising and more. An example of an appropriate course for such an option may be the First Year Seminar.
4. Require students to take CTA 100 (Library Research Methods) as a co-requisite.
As an alternative to designing and coordinating a co-requisite, a faculty member could choose to require students to take the already established CTA 100 course concurrently.

Options for students to fulfill IL requirements I and II include the following:

1. Take two IL-designated courses (one before 30 credits, one between 30 and 60 credits)
2. Take CTA 100: Library Research Methods. The popularity of this option may require that the number of sections of CTA 100 currently offered be expanded

beyond one per year or perhaps consider other delivery methods. The impact this may have on library staffing and services would need to be assessed.

3. Take a series of non-credit bearing online tutorials – number and sequence yet to be determined.
4. Test out of requirements I and/or II using specially designed assessment instruments.

Options for students to fulfill IL requirement III (outside general education) include the following:

1. Take a capstone or research methods course in their major

Resources

The above options will require significant increases in professional and support staff in the libraries, as well as equipment and software resources. The library faculty will submit proposals for needed additional resources to the General Education Review Committee, which will forward the proposals to the University Planning and Budget Committee with its recommendation.

Assessment

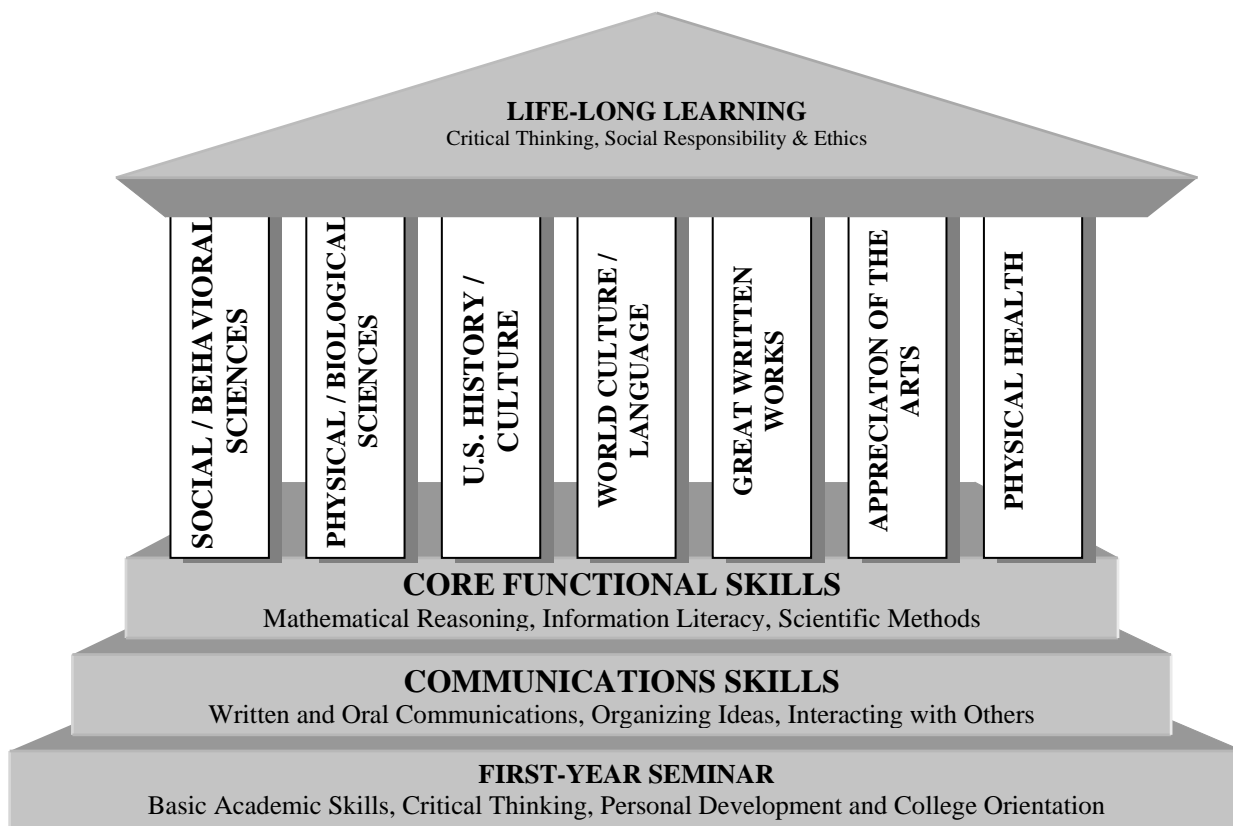
In Appendix 7, there are five standards and 22 performance indicators. The standards focus upon the needs of students in higher education at all levels. The standards also list a range of outcomes for assessing student progress toward information literacy. These outcomes serve as guidelines for faculty, librarians, and others in developing local methods for measuring student learning in the context of an institution's unique mission. In addition to assessing all students' basic information literacy skills, faculty and librarians should also work together to develop assessment instruments and strategies in the context of particular disciplines, as information literacy manifests itself in the specific understanding of the knowledge creation, scholarly activity, and publication processes found in those disciplines.²

Conclusion

Education in information literacy must be a collaborative effort, requiring the cooperation of discipline faculty, library faculty and campus administration that should become an integral element of the general education curriculum and beyond. Through lectures and by leading discussions, faculty establish the context for learning, inspire students to explore the unknown, and monitor students' progress. Academic librarians coordinate the evaluation and selection of intellectual resources for programs and services, organize and maintain collections and many points of access to information, offer guidance on how best to fulfill information needs, and provide instruction to the campus community on effective methods of accessing, selecting, and evaluating information. Administrators also play a significant role through active support of information literacy programs and by creating opportunities for collaboration and staff development among faculty, librarians, and other professionals who initiate information literacy programs, lead in planning and budgeting for those programs, and provide ongoing resources to sustain them.

² Information Literacy Standards for Higher Education, <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm>

Recommendation 5
**Restructure the current General Education areas
 into educational objectives**



How the General Education Components Might Fit Together

While possible changes to the general education requirements are being presented to the university community as fairly independent modules, we expect that, at some point, many pieces will come together as a new, more coherent whole. Without presuming that any particular module will in fact be approved by the university community, we want to illustrate what the core curriculum could eventually look like, and how all the pieces could fit together. The following materials could serve as informational literature for the student and advisor, as program sheets as well as part of the WestConn website.

The Benefits of the University Core

Western's faculty is committed to your success in college. We also believe that the college experience can help set the foundation for an enriched life. In order to provide you with the foundation necessary for success in college, your career, and hopefully enrich your life, we have developed the university core requirements. The core has two major components, skills and knowledge areas. We used several sources of information when we defined the skills and knowledge that you should possess.

These sources include an examination the curriculum of other universities, faculty surveys, state requirements and interviews with students.

You have already developed academic skills through your previous education. Our goal is to sharpen those skills for college-level work. The core skills consist of:

- Written and oral communications
- Critical thinking
- Mathematics
- Information literacy
- Technology literacy
- Group and leadership abilities

Improving these skills will help you as you progress through courses in your major and take on a career or graduate study.

The second component of the university core is the knowledge areas. We believe that familiarity with these areas will not only help you when you take certain advanced courses, but may also enrich your life and encourage you to pursue lifelong learning. We believe that it is important for educated people to appreciate how:

- The social and behavioral sciences provide insights into human behavior
- Systems of values and ethics affect other people and society in general
- The natural sciences describe and explain various aspects of the physical and biological world
- The study of our own history and culture provides an understanding of our institutions and political processes
- The examination of other cultures provides a broader perspective of the world and a tolerance for different people
- Physical activity and health are important to intellectual and emotional well-being
- The arts and important written works provide insights into the human condition and help enrich the human experience

Western's faculty believes that regardless of your selected course of study or career goals this common body of knowledge will help you relate more effectively to people and situations that you encounter in life.

CATEGORY / BROAD OBJECTIVES	REQUIREMENT	COURSES / POTENTIAL COURSES	COMMITTED CREDITS
First-Year Seminar Develop a range of skills and knowledge areas including reading, critical thinking, communications, information literacy, social responsibility/service learning, etc.	3 credits taken in Freshman year, preferable first semester at Western. Transfer students with less than 12 credits would also be required to take the course	First Year Seminar	3
Written Communications Development of college level writing skills including appropriate grammar, sentence and paragraph structure, content clarity and continuity, etc.	Two writing intensive courses are required. One course would be required within 30 SH and the second course with an academic research component would have to be taken within 60 SH.	Current "W" courses would fulfill the first writing requirement. The second level courses "AW" academic writing, would require a library research component.	0
Oral Communications Development of college level oral communications skills	OC designated course or 3-credit course focused on oral communications taken within 30 SH.	Course that require at least 2 structured and evaluated oral presentations or focused courses such as CTA - 160, 161, 162	3
Development of Critical Thinking	Integrated into all Gen Ed courses		
Information Literacy Develop skill and knowledge in the acquisition, evaluation, and communication of information. Specifically, secondary source (i.e., library) resources will be stressed.	Two information literacy courses are required. One course would be required within 30 SH and the second course would have to be taken within 60 SH. IL designated courses or focused library research courses could fulfill this requirement.	Existing courses could qualify for "IL" status if they incorporate a library project. Focused courses such as CTA 100 could fulfill 3 credits of this requirement.	0
Technology Literacy Develop skills necessary to use technology for academic purposes.	TL designated course or 3-credits focused on applied technology taken within 30 SH.	Current courses could qualify for "TL" status if they incorporate at least two of the following applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word processing • Spreadsheets • Statistical program • Presentation • Databases or focused courses such as MIS 260.	0
Mathematics Development of mathematical reasoning skills.	Additional course beyond basic proficiency	Current Gen Ed math courses	3
Social / Behavioral Scientific Literacy – Understanding of scientific methods and research processes in the social and behavioral sciences	One 3-credit course	Current Gen Ed Social and Behavior Science courses could fulfill this requirement providing that they include a review of research methods	6
Physical / Biological Scientific Literacy – Understanding of scientific methods and research processes in the physical / biological sciences	One laboratory course	Current Gen Ed Physical and Biological Science courses could fulfill this requirement providing that they include a review of research methods	4

CATEGORY / BROAD OBJECTIVES	REQUIREMENT	COURSES / POTENTIAL COURSES	COMMITTED CREDITS
World Culture Awareness and understanding of other cultures, language or history	Two 3-credit courses	Current language, non-western culture, history, and humanities course may qualify for this category providing there is a significant cultural component. ANT/COM/THR 208,	6
U.S. Culture and History Knowledge and appreciation of US culture.	One 3-credit course	Current U.S. history and culture courses. HIS 101, HIS 148, HIS 149, HIS/PS 262	3
Great Written Works – Literature, Philosophy, Humanistic Studies An appreciation for written works that have affected human thought.	Two 3-credit courses	Several courses in the current Humanities category would be eligible for this category provided that they examine one or more significant works in the discipline.	6
Arts- An appreciation for fine or performing arts.	One 3-credit course	All fine and performing arts courses would be eligible for this category.	3
Ethics- Reinforcing ethical values and social responsibility.	Integration of ethics in all Gen Ed outlines and First-year Seminar. <u>Or</u> designated “E” courses or 3-credit ethics courses.	“E” courses incorporate a significant ethical and/or social responsibility component. Other courses focused on ethics such as PHI 110, PHI 111 and PHI 112 would fulfill this requirement.	0
Physical Health- Valuing and maintaining physical health	Two credits	Existing Physical Activity Courses would fulfill this category.	2
			39

Recommendation 6
Require E-portfolios to facilitate
student “ownership” of the Gen Ed experience

Rationale

Many criticisms of our current general education requirements center on the lack of coherence in the program. Apparently arbitrary decisions about which courses meet general education requirements (Student Focus Group Document, p.3), the perception from outside that the general education requirements are not currently understandable and are not currently coherent (NEASC report, p.7), faculty concern about students fulfilling requirements “because they have to” instead of because they have “come to believe in the values and goals of the university and seek to become educated people” (Petkanas and O’Neill proposal, p.1) all point to the urgent need for students to understand, and ideally take on ownership of, the connections and coherence in their own general education program.

Three responses to this concern spring immediately to mind:

1. Completely redesign the core curriculum so that every student progresses through the same set of core courses with logical and interdisciplinary connections stressed throughout.
2. Educate our current students, faculty, and outside observers that what we currently have makes sense and is coherent.
3. Use a student-centered authorship tool to help students to understand the connections within, and build the coherence into, their own general education program.

The first solution involves the most dramatic change to WestConn’s instructional programs, and is therefore the hardest to implement. The second involves no change, and rests entirely on a good marketing campaign, which may be a bit simplistic. The third involves no change to current requirements or structure, but rests instead on the requirement that each student present for advisement and graduation an electronic portfolio in which the student demonstrates completion and competence in each of the general education areas. Thus, for example, a key part of the portfolio could be demonstration of critical thinking by presentation of a successfully critical paper, presentation or video from any academic discipline.

Objectives

Electronic portfolios have been used in a wide variety of disciplines already to help students take on ownership and authorship of their own education, facilitate a life-long learning approach to education, as well as the more immediately gratifying reason of helping students to prepare for the job market.

The main objectives for an electronic portfolio program are as follows:

- To facilitate student ownership of their own education
- To encourage life-long learning,
- To help students notice the “larger picture”, the interconnections, and the deeper structure of the knowledge and skills they are acquiring, and finally
- To prepare students in meaningful ways for a rapidly changing job market that relies increasingly on the demonstration of higher-order thinking skills.

The main advantages of using electronic portfolios rather than paper-based portfolios are that

- Electronic portfolios can accommodate non-paper-based projects, such as musical performances, computer programming projects, and film or video products,
- Electronic portfolios can be indexed in multiple ways, so that electronic documents can be arranged by general education requirement, job-related skills, or thematically.

Implementation

Electronic portfolios could be initiated upon admission to the university (by supplying students with an internet login ID, or by sending each student a CD-ROM). The electronic portfolio could contain the shell of the general education requirements, so that from the beginning the student is aware that they will have to demonstrate critical thinking, information literacy, scientific method, and so on. As the student's education progresses, items can be added to the portfolio as they are completed, or replaced when the student has completed the requirement in a more satisfying way. The electronic portfolio can be available during advisement so that advisor and advisee can discuss how best to fulfill remaining requirements. Finally, during the last semester of the senior year the student can submit the electronic portfolio to a senior portfolio panel (or present it in person as part of a senior show) so that the student can show the university community that he or she understands and has completed the general requirements for being an educated person and WestConn graduate in a way that is meaningful to the student.

Assessment

All electronic portfolios will be assessed on the general education requirements rubric to determine student eligibility to graduate. In addition, students, alumni, and community members will be assessed using current survey mechanisms, to determine whether the WestConn general education requirements make more sense, feel more cohesive, are perceived more positively after implementation of the electronic portfolio program.

Recommendation 7**Modify advising system to better serve students and faculty****Rationale**

If the General Education Experience is to meet its objectives, it will need to be a collaborative experience between students and faculty. This collaboration will occur on many levels: in the classroom, in more casual environments, and in the advising relationship between faculty and student. The advising relationship as it currently exists may not sufficiently contribute to an environment conducive to this collaborative experience. There are several potential inadequacies in the faculty-student advising relationship. While the importance of the advising relationship may seem obvious, it is not listed explicitly as one of the expectations for faculty members, as are, for example, teaching load, professional activity, and productive service. Therefore, the advising performance of faculty members is not explicitly or uniformly evaluated. Second, it is possible for students to meet with their advisors as few as two times a year or fewer. Third, faculty members may not be aware of specific General education requirements, the purpose of those requirements (Student Focus Group Report, 2003) or how different departments may have structured those requirements to meet the individual goals of the departments. The combination of these factors results in a situation in which students may only rarely see their advisors. When they do see their advisors, these advisors may not be particularly well-informed about issues affecting students' academic lives. These advisors, in light of the other responsibilities for which they are explicitly evaluated, may have little motivation (or time) to become better informed. If the General Education Experience is to become an integral component of our students' lives while at WestConn, the current advising system must be modified.

Objectives

To develop the advising experience so that it becomes an integral part of the General Education Experience for faculty and students alike.

Possible implementation plans

- In recognition of the fact that faculty members may simply be unable to provide the more intensive advising experience than currently exists, "Super Advisors" will be designated for each department. There would be at least one Super Advisor per department, and each Super Advisor would receive a one course reduction for one year in return for assuming the additional advising responsibilities. The numbers of students each Super Advisor would be responsible for, how many Super Advisors would be needed per department and whether this would be logistically possible during registration are all issues that would need resolution.
- Expansion of advising beyond the 10-day pre-registration experience. Students will be encouraged to meet with faculty advisors when midterm grades are released and then once again for registration.

- Creation of a “Faculty Advising Handbook” that can be updated annually with any changes endorsed by CUCAS. The current Faculty Handbook could serve as a possible template. This handbook would contain the program sheets listing the General education Requirements for every department. In addition to these program sheets, each department would include an explicit description of why those courses listed for the program are necessary, and how each course fulfills a general education objective. A third part would contain a General Education Experience Program Schedule (a GEEPS). The GEEPS would list the eight semesters (at a minimum), and the GEE expectations for each semester. Each GEEPS could be updated and modified every semester by the student in collaboration with their academic advisor. The Advising Handbook would need to be updated every year as well. Departments making changes that affect the General Education Experience would be responsible for forwarding those changes to whoever is responsible for maintaining this handbook.

Assessment

An Advising Survey will be used to assess graduating seniors. This survey could also be included in a general education assessment instrument to be distributed to alumni.

Area of Concern
**Integrate the teaching of Technology
and the teaching of Ethics across the curriculum**

Rationale

A review of the University's mission statement, the Task Force's Educated Person Model and benchmark schools points to two additional areas lacking in the current Gen Ed curriculum: applied computer technologies and ethics. The survey of Western's faculty also indicated a need to address these areas in the Gen Ed curriculum. When asked about preparation for more advanced courses, faculty ranked applied computer technologies sixth of 47 areas and ethics ranked eighth. Both of these areas were rated significantly more important than many areas currently in the Gen Ed curriculum. The subcommittee believes that the permanent Gen Ed committee should seriously consider how these areas are integrated into the Gen Ed curriculum.

Objectives

One of the seven areas of emphasis in Western's mission statement is "a strong background in information technologies." One of the stated principles in the mission statement is "Empowering students to attain the highest standards of academic achievement, public and professional services, personal development, and ethical conduct is our fundamental responsibility." Similarly, the Task Forces document states that the educated person has "competence as a computer user" and "develops ethical values with a sense of responsibility toward society (such as honesty, integrity, a work ethic) and an ethical responsibility toward the self (such as tenacity, perseverance)." We, therefore, believe that the Gen Ed curriculum should provide students with:

1. A basic competency in applied computer technologies that will enable them to succeed in advanced courses.
 - At minimum students should be competent in using university computer systems, word processing, electronic communications and presentation applications. Students should also have exposure to electronic spreadsheet concepts.
2. The opportunity to examine how words, value systems and actions affect other people and society in general for the purpose of developing a sense of ethical responsibility toward other people and societies.
 - Although there is controversy surrounding the concept of teaching ethics, there is a tradition in higher education to examine value systems and the implications of human words and actions. At minimum students should explore the ethics of their own actions, especially in the context of being part of the university community (plagiarism, cheating, work ethic, etc.). Further, divergent viewpoints on current ethical issues could be objectively discussed in the context of how they might affect their lives and the lives of others.

Implementation

Some aspects of computer applications and ethics will be covered in the first-year seminar. However, the subcommittee believes that these areas should be strengthened further in the Gen Ed curriculum. Therefore, we proposed that a model similar to the one used for writing intensive courses be implemented here. Courses could receive a designation of “C” for computer applications or “E” for ethics. Departments could apply for the designation if courses included a significant component of these areas. The permanent Gen Ed committee would be responsible for establish criteria and reviewing these applications.

Further, courses that focus on one or more aspects of these areas could also fulfill the requirement. For example, MIS 260 Information Systems Concepts, and PHI 111 Ethical Issues in Health Care directly address these areas. At the request of departments, the Gen Ed committee would review course outlines of current and proposed courses that focus on computer applications or ethics. Students would be required to take one applied computer technology course (“C” designated or focused course) and one ethics course (“E” designated or focused course) prior to the completion of 60 credits. As stated in previous proposals, a course may have more than one designation. For example, a literature course may have a “W” designation and an “E” designation if the writing projects address ethical issues.

Assessment

In addition to the course assessment of these areas, the e-portfolio assessment method could be used to demonstrate proficiency in these areas. For example, students could place a spreadsheet of calculations or a paper on health care ethics into the e-portfolio to demonstrate proficiency. Samples of e-portfolios would be periodically evaluated by a team put together by the permanent Gen Ed committee.

Conclusions

This proposal is offered to fill the gap between what we want our students to be and the curriculum necessary to achieve that objective.