Re-Envisioning General Education

A Report to the Provost

General Education Visioning Committee

August 2009

Dedicated to the memory of our colleague, Len Foster

LIST OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee Chair

Dr. Carol Ivory, Professor and Chair, Fine Arts

Members

Dr. William Andrefsky, Professor and Chair, Anthropology

Dr. Matthew Carroll, Professor, Natural Resource Sciences

Dr. Sandra Cooper, Associate Professor, Mathematics

†Dr. Lenoar Foster, Professor of Educational Leadership and Associate Dean, College of Education

Michael Gallegos, Senator, Associated Students of Washington State University

Dr. Carl Hauser, Clinical Associate Professor, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

Dr. Susan Poch, Associate Vice President, Educational Development

Dr. James R. (Dick) Pratt, Professor of Environmental Science and Academic Vice Chancellor, WSU Tri-Cities

Dr. Thomas Tripp, Professor of Management, WSU Vancouver

Dr. Mary Wack, Professor of English and Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education

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Executive Summary

On October 15, 2008, the committee received the charge from Provost Warwick Bayly to provide him with a set of recommendations by April 1, 2009 that will "provide a basis for direction and strategy for general education" at Washington State University. In carrying out this charge, he asked the committee to consider:

- Fresh possibilities for structuring general education, given current literature nationally on the topic and internal reviews of General Education issues
- Advantages and disadvantages of lessening the distinctions between general education and the major
- What the goals and pedagogical strategies should be for structuring general education in the transitional freshman year
- How to evaluate if students are learning what they need to, i.e., are they meeting the learning goals of General Education and the baccalaureate

In subsequent informal conversations with some of the committee, the provost also requested consideration of how a general education program could foster leadership. The committee's understanding of its charge is to propose an overall concept and direction for the WSU general education program, not to develop a detailed plan. In this report, the committee offers a vision along with some recommendations for achieving that vision.

Realizing that their task was a complex and multi-layered one, the committee immediately began an intensive research period, developed a set of guiding principles, and carefully examined the current General Education program. In the end, the committee found that the program is, in fact, in need of a major redesign in light of realities and fundamental issues and concerns detailed in the report. These include an outdated budgeting system; widespread lack of knowledge about the nature, purpose, and structure of the program; and a fundamental shift in the design of educational programs nationally and internationally, to focus on outcomes (what students actually know and are able to do) rather than on course-counting.

GEVC advocates a vision of general education that supports the goals of WSU's 2008-13 strategic plan to "provide a premier education and transformative experience that prepares students to excel in a global society" by providing "high-impact learning experiences that engage students" and by fostering "core competencies in our learners." It is in line with a national consensus on General Education as embodied in the American Association of Colleges & Universities' documents on liberal learning included in this report. The GEVC vision for General Education at WSU can be summarized as follows:

WSU fosters educational outcomes that include knowledge of human cultures, of the arts, and of the natural and physical world. Students develop their intellectual and practical skills through integrated learning experiences that prepare them to be responsible local and global citizens and leaders. They reach this through a broad liberal education, specialization in a major, and community and field-based experiences that explore the world's major questions.

The outcomes of a baccalaureate degree should be reached through coordinated and integrated pathways. Courses and experiences in the major and outside the major, elective and required, contribute to students' achievement of outcomes. The "re-envisioning" will only be complete when outcomes become embodied in curricula, and pathways emerge through general education and major requirements.

Three fundamental issues must be addressed if changes to general education requirements or courses are to have meaning and impact. These are:

1. Budget reform as the *sine qua non* of general education reform.
2. Awareness, buy-in and "marketing" of General Education to faculty and students.
   The committee recommendations for revision of program elements can be discussed as part of raising general awareness around the issue. They include:
   - Make the General Education program simpler and more flexible
   - Create coherent pathways through all four years and engage with the major
   - Consider crediting co-curricular learning
   - Re-examine first-year and capstone experiences
3. Shifting to an outcomes-driven paradigm.

The committee's research into the experience of other universities that have successfully overhauled their general education programs shows that it is a multi-year process. To assure faculty buy-in and resolve potential conflicting needs, the committee recommends that during the 2009-2010 academic year, some form of the current committee (with possible additions/changes) focus on two areas in particular:

1. Outreach to various constituencies to engage in dialogue regarding the report and its different elements. There needs to be frank and open conversations with Senate leadership; deans, associate deans, chairs and program directors, faculty; regional campuses; advisors; and students through ASWSU and other forums.
2. Outcomes are central to the restructuring of the General Education program. Faculty must be engaged from the beginning in the process of re-examining the learning goals and

writing assessable outcomes for them. We need to engage faculty, the Teaching Academy, and experts from all campuses, AAC&U, and professional departments. This discussion will inevitably include consideration of potential changes to the program.

The committee foresees a third year to continue dialogue with all of the constituent groups to finalize a new program, and a fourth year to begin implementation. Should consensus emerge more rapidly, this timeline could be accelerated. The committee stresses that a four-year timeline is normal for an inclusive, faculty-driven process.

General Education Visioning Committee

REPORT

Summary of charge to the committee

On October 15, 2008, the committee received the charge from Provost Warwick Bayly to provide him with a set of recommendations by April 1, 2009 that will "provide a basis for direction and strategy for general education" at Washington State University (Appendix A). In carrying out this charge, he asked the committee to consider:

- Fresh possibilities for structuring general education, given current literature nationally on the topic and internal reviews of general education issues
- Advantages and disadvantages of lessening the distinctions between general education and the major
- What the goals and pedagogical strategies should be for structuring general education in the transitional freshman year
- How to evaluate if students are learning what they need to, i.e., are they meeting the learning goals of general education and the baccalaureate

In subsequent informal conversations with some of the committee, the provost also requested consideration of how a general education program could foster leadership.

The committee's understanding of its charge is to propose an overall concept and direction for the WSU general education program, not to develop a detailed plan. The committee wishes to emphasize that it is offering a vision, and some recommendations for achieving the vision. It very consciously and specifically has *not* crafted "a done deal" of line item changes to the current courses and requirements. In fact, the next steps in the process will require extensive dialogue among all faculty about what outcomes WSU wishes to set for its undergraduate degrees, and what curricula are appropriate to foster those outcomes.

The committee members met twice monthly throughout the rest of the academic year, culminating in a daylong retreat on Thursday, May 14, 2009, to finalize the contents of this report.

General overview of the process and development of guiding principles

The committee members quickly began to realize that their task was a complex and multi-layered one affected by numerous factors, including:

- The Vancouver campus's experience in trying to develop a new general education program that ultimately was terminated after two years
- The Tri-Cities campus's need to expand lower-division offerings, including general education courses, now that it has become a four-year campus
- The need to design a program for a state-wide, multi-campus system where campuses are vastly different in scale and in student/faculty demographics
- New regional accreditation guidelines on general education that mandate a general education program which "demonstrates an integrated course of study that helps students develop the breadth and depth of intellect to become more effective learners and to prepare them for a productive life of work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment. Baccalaureate degree programs and transfer associate degree programs include a recognizable core of general education that represents an integration of basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social sciences."
- A new (2008) university strategic plan that posits a goal of "providing a premier education and transformative experience that prepares students to excel in a global society," with particular focus on providing "high-impact learning experiences that engage students" and on fostering "core competencies in our learners"
- The move of the World Civilizations program to the Department of History
- The impact of the Academic Affairs Program Prioritization report (A2P2)
- The impact of budget reductions on courses and programs that affect the availability of general education courses
- An increasingly international faculty educated outside the American system and thus potentially unfamiliar with the notion of a broad liberal education as part of an undergraduate degree
- The burgeoning literature on the topic of general education, both national and international, that needed to be read to acquaint the committee with contemporary thinking on the subject

The committee immediately began an intensive research period in which the members looked both inward and outward (see bibliography in Appendix F for an overview of this research).

Through this research, the committee found that the current General Education program is, in fact, in need of a major redesign in light of the realities noted above, and in light of three fundamental issues. Two of these issues have been identified in previous reports on general education; the third has emerged most pointedly with the imminent change in accreditation standards in the Northwest region. All must be addressed if any changes in requirements or curriculum are to be successfully implemented:

- An outdated budgeting system that is widely seen as a barrier to improvements at any level of the program;
- Widespread lack of knowledge or misunderstanding on the part of faculty, students, and staff of the nature, purpose, and structure of the general education program;
- A fundamental shift in the design of educational programs, both nationally and internationally, to focus on outcomes (what students actually know and are able to do) rather than on course-counting.

As the committee began to identify particular areas of concern, it also drew up a set of principles to guide the analysis of the problems and the formulation of possible solutions. Many of the principles characterize the current program, and are listed here to capture systematically elements needed for any future program. Whether old or new, implicit or explicit in the Pullman and Vancouver models, these **guiding principles** are that:

- A general education program has to work for all campuses: there should be only one program system-wide, albeit with flexibility to adapt to the circumstances at different campuses. It must meet transfer student needs.

- Current goals of the baccalaureate are largely suitable as general educational goals but are open to refinement.

- A General Education program should be designed around learning outcomes, not around course-counting or administrative structures of departments.

- General Education courses must be based on outcomes that link to undergraduate learning goals and are assessable; assessment must be pervasive through the general education structure.

- Broad-based educational outcomes span general education and the majors, including professional and pre-professional studies. All curricula help students achieve the outcomes of a liberal education.

- There should be integration and coherence between general education and the major; general education requirements are not set apart "over there" with respect to the major.

- The program must demonstrate intellectual coherence; should intentionally develop intellectual skills through all four years; and be simple, compact and flexible, with fewer (e.g. 30-35) rather than more credits required.

- The program must provide for breadth of study as well as for integrative learning; consistent with program outcomes, some of the breadth should be at the upper division, and could be met in the major.

- The freshman year needs intentional design with common outcomes, bearing in mind residential and non-residential characteristics of the campuses.

- Baccalaureate programs should culminate with an integrative "capstone" experience either in the major or in General Education.

Finally, the committee's research, including the examination of the WSU Vancouver experience, made it clear to the members that there are numerous political and economic realities and concerns that need to be addressed if general education at WSU is to be successfully "re-envisioned." The key points that emerged were:

- Any proposal will be both "too radical" and "not radical enough."

- There has to be continual outreach and faculty development in order for a system of outcomes to be translated effectively into course design and assessment.

- A successful general education program requires permanent, stable funding and a mechanism to address enrollment increases in a predictable manner.

- The large undergraduate colleges have significant investments in the status quo, in particular the system of funding their graduate students through large general education courses. Colleges will need clear incentives to change.

With these points in mind, and within the time and resource constraints it faced, the committee assessed the current general education program at WSU and came to consensus on recommendations for re-envisioning the program and for the next steps in this process.

Vision

The goal of WSU's 2008-13 strategic plan is to "provide a premier education and transformative experience that prepares students to excel in a global society" by providing "high-impact

learning experiences that engage students" and by fostering "core competencies in our learners." Within this framework, GEVC advocates a vision of general education derived from national consensus embodied in the American Association of Colleges & Universities' documents on liberal learning.

So that there is no confusion about what "liberal learning" means, the committee uses it in the sense noted here: "Reflecting the traditions of American higher education since the founding, the term 'liberal education' headlines the kind of learning needed for a free society and for the full development of human talent. Liberal education has always been this nation's signature educational tradition, [whose] core values [are]: expanding horizons, building understanding of the wider world, honing analytical and communication skills, and fostering responsibilities beyond self" (AAC&U, *College Learning for the New Global Century*).

The vision for general education can be summarized as follows:

> WSU fosters educational outcomes that include knowledge of human cultures, of the arts, and of the natural and physical world. Students develop their intellectual and practical skills through integrated learning experiences that prepare them to be responsible local and global citizens and leaders. They reach this through a broad liberal education, specialization in a major, and community and field-based experiences that explore the world's major questions.

The outcomes of a baccalaureate degree should be reached through coordinated and integrated pathways. Courses and experiences in the major and outside the major, elective and required, contribute to students' achievement of outcomes. In a framework intentionally designed to achieve outcomes, the credits required for the prescriptive elements (general education and the major) may potentially be reduced while enabling students to learn more deeply and more quickly.

A nationally shared vision of liberal education becomes uniquely WSU's in the particular undergraduate outcomes established collectively by the institution, and in the design of curricular and co-curricular experiences to achieve those outcomes. The "re-envisioning" will only be complete when outcomes become embodied in curricula, and clear pathways for students through general education and major requirements emerge.

Key issues

Using the guiding principles above, and building on various documents and sources,[1] the committee analyzed the WSU general education program for key issues in re-thinking the program. A quick synopsis of the current program will help put the following analysis and recommendations into perspective. The analysis was conducted in the spirit of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities' 2009 accreditation evaluation report, which noted regarding general education: "WSU has a strong general education program which now extends to its branch campuses in Vancouver and Tri-Cities. Importantly, and commendably, WSU appears committed to continuously improving the general education experience and program."

WSU's current model of general education

After intensive study of general education models in the 1980s, WSU arrived at a compromise model of general education that embodied strengths of different models current at the time. From the notion of a *core curriculum,* a type in which all students follow a common set of general education courses intended to provide a common intellectual experience (as one instance, the "Great Books" model at such places as Chicago or St. John's), WSU developed the core World Civilizations courses that all students take upon entry. From the *distribution* model, intended to guarantee breadth of study outside the major, WSU developed the distributional areas which, translated by the degree audit software, have become known as "alphabet soup." From the *integrative model*, which focuses on integration of subject areas and skills, WSU developed the discarded "Areas of Coherence" and the general education capstone (Tier III). Using a *developmental model*, the GE requirements include a transitional course as the academic backbone of the first year (World Civilizations, 'A" requirement); they build writing into multiple levels of the curriculum; and the curriculum was originally structured in tiers intended to be of progressive intellectual sophistication.

Viewing the 40-credit WSU model for its emphases, it is about 75% distributional, sandwiched by an introductory core experience (6 credits) and a culminating integrative capstone (3 credits). Leaving aside the largely discarded or ignored tier system, it is in these two places— students' transition in and transition out—that the "intentionality and coherence" of the program are particularly manifested. That is, these are the two points where WSU has attempted to create learning experiences for students that are more purposeful than a purely

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[1] Faculty Senate 2006 report on general education; reports of the Director of General Education; 2005 Shoenberg Report; 2008 A2P2 report; the university's strategic plan; and best professional practices as exemplified by a variety of AAC&U publications, other works on general education, and the AAC&U overview of a liberal education – see Appendix D.

distributional general education program. Intentionality and coherence require time and attention, which is to say, money. With money for general education in short supply, these two departures from the "cafeteria model" have been the points of contention about the current general education program. Put another way, the inertia and incentives of the status quo default toward the distributional model, a model that is disappearing nationally as a viable structure for developing core twenty-first century skills..

Three fundamental issues

Three fundamental issues must be addressed if any changes to general education requirements or courses are to have meaning and impact:

1. **Budget reform is the *sine qua non* of general education reform**

The GEVC acknowledges the national reputation that the current program has achieved and sustained, but it also acknowledges that the conditions of the present and recent past severely impair the program's ability to fulfill its goals. If there is one theme pervading reports on general education over the last 10 years, whether from the Director of General Education or from the Faculty Senate, it is that General Education lacks sufficient and stable budgetary support to make it successful. Despite repeated calls for change in the funding system, nothing fundamental has been done, perhaps because of the daunting complexity of, and limited faculty power within, the current budgetary system, and perhaps because no concrete alternatives to the present system have been identified. The committee stresses that this is the "make or break" issue for the success of the re-envisioning process. The committee does not foresee that sufficient will can be mobilized to engage in serious revamping of the program without visible commitment to, and progress on, solving this issue.

The committee identified four budgetary topics for further investigation.

- **Under-resourcing**: are the budgets (insofar as they can be identified) allocated to courses with GER designations disproportionately under-resourced compared to those without GER designation? Put another way, of the revenue generated by GER courses, is a sufficient fraction returned to departments offering the courses to enable the instruction to meet the program goals and university strategic goals? (The current strategic goal is "providing a transformative experiences that prepares students to excel in a global society" through "high-impact learning experiences that engage students" and that "foster core competencies in our learners.") These are empirical questions that a task force with support from Institutional Research and the Budget Office should

investigate so as to lay out as clearly as possible the budgetary realities before major reform is undertaken.

- **Lack of transparency**: whether the current allocations are sufficient or not, identifying them is extraordinarily difficult because they are embedded within many departmental and college budgets without separate line-item status. Several undesirable consequences follow:

  - Without such visibility, it becomes difficult to map the impact of budget cuts on the General Education program, and whether it is disproportional to impact on majors and graduate programs.

  - There is no evident link between responsibilities, budgeting, and accountability for student outcomes. Neither rewards nor sanctions follow from "doing general education well," or failing to do so.

  - WSU's matrix system of budgeting and academic responsibilities at the regional campuses complicates the task of linking responsibility, budgeting, and accountability for student outcomes.

- **Lack of predictability**: a chronic source of irritation for chairs, deans, and the Director of General Education has been the lack of a predictable mechanism to deal with enrollment increases in GER courses. The mechanism of temporary allocations (sometimes of long duration) to address enrollment issues seems to have evolved in response to years of unpredictable freshman enrollments and to the lack of periodic re-basing of budgets to account for growth (or decline). Whatever its origins, the "permanent temporary" money for general education courses has come to symbolize the administration's ambivalent commitment to general education. Furthermore, it creates frustration for chairs who can't make graduate offers in a timely fashion, and find it difficult to hire instructors competitively and strategically to meet student demand. The downside of making the existing temporary money permanent within the current budget system is that it then ceases to be transparent, becomes absorbed into other budgets, and can no longer be tracked for accountability nor easily mobilized for change.

- **Leveraging current resources:** Fourth, and fundamentally, the budgets supporting general education instruction are so widely distributed across the university and embedded in other budgetary structures that there is no single point or even a few

points of leverage that would allow funds to be mobilized for new endeavors. Perhaps the most formidable hurdle to changing the present system is teasing out how currently-allocated resources can be shifted to support both the start-up and ongoing phases of a new program.

To transform student learning through the general education program, budget must be used in intentional ways to guide the implementation of a new vision of general education. A firm commitment by the central administration to adequately fund general education (including money for faculty development and faculty rewards to generate faculty buy-in) is essential if any effort to re-envision, or even to continue, the current program is to succeed. Such a commitment will need to be made at the beginning of a public process of general education revision, if faculty and departments are to be engaged at the needed level, and if their engagement is to be sustained over the multiple biennia that reform will take.

The committee recommends that if significant new funds are not available for the first phase of implementation the budgetary task force recommended above be charged with determining how current general education monies may be identified within their budgetary matrices and mobilized for new curricula while not imperiling graduate programs. The longer-term task is to tie funding to performance expectations at the unit level.

2. **Awareness, buy-in and "marketing" of General Education to faculty and students**

After budget, the issue identified as most fundamental to student and faculty discontent with general education is a "significant general lack of understanding of the purpose and structure of the General Education Program" (Senate 2006 report). The reasons for this range from shifting faculty demographics (substantial numbers educated outside US system, increasing proportion of faculty and students in professions), limited engagement of faculty with General Education teaching and advising, faculty turnover since the program was created, and lack of resources in the program for ongoing, systematic outreach.

- 20% of WSU faculty now hired annually on the tenure track are educated abroad, usually in systems without general education programs. WSU does not actively offer systematic information on the purposes and value of general education to new and ongoing faculty.

- If faculty are not familiar with the purposes of and rationale for general education, they have difficulty explaining to students its necessity and its value. General education requirements then seem to be arbitrary hoops to jump. WSU needs to create shared

understanding and agreement on the outcomes of the baccalaureate degree that include both the major and general education.

- Professional advisors also need regular professional development regarding the purposes and rationale for general education.

- Lack of understanding throughout the system affects curricular and budgetary decisions. A case in point is the institutional failure to develop a sufficient number of Tier III courses to offer students meaningful choices among schedules and subjects, and/or to achieve class sizes that allow the intended focus on research and writing.

- Ongoing marketing/awareness/professional development activities regarding the purposes and rationale for general education for both faculty and students must be broad, regular, and via multiple communication channels.

In WSU's 2009 accreditation evaluation report from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the critical importance of the institutional visibility of, and engagement with, general education was called out:

> WSU has been widely recognized for excellence in general education, but this may be difficult to sustain without broad-based and committed support across the University. Second (and related), in difficult financial times it will take a deliberate and concerted focus on the value and importance of general education to the entire university to prevent the erosion of support that could jeopardize its success, to the detriment of undergraduate education and the entire University.

The committee discussed several mechanisms for creating buy-in and support. One is the very process of re-envisioning, whose next steps should involve large numbers of faculty in working groups. A second is a system of incentives, touched on in the budget discussion above. A third is a program of ongoing faculty development, and a fourth is program descriptions in the catalog and elsewhere. The latter two received detailed discussion by the committee, summarized in Appendix B.

Additional recommendations:

- Marketing communications resources should be applied to communicating the general education program, as it is a fundamental element of the academic program and institutional mission.
- Key message points about general education's purpose and value should be included in recruitment and admissions materials.

- Sufficient human and financial resources for ongoing faculty development must be allocated.
- The Teaching Academy has played a significant role in formulating the university's learning goals as well as in faculty and TA development. Their work should be supported and extended to carry re-envisioning of general education forward.

3. Shifting to an outcomes-driven paradigm

Changing focus from courses and content to achieving learning outcomes

In keeping with new accreditation standards effective in 2010, which themselves reflect global transformations in higher education such as the outcomes-based focus of the Bologna Process, WSU should turn necessity into opportunity by actively embracing the shift from courses and content to outcomes. This will not be unique to general education, but is something that must be done more generally in all programs. The new regional accreditation standards include the following:

2.C.2 The institution identifies and publishes expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Expected student learning outcomes for courses, wherever offered and however delivered, are provided in written form to enrolled students.

2.C.5 Faculty with teaching responsibilities take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly-identified learning outcomes.

2.C.10 The institution demonstrates that the general education components of its baccalaureate degree programs (if offered) and transfer associate degree programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that are stated in relation to the institution's mission and learning outcomes for those programs.

Nationally, the Association of American Colleges and Universities strongly advocates outcomes-based general education programs. The medical community, too, has recently re-assessed the training of pre-medical students. The report, released jointly by the Association of American Medical Colleges and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, argues strongly for the redesign of premedical and medical school science curricula to reflect outcomes-based competencies. Most separately accredited professional programs state expected outcomes, some of which are expected to come from a general education program.

Any curriculum revision must start from consideration of the goals and outcomes the program is expected to achieve. Adding or deleting requirements without such a consideration can

erode the intellectual coherence of the program, and reinforce the perceived arbitrariness of the requirements. The new accreditation standard for general education from NWCCU (effective in 2010) lays the groundwork for the program's coherence:

> 2.C.9 The general education component of undergraduate programs (if offered) demonstrates an integrated course of study that helps students develop the breadth and depth of intellect to become more effective learners and to prepare them for a productive life of work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment. Baccalaureate degree programs and transfer associate degree programs include a recognizable core of general education that represents an integration of basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social sciences.

In the current system, the alphabet soup of required courses does not clearly map to particular outcomes. They are overly anchored in a few colleges, and for the most part, are not integrated with the major (except for writing in the major courses). GEVC recommends that outcomes in the first instance be specified based on what we want students to know and be able to do, independent of academic administrative and/or departmental structures. General educational outcomes are sufficiently broad that many disciplines and departments can contribute to students' achieving them. Two existing courses that model intentional interdisciplinary design to achieve broad goals are World Civilizations (until 2009) and Science 101-102. Depending on the final set of outcomes established for the baccalaureate, they could serve as models for other parts of the GE curriculum. But these courses, the committee hopes, are just starting points: bold new interdisciplinary "Big Questions" courses, intentionally designed to meet learning outcomes and students' developmental needs, should emerge from followup discussions among the faculty.

Recommendations:
- Re-orient the general education and the majors to focus on assessable learning outcomes. Once the outcomes are established, curricular requirements will flow from them, and courses will then be (re)designed around them.
- Bring in facilitators from AAC&U and similar organizations to assist cross-university faculty groups in defining assessable outcomes for broad domains in fall 2009.

Clarification of learning goals and related learning outcomes

The committee reviewed WSU's Six Learning Goals of the Baccalaureate in relation to the previously-established learning goals of the General Education program (Appendix D). Both sets of goals line up well with those of many other institutions nationwide, and with national

research on the essential outcomes of a college education. However, there are slight differences between the Six Goals and the General Education learning goals in Pullman and Vancouver. The GEVC discussed integrating the two sets of goals into a single vision for undergraduate education, and recommends follow-up work on this point through which the goals are clarified and translated into a set of specific outcomes (statements about what students will know and be able to do that are assessable). The General Education Learning Goals on p. 57 of the 2008-09 *Catalog* are a good foundation for this process, but they should not preclude consideration of additional goals and outcomes, for example regarding spatial or visual thinking, creative, or integrative thinking, or leadership.

As stated in the Guiding Principles, the committee feels strongly that general educational learning outcomes should not be just a preparation for a major, but should extend throughout the entire student career at WSU, and should include the major (as, for example, the writing portion of the program already does at the upper division).

Four outcomes domains require further comment.

Broad disciplinary areas. Arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and so on that serve as the basis for the current required areas (B, P, H, S, etc,) and for most general education courses do not have learning outcomes established at a sufficient level of specificity so that they are assessable. The current General Education Learning Goal, "Acquire knowledge in a variety of scholarly modes and contexts, and recognize diverse disciplinary viewpoints and methods" is broken out into sub-points that stipulate students will "understand and apply the principles and methods of [e.g.] the social sciences." What these principles and methods are is not spelled out except for the use of quantitative methods to assess validity. Before the faculty can engage in a discussion of what to require, or what courses might fulfill this requirement, the outcomes students are expected to attain must first be articulated at this broad disciplinary level. Curriculum discussions then follow from the outcomes once established.

Self in society. The second domain where fundamental discussion of desired outcomes must be engaged involves the current learning goal, "Self in Society. " Within the General Education Learning Goals it reads: "Demonstrate knowledge of self in diverse cultural contexts and understand the relationship of one's own society to other societies and groups." This goal is the general rationale for the D and I requirements, and a partial one for A (World Civilizations).

When we say that our strategic goal as an institution is to "prepare students to excel in a global society" (2008-13 Strategic Plan), and that our fundraising theme is "leaders for an interconnected world," what outcomes are we positing? What knowledge and skills to this end

do we, or should we, presume and foster through the curriculum and co-curriculum? How do we specify the outcomes for exercising citizenship in a democracy, and for engaging with national and global diversity? This domain opens into broad areas such as foreign language competence,[2] intercultural knowledge and skills, ethics, civic engagement, the interactions of society and the environment, perhaps even interactions between humans and technology that have not yet had recent or full discussion as elements of a common set of undergraduate outcomes.

Experiential learning: The 2002-07 strategic plan's implementation work included a strong subcommittee report on fostering experiential learning as part of creating "the best undergraduate experience in a research university." At the time, discussions raised the possibility of requiring some form of experiential learning (such as community service learning or civic engagement, internships, study abroad, or undergraduate research) within either general education or the major. GEVC recommends that this should be strongly considered in the revised undergraduate outcomes, as it will offer both deep learning experiences (based on National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE] and other research) and more flexible pathways for students.

First-year outcomes. The 2005 Shoenberg report drew attention to academic needs at the lower division, and NSSE data from 2000 onwards show plenty of room for improvement in all areas of freshmen students' engagement with the university. Because the greatest cognitive development takes place in the first two years of college, it is critical to have a well-designed, intentional set of educational experiences before students certify their majors.

The World Civilizations course sequence has served as a common intellectual experience for incoming students, as a transition into university culture and research university expectations, and as the "backbone" of the first year experience in Pullman. By virtue of its reach, and of the program's responsiveness to university initiatives such as using technology in the classroom, increasing critical thinking in deliberate ways, introducing students to information literacy, and providing multiple opportunities for writing outside English 101, it has become a key site for implementing (and documenting) reforms in the first-year experience. World Civilizations

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[2] WSU is unusual among major research/AAU institutions in not having a foreign language requirement. This has been conditioned by the state's lack of a foreign language requirement in high school. In recent years major reports from the federal government, professional societies, and higher education groups have all advocated for greater language study among American college students. Even the state of Washington is moving (albeit slowly) toward a globally-responsive K-12 education (*Washington Learns* studies and reports; Higher Education Coordinating Board Policy Brief 1.2, 2007, "Preparing students to live and work in a global economy"). GEVC briefly discussed this issue, but did not reach consensus on this topic. The topic should be part of a general faculty discussion of the essential outcomes of an undergraduate education at a major research university.

faculty have been key players in both the Freshman Focus program, and the Common Reading program, more recent initiatives for improving freshman outcomes.

However, budget problems have long plagued the program, with faculty development being lost to cuts, and funding levels not keeping up with enrollment. The recent move of the World Civilizations courses to the Department of History, with an even smaller funding base for the program, puts into question its continued position as a single university-wide, interdisciplinary course required for all. The committee questions whether it is realistically viable any longer to mount such a single, universally required freshman course, primarily because of the challenges at the academic department level of mobilizing, managing, and professionally developing faculty on a sufficient scale to offer reasonably-sized classes responsive to university initiatives.

Nonetheless, the committee believes that the first year should be intentionally designed to transition students from high school to success in a research university. This is all the more pressing as the campuses recruit increasing numbers of first-generation students. An updated look at the first-year experience that will define the outcomes expected at all campuses, and include both curricular and co-curricular elements (not necessarily residential), should be undertaken by a task force in tandem with broader faculty discussion regarding outcomes of general education.

Recommendations:
Because the GEVC had neither the time nor the expertise to define a complete set of goals and outcomes, it has deliberately foregone proposing one particular curricular structure over another. Such a structure would be premature, and not grounded in a set of outcomes agreed upon by the faculty. Along with budget analysis, the highest priority among next steps is for the learning goals to be rearticulated and realigned into the foundation for curriculum and requirements. This is a necessary step in re-engaging faculty in the aims and values of general education. Faculty participation in the process should be broad, even at the risk of slowing the timeline down a bit. It must also be stressed that the discussion of outcomes is not intended to replicate the current distribution system, and should include the perspective of professional schools, and, where appropriate and feasible, employers and other stakeholders.

- Realign the various sets of learning goals (6 Goals of the Baccalaureate, Pullman General Education, Vancouver General Education) for greater consistency and clarity, and define appropriate outcomes.

- Establish outcomes where they are lacking, ambiguous, or underdeveloped.

- Refine learning outcomes so that they are comprehensive and assessable. Appendix C contains an illustration of the complexity and necessity of wide faculty engagement in defining outcomes for the various domains of baccalaureate competence.

Re-envisioning the program

The highest priority considerations from the committee after budgeting, faculty buy-in, and outcomes, are the following:

Make the general education program simpler, more flexible and more coherent.

The students' experience of the general education program's original underlying coherence, and their ability to choose purposeful pathways through the curriculum, has been compromised by a number of developments over the years since the program's inception.

- **Prescriptive major requirements that stipulate which specific GE courses are to be taken**. In some cases, students have almost no choice at all in four years of curriculum, between the erosion of electives and stipulation of GER courses by major departments. This limits students' becoming self-directed learners through the exercise of freedom to explore a variety of fields and choose personally meaningful subjects to study. It also complicates students' ability to transfer among majors without taking additional GER courses.

- **Confusion about the number of credits required by the general education program**. WSU's general education program is "standard-issue": the number of general education credits at WSU (39-40) falls well within national norms and accrediting guidelines, which typically expect 30-40 credits of general education in a 120-credit baccalaureate degree. Anecdotal reports suggest that students are confusing university general education requirements with those of colleges and departments. CLA and COS require 12 additional credits (for a total of 52), as a solid core of liberal education to complement majors in those colleges. Other departments appear to be labeling pre-major requirements as general education requirements if the courses in question have general education designations. In this way pre-major requirements come to be confused with general education requirements, and the higher number attributed to general education rather than to the major track. Students (and some faculty) don't necessarily distinguish between what is required by the university and what is required by the major or college. These issues are presumably the source of the A2P2 recommendation to "reduce the number of GE courses."

- **Confusion resulting from the multiple letter designations within area categories.** In an ironic twist, the creation of flexibility for students and departments in the current system has generated the "alphabet soup" via an inflexible degree audit system. Mechanisms of flexibility such as options (3 <u>OR</u> 6 credits humanities or social sciences), double-counting (a course could meet social sciences <u>AND</u> diversity categories), recognition of interdisciplinarity ("H" if humanities but "G" if humanities used for intercultural requirement, but "I" for intercultural requirement itself) and so on, have created category designators that students and faculty find difficult to keep track of, and that obscure the essential simplicity of the areas of requirements.

The committee recognizes that under the current set of information systems, flexibility and simplicity pull in opposite directions. The committee's vision is that a reduced set of categories structured around essential outcomes should offer enough variety of courses and pathways within each category that multiplication of designators can be avoided. For example, there might be six (or whatever) numbered areas: students achieve the outcomes of each area via a variety of paths, but because the "unit" of achievement is an outcomes area, courses themselves do not need to be multiply designated, nor the areas.

The committee nonetheless recognizes that the desire of various disciplines or areas to reach students through required study within a credit-capped system (the 40 general education credits) can lead to confusing multiple designations of areas (the diversity and intercultural areas are examples in the current system). GEVC recommends that the outcomes areas be carefully constructed to be inclusive yet reasonably limited.

Finally, the committee notes that a purely outcomes-based system addresses many of the bureaucratic consequences of a system based on credit-counting, though it generates other complexities of its own. GEVC also realistically recognizes that WSU will not move to a pure outcomes system in a year, or even a biennium, and that credit-counting will inevitably occur for some time to come. Thus, its recommendations here and elsewhere strongly advocate for an outcomes-based system while acknowledging that the current system of credits will remain in place for the near term.

<u>Additional recommendations:</u>

- Simplify program so that achieving outcomes will entail fewer credits of carefully designed general education courses

- Encourage the colleges of Sciences, Liberal Arts, and Communications to examine their additional general education requirements in light of the university-wide system decided upon
- Encourage all departments to scrutinize their pre-certification and general education requirements, creating student choice where possible, and reducing barriers to earlier certification of the major.

Engage with the major.

The AAC&U envisions that each college student "will be helped to achieve, in ways appropriate to his or her educational interests, a high level of integrative learning and demonstrated accomplishments across the full range of essential learning outcomes." Some learning goals might be more appropriate to the general education program, others to the major. Further, there are many ways that students may engage the learning goals and achieve their outcomes that are not limited to courses, but could also include hands-on experiences, study abroad, internships, etc. All of the possibilities need to be assessed, developed, and mapped so that students can find meaningful and relevant paths to achieving their goals.

The example of writing

The Writing program at WSU is highly regarded nationally. Writing's role within the current general education program is an excellent example of how general education and the major can be successfully integrated. The current model includes two writing requirements at the lower division (English 101 and the University Portfolio), along with the writing in the major courses (M Courses) at the upper division. While the M courses are in the major, they also serve the purposes of general education. The committee endorses this model and encourages exploration of its use more broadly to achieve general education outcomes.

Beyond writing: quantitative and symbolic reasoning

The re-envisioning of the general education program provides the opportunity to extend the discussion of WSU's expected outcomes in the area of quantitative and symbolic reasoning, or quantitative literacy. This outcomes domain seems highly suitable to integration with the majors. In recent years various faculty from Math, the Teaching Academy, and elsewhere have advocated for a broader university discussion of what should be done to ensure that students graduate with the appropriate quantitative skills through the most efficient and relevant curricular pathways for their academic programs. The full text of the quantitative and symbolic reasoning goal of the Six Goals of the Baccalaureate provides a firm basis for a renewed discussion of the essential quantitative skills and understanding we expect of our graduates, and of the appropriate pathways for gaining that knowledge.

Integrate learning through a Capstone

Currently, all students are required to take a designated [T] Tier III course to serve as a General Education capstone requirement. There is considerable confusion among students and faculty as to the purpose of a general education capstone vs. one in the major. As noted in the Senate review of 2006: "Finally, the purpose of the Tier III courses is not clear." The catalog indicates that "Tier III courses provide the final component of sequential study in general education. The Tier III course, taken in the junior or senior year, is intended to permit focused study within a body of related course work." Nowhere does the catalog indicate what that "body of related course work" or "sequential study in general education" might be. The Tier III courses and the logic of their existence appear to be an artifact of the "areas of coherence" that were abandoned in 1998. The purpose of the Tier III requirement of the General Education Program is the least understood by both students and faculty.

The committee strongly believes that a baccalaureate degree program should contain an integrating capstone experience, but that such an experience might best be done within the major. It will most often be a course, but could also take the form of a zero-credit professional experience with documented outcomes (internship, professional experience, service learning, etc.). Most critical, however, is the articulation of expected outcomes for a capstone course, no matter what the host department. Correspondingly, a common assessment of essential outcomes should be employed for all general education-designated capstones. The committee therefore affirms retaining a requirement for an integrating capstone experience, but recommends that students be allowed to fulfill it with a capstone experience in the major if appropriate and offered.

Pathways for Students

Creating "purposeful pathways for students" as recommended by AAC&U entails recognition of the diversity of student entry-points into the university (Pullman, Tri-Cities, Vancouver, Spokane), their level of entry (freshman or transfer), their individual needs as learners, and the richness of learning that takes place outside the classroom. The committee did not have time to take up these issues in detail, but wishes to make a few observations.

Transfer Students

Transfer and articulation issues are becoming more pressing at state and national levels, as ever-fewer students graduate from the institution where they began, and as the majority of students have transfer credit of some type. At WSU, about 50% of any graduating class is comprised of transfer students. The state of Washington has a variety of laws, codes, and regulations governing transfer issues. The committee notes these issues:

- The majority of transfer students come from quarter-based systems, and thus often bring in fractional credit toward General Education requirements if they do not have a transferable AA or AS degree. WSU has evolved some one-credit GER courses to address this need, but some of these courses have been cut recently (ENGL 200 is an example). GEVC recommends that any future curriculum include course options for students who need 1 or 2 credits to meet WSU's requirements.
- The goal of developing students' general skills over four years potentially conflicts with a widespread view that transferable AA degrees have "gotten general education out of the way" in the lower division. Further discussion of curriculum must address how upper-division general education meshes with transferable degrees.
- Because of the need to articulate with the Washington community colleges, a sub-committee should liaise with the community colleges once outcomes have been established and a curriculum is beginning to take shape.

Crediting co-curricular learning

In the wake of Richard Light's research at Harvard (Making the Most of College, 2001) that 80% of what students think they retain from college derives from the co-curriculum, a number of universities nationally and internationally have found ways to formally credit strong learning experiences in the co-curriculum, ones that meet the expected outcomes for the universities' degrees. In some places co-curricular transcripts are created (such as that used by WSU's Center for Civic Engagement), and in others the experiences are directly transcripted along with coursework.

An interesting example of how students may achieve university outcomes by both curricular and co-curricular paths is offered by Macquarie University's Global Leadership Program (http://www.international.mq.edu.au/GLP). To attain this certificate (in addition to a regular major), students must attend both regular academic colloquia, as well as attain 200 experiential "credit points" through documentation of study abroad, internships, organizing international events, volunteer experiences, serving as a mentor, etc. The mapping and formalizing of these options recognizes that learning takes place in many venues, and provides multiple pathways for students' engagement in international and leadership activities.

Leadership

The WSU student experience has always been rich in co-curricular opportunities to develop leadership skills through student organizations, the residence system, and student government. If the university ultimately expects that development of leadership skills be part of the outcomes of an undergraduate education, deliberation regarding the appropriate balance of

curricular and co-curricular experiences toward this end is needed.[3] Transcripting options are a way of recognizing the outcomes that students have achieved, and thereby signal the strength and value of the degree to employers and others. They should be part of the re-envisioning discussion, particularly if leadership emerges as an intentional focus of the undergraduate experience.

Assessment

At this stage it is premature to map out an assessment plan in detail. The committee notes several key issues:

- Assessment of the entire general education program will need to be statewide, in keeping with the 2009 NWCCU recommendation.
- Assessment must be a faculty-driven process, per the new (2010) NWCCU standards.
- WSU should build on its assessment strengths as it co-evolves a new curriculum and its assessment.
- Just as the undergraduate outcomes are achieved through general education and the major in tandem, so too the assessment processes will necessarily involve both.

The university writing portfolio continues to be an institutional strength, and as such, could serve as a site for expanding assessment of general education outcomes. A second strength involves the various departments who have developed robust and innovative assessment processes for their program outcomes. A third strength is the suite of leading-edge assessment tools and concepts available through the Office of Assessment and Innovation (formerly Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology). A fourth strength is the integrated general education assessment process developed at the Vancouver campus. All of these elements should come into play as outcomes are defined and a curriculum emerges to foster those outcomes.

Next steps

One of the first things that became apparent to the GEVC committee was the immensity of the task assigned. Our research into the experience of other universities that have successfully overhauled their general education programs shows that it is a multi-year process. The University of Nebraska, Lincoln, for example, spent four years from initial assessment and research to the beginning of implementation. We spent this abbreviated first year absorbing all of the literature and other resources available and coming to grips with the complexity of the

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[3] Nearly all undergraduate leadership courses have been eliminated from the catalog in recent years. The exception is EdAd 497, with an enrollment of 700-800/year. The minor of which it was part has been cut, and the course ought to find a home within the proposed University College.

task. To assure faculty buy-in and resolve potential conflicting needs, the committee recommends that next year (2009-10) some form of the current committee (with possible additions/changes) focus on two areas in particular: outreach and outcomes.

Outreach is necessary to understand the complicated, and sometimes conflicting, interrelations that currently exist within each academic unit between General Education, majors, and programs. It is also essential if general education reform is to be a faculty-driven process, as it must be for long-term effectiveness and sustainability. We therefore recommend that the committee initiates outreach to various constituencies to engage in dialogue regarding the report and its different elements. There needs to be frank and open conversations with:
- Senate leadership
- Deans, associate deans, chairs and program directors, faculty
- Regional campuses
- Advisors
- Students through ASWSU and other forums
- General Education and other university committees

Outcomes are central to the restructuring of the General Education program. Faculty must be engaged from the beginning in the process of re-examining the learning goals and writing assessable outcomes for them. We need to engage:
- Best teachers in each department/area
- Teaching Academy
- Experts from other campuses, AAC&U and professional departments

The committee recommendations for revision of program elements can be discussed as part of both outreach and outcomes discussions. They include:
- Make the General Education program simpler and more flexible
- Create coherent pathways through all four years and engage with the major
- Consider crediting co-curricular learning
- Re-examine first-year and capstone experiences

Faculty and departments doubtless have additional ideas for strengthening the program, and the "outreach/outcomes" discussions should allow for rich dialogue around these topics.

The committee foresees a third year to continue dialogue with all of the constituent groups to finalize a new program, and a fourth year to begin implementation. Should consensus emerge more rapidly, this timeline could be accelerated. The committee stresses that a four-year timeline is normal for an inclusive, faculty-driven process.

Timeline

Spring 2010:
- Outreach phase of intensive discussion of the report and its implications with various stakeholder groups
- Budget Task Force identified and begins work
- Working groups discuss and refine outcomes
- Multiple groups work in parallel on key issues such as first-year experience, capstones, disciplinary outcomes
- Team is selected to attend AAC&U Institute (summer 2010) with goal of refining a set of assessable outcomes

Fall 2010:
- Outcomes presented to Faculty Senate for adoption
- Curriculum task forces begin work devising requirements and curricula to meet outcomes

Spring 2011:
- Potential submission of revised requirements to Faculty Senate for adoption if consensus is achieved early in process
- Curriculum development
- Planning for implementation with first cohort Fall 2011

Conclusion

The welfare of general education in research universities is a constant, and often uphill battle. As the University of California Commission's "General Education in the 21st Century" realistically points out, "the pressure in a research university for faculty to move toward specialization and graduate teaching is great; some measure of countervailing pressures in the form of economic and social rewards can make a difference" [to faculty willingness to teach general education courses].

The next several years offer a unique window of opportunity to re-engage the university community in a meaningful discussion of the fundamental purposes of undergraduate education. The imminent changes to our regional accreditation process, which will insist even more explicitly on outcomes-driven curricula and assessment, provide one impetus for immediate dialogue this fall on general educational outcomes. The Bologna Process in Europe

sets an even higher benchmark: not only is the United States "no longer at the cutting edge" in global higher education, but "we are lagging—not in access or degree production . . . rather in the meaning, challenge, and value of the degrees we do award."

In re-envisioning general education, WSU has the chance to assume national leadership in its undergraduate program once again, leadership that at its best could show the way in the United States toward baccalaureate degrees of global quality. To do so we must build on institutional strengths: the concept of an academic "backbone" to the first year experience; the significant work on outcomes in academic departments and programs that has taken place already; the strengths and structure of WSU's nationally-recognized writing program; longstanding dedication at the university to experiential learning in its many forms; the lessons learned in the Honors College curriculum reform and the general education experiment at Vancouver; and global aspirations. Finally, the multi-campus system brings the strengths of difference to the process, ensuring that ideas will be vetted from multiple perspectives and contexts.

But to achieve these goals, the faculty must be widely engaged in the process, and supported both in the startup phases and in the long term. This committee stands ready to assist the Provost in that work.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Charge to the Committee

MEMORANDUM
To: General Education Visioning Committee
From: Warwick Bayly, Provost
Date: October 15, 2008
Subject: **Charge to the General Education Visioning Committee**

The overall charge to the General Education Visioning Committee is to provide the Provost with a set of recommendations by April 1, 2009 that will provide a basis for direction and strategy for general education at Washington State University.

In carrying out this charge, the committee should consider:

- Fresh possibilities for structuring general education, given current literature nationally on the topic and internal reviews of GE issues;
- Advantages and disadvantages of lessening the distinctions between general education and the major;
- What the goals and pedagogical strategies should be for structuring general education in the transitional freshman year;
- How to evaluate if students are learning what they need to, i.e., are they meeting the learning goals of GE and the baccalaureate?

Background:
On April 15, 2008, Provost Bates received a set of recommendations from the Academic Affairs Program Prioritization (A2P2) Phase II Task Force. Included were cross-college/cross-area recommendations regarding General Education, which he accepted for further action and implementation. They are:

- Elevate general education as an institutional budget priority.

- Review the philosophy and restructure the overall content of general education.

- Expect tenure-line faculty "ownership" of and engagement in general education.

- Develop, with the assistance of an external consultant, a funding model and administrative structure for general education that clearly defines the roles of the Office of Undergraduate Education, the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and other colleges contributing to the general education curriculum.

Formation of a committee was delayed until Provost Hoch arrived in Pullman. In September 2008, Provost Hoch appointed the current committee with the overall charge as above, but a somewhat different set of considerations.

The Faculty Senate has reviewed General Education several times in the last ten years, and issued recommendations. Those reports and the responses of the Director of General Education will be made available to the committee on the GEVC website. The 2005 Shoenberg report on undergraduate education at WSU also contained numerous suggestions regarding GE and can also be viewed in the same website.

The fundamental parameters provided by accreditation standards regarding general education will also be provided online.

APPENDIX B

Generating Awareness and Buy-In for General Education

Faculty development

Nearly 65% of apportioned teaching effort in GER courses is currently allocated to long- and short-term instructors, adjuncts, and graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants (AY 2007 GER Analysis Summary Data). This workforce is often transient, as students necessarily graduate and move on, and for myriad reasons clinical faculty, instructors, and adjuncts, by the nature of their positions, frequently find better career opportunities. This workforce is also outside of many processes of internal communication, recognition, and reward. Professional development in general education must make special efforts to reach and embrace this group responsible for delivering the bulk of the general education program.

The mobility of these teachers—and indeed of the faculty at large-- requires that faculty development in general education be ongoing. For example, tracking of faculty who participated in grant-funded faculty development in 2003-04 shows that more than 1/3 were no longer at the university five years later. Attrition rates for tenure-seeking faculty are even higher (COACHE surveys). Professional development around GE issues needs to include not just those teaching the courses, with or without Ph.D.s, but also those who advise, who administer GE-related budgets, and those who oversee the curriculum as a whole, that is, the corporate body of the faculty as represented by the Faculty Senate.

Catalog Issues

In the absence of an ongoing program of faculty development and general communication around general education issues, the university's *Catalog* has served as the primary vehicle for students, faculty, advisors, and external audiences to learn about the larger purposes and importance of general education. The Faculty Senate report of 2006 found that "The intellectual coherence of the program is no longer visible or understandable to faculty. The catalog descriptions of general education requirements, tiers, and areas are little known and found by many faculty and students to be confusing." This finding was affirmed by the GEVC. Departmental checksheets, which are necessarily reductionist, are all too often the primary vehicle for student and faculty understanding of general education. Because the *Catalog* contains the official program description, the committee spent considerable time on a line-by-line analysis of the General Education catalog entry.

The committee recognizes that the Catalog copy has undergone continual revision over the years. It also recognizes that aspects of the annual Catalog revision process work against wholesale revision of sections. The committee's overall recommendation, however, is that the *Catalog* copy should address the differing rhetorical challenges involved in presenting information on general education for students, faculty, and external audiences. Restructuring the *Catalog* presentation of the GE program may solve some of the practical and conceptual difficulties that students and faculty are experiencing.

The GEVC also endorses the Senate recommendation statement (2006) that "Department chairs are in a position to influence the General Education Program through their selection of faculty to teach courses, enrollment limitation, enforcement of writing-in-the-major courses, and so on. Orientations and retreats for chairs should include a session on the General Education Program."

APPENDIX C

Establishing Outcomes in Broad Knowledge Domains

After much study and discussion in spring semester, the committee decided to tackle defining a sample set of outcomes so as to be able to explain and guide the process during the followup phase of public dialogue about general education outcomes. While WSU has suitable sets of goals for the baccalaureate and for general education, it has not yet fully coordinated the two sets with each other, nor fully translated them into assessable outcomes—student performances that can be documented.

Outcomes statements provide criteria for designing new courses; for assessing student learning; and for including courses in a general education curriculum. Shifting from curricular thinking that is typically content-driven to thinking that is outcomes-driven is not easy or quick, and the committee wished to experience for itself the complexity of the task before making recommendations.

Lest distinctions between "goals" and "outcomes" seem like esoteric "edu-speak" remote from the concerns of faculty, it should be pointed out that henceforth under the new regional accreditation standards WSU must document "through an effective and regular system of assessment of student learning achievement that students who complete its education programs, wherever offered and however delivered, consistently achieve intended course, program, and degree student learning outcomes. The faculty has a primary role in the evaluation of student achievement of intended learning outcomes." Even more pointedly, the new standards stipulate that the institution "ensures that its expectations for student learning are embedded in courses and programs and that in every class section students receive a course syllabus that specifies expected learning outcomes."

The domain of science was chosen because the College of Sciences, as the result of its own internal study process this year, had created and shared a white paper on general education requirements and the sciences that contained some elegant and compelling views on the study of science. GEVC is grateful for their thoughts and perspectives.

The document italicized below was designed as an example and as a discussion piece for committee members. It derives from the current WSU Catalog's section on general education science categories, and from the COS white paper. Statements that could be construed as

outcomes or "outcomes-like" were assembled from both documents to present one possible picture of what a WSU graduate should know and be able to do in the domain of science.

<u>Sample Outcomes</u>

By engaging with the subjects offered in this cluster, students will be able to:

- *Use unifying concepts in life sciences, physical science, earth and space sciences to evaluate personal, social, and policy implications of contemporary scientific and technological issues (e.g. as one finds in the science section of the NYT)*
- *Distinguish between evidence-based arguments on scientific and technological topics and arguments based on opinion, personal bias, and cultural norms*
  _____

- *Draw conclusions based on observations and data, and extrapolate appropriately from the information at hand*
  _____

- *Understand and apply quantitative principles to construct scientific models, test hypotheses, and/or to solve problems*
- *Distinguish between testable and non-testable ideas*
- *Apply the scientific method of hypothesis, experiment, observation, and refined hypothesis in active learning settings [e.g. labs]*
- *Understand the fundamental role of intellectual integrity and honesty in scientific study and in the development of new technologies*
- *Communicate effectively regarding scientific or technological issues*

<u>Committee Discussion</u>

In a vigorous discussion, the committee came to the conclusion that the challenge of defining outcomes for general education is determining what is truly essential for students to master. Within the broad domains of knowledge, what *really* matters? Of those things that matter, which elements are appropriately developed within a general education program, and which are the domain of the major? And within the major, it is essential to set benchmarks of performance for graduation-level knowledge and skills. These in turn should bear recognizable relationships to entry-level competences expected in the relevant professional workforces.

In the list of potential outcomes above, the committee eventually concluded that the list would be a daunting one to achieve, even for science majors. Do we expect *all* students to become informed consumers of scientific knowledge, or do we also expect them to become

producers of scientific knowledge, and if so, at what level? The document was felt to represent a long list of <u>desired</u> outcomes, rather than a shorter list of <u>essential</u> outcomes. The committee concluded that only the first two or three outcomes are essential for general education, and that others would be appropriately developed within majors.

The committee strongly believes that this work of defining outcomes cannot be carried out by a small committee such as GEVC, but must be engaged in widely by the faculty. What outcomes truly matter for *all* students must be sorted from those that are appropriate for more specialized study in the majors. The committee also believes that the existing documents on "General Education Learning Goals," the category headers of Tier II, and the various versions of the "Six Goals" offer rich starting points for refining existing goals into assessable outcomes.

The challenge in this endeavor when moving from essential outcomes to curricula required to achieve them is to transcend a view of courses and curricula structured only by disciplinary content that is administered by academic departments. The outcomes themselves are larger in scope than any single department, and many departments can contribute to a given outcome. Thus, while faculty may agree that students should not graduate without some understanding of how economic systems impact the natural world, it does not follow that a specific course from the economics department must be required; such could be gained by an interdisciplinary course on "Big Questions" taught from multiple departments.

Even as research increasingly looks at interdisciplinary "Big Questions" that cannot be approached let alone solved within departmental confines, lower division general education courses have by and large remained anchored in traditional disciplinary structures and content (the two notable exceptions being World Civilizations until 2009, and Science 101-102). The faculty must decide, as the general education process moves from agreeing on outcomes to shaping a curriculum, fundamental questions of educational purpose and value. For example: Is it better for a student to take introductory biology or a course on public health? This needs to be a campus-wide discussion—on what is truly essential in a domain at a general level.

APPENDIX D: OUTCOMES

APPENDIX E

WSU' SIX GOALS OF THE BACCALUAREATE

1. Critical and Creative Thinking

Graduates will use knowledge of evidence and context to reason and reach conclusions as well as to innovate in imaginative ways.

Graduates will demonstrate critical and creative thinking by their ability to:

- Apply the WSU Guide to Rating Critical Thinking to analyze problems, explore issues, and research questions.
- Apply a Creative Thinking Rubric, such as:
    - Reframe problems, issues, and questions
    - Consider multiple perspectives from various people while not censoring their own perspective
    - Identify artificially imposed constraints
    - Draw new analogies and associations among disparate ideas or concepts
    - Generate a new preferred solution, test it, modify as needed, test, repeat.

2. Quantitative & Symbolic Reasoning

Graduates will analyze and communicate appropriately with mathematical and symbolic concepts.

Graduates will demonstrate quantitative and symbolic reasoning by their ability to:

- Analyze real world problems by critically evaluating the quantitative and symbolic information used to represent and draw inference from them.
- Estimate and check answers to mathematical problems to determine reasonableness, identify alternatives, and select optimal results.
- Use fundamental computer skills to apply quantitative and symbolic methods to solve problems.
- Draw conclusions from computational and symbolic representations in order to check the logic and validity of statements and models.

Employ symbolic reasoning to appreciate, understand, represent, and use the variety of discourses underlying the search for truth and expression in the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

3. Information Literacy

Graduates will use a disciplined and systematic approach to accessing, evaluating and using information.

Graduates will demonstrate information literacy by their ability to:

- Determine the extent and type of information needed.

- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently from computer, print, and human data sources.
- Evaluate information and its sources critically.
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose, such as making a decision or communicating persuasively.

Access and use information ethically and legally.

4. Communication

Graduates will write, speak, and listen to achieve intended and meaningful understanding.

Graduates will demonstrate communication by their ability to:

- Communicate in writing, speech, and presentation in order to convey meaning, significance, emotion and values in and beyond peer groups.
- Appreciate background and interests of a group or audience and how this impacts the exchange of information.
- Visually express ideas, propositions, and beliefs in coherent, concise, and technically correct forms effective with general and disciplinary audiences.

Engage effectively with diverse groups through listening and speaking one-on-one, in small groups, and in large groups.

5. Self in Society

Graduates will employ self-understanding and interact effectively with others of similar and diverse cultures, values, perspectives, and realities.

Graduates will demonstrate a sense of self in society by their ability to:

- Understand their own values, goals, and perspectives in order to gain an understanding of those held by other individuals and cultures.
- Reflect on, revise, and revisit issues of local and/or global significance from the vantage of a broad knowledge base.
- Provide or effectively follow, as appropriate, informed leadership to achieve desired social outcomes.
- Practice personal integrity, citizenship, and service to others shaped by a spirit of compassion.
- Commit to life-long learning.

6. Specialty

Graduates will hone a specialty for the benefit of themselves, their communities, their employers, and for society at large.

Graduates will demonstrate specialty expertise by their ability to:

- Show a depth of knowledge within the chosen academic field of study that reflects an appropriate degree of specialization.
- Show a breadth of knowledge within the chosen field based on integration of its history, core methods, techniques, vocabulary, and unsolved problems.

Apply the concepts of the discipline to personal, academic, service learning, professional, and/or community activities.

Understand how the methods and concepts of the chosen discipline relate to those of other disciplines, and possess the ability to engage in cross-disciplinary activities.

WSU GENERAL EDUCATION GOALS

General Education Learning Goals

As outcomes of their education, WSU students should be able to:

1. Reason critically and creatively
- Define, analyze, and solve problems
- Integrate and synthesize knowledge from multiple sources
- Assess the accuracy and validity of findings and conclusions
- Understand how one thinks, reasons, and makes value judgments, including ethical and aesthetic judgments
- Understand diverse viewpoints, including differing philosophical and cultural perspectives

2. Use quantitative and symbolic reasoning
- Understand and apply quantitative principles and methods in the solution of problems
- Draw conclusions from computational and symbolic representations in order to check the logic and validity of statements and models
- Employ symbolic reasoning to understand and interpret the variety of discourses in the arts, humanities, and social sciences

3. Conduct self-directed learning projects (i.e., attain information literacy)
- Effectively frame and solve problems
- Demonstrate knowledge of research and information retrieval strategies in the library and on the internet
- Evaluate sources and data

4. Communicate clearly, concisely and effectively
- Critically analyze written information
- Show awareness of contexts, audiences, styles, and conventions
- Use correct Standard English

5. Demonstrate knowledge of self in diverse cultural contexts and understand the relationship of one's own society to other societies and groups
- Understand how people think, reason, and make value judgments
- Understand distinctions between value assertions and statements of fact
- Demonstrate broad knowledge of the human past, including the historical development of human knowledge in global contexts

- Demonstrate broad knowledge of differing philosophical and cultural perspectives
- Demonstrate knowledge of historical and contemporary systems of political, religious, ethical, and aesthetic values
- Understand perspectives linked to race, gender, ethnicity in American society and in international contexts
- Understand the interactions of society and the environment
- Recognize one's responsibilities, rights, and privileges as a citizen

6. Acquire knowledge in a variety of scholarly modes and contexts and recognize diverse disciplinary viewpoints and methods
- Understand and apply scientific principles and methods
- Understand and apply quantitative principles and methods
- Understand and apply the principles and methods of the arts and humanities
- Understand and apply the principles and methods of the social Sciences

The General Education Requirements (GERs) are a subset of the University Requirements (see below) and apply to all undergraduate students except those in the Honors College. The goals of the program derive from WSU's Six Goals for the Baccalaureate.

WSU VANCOUVER (as of May 15, 2009)

How the Learning Goals Work for Students

The learning goals work to organize and enhance the overall learning experienceat WSU Vancouver. The General Education Program provides opportunities for students in all majors to engage in learning communities that connect to real world problems. Science, social science, arts, and humanities are integrated and linked to a unifying campus theme. Students receive a "big picture" view of the world, learning how vastly different disciplines (such as science and history) relate to each other and to real life.

1. Interdisciplinary Core [V] –The core course(s) introduce students to the culture of learning communities and to the University's learning goals. Theintegrated approach is intended to model the connections that students will continue to employ throughout their work in general education and their major, as well as enhance their capacity for life-long learning. Students take two 3-credit classes.

Communication and Information Literacy

Students learn to write, speak, and listen to achieve intended and meaningful understanding. Students also gain foundational skills in using a systematic approach to accessing, evaluating, and using information.

2. Communication [W] – Students address real-world problems and issues through written, verbal, and visual communication. Students take one 3-credit class.

3. E-Portfolio [E] - Students use the disciplinary content of other courses to build the learning outcomes into their educational and employment goals. E-Portfolio courses provide foundational skills and experiences in using a systematic approach to accessing, evaluating, and using information. Each student will create his or her own digital repository for class papers, projects, and recommendations for future use in academic or professional careers. Students must take three 1-credit classes.

Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning

Students analyze and communicate with mathematical and symbolic concepts. They critically evaluate the quantitative and symbolic information used to represent and draw inferences regarding problems.

4. Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning [N] – Students use quantitative and symbolic reasoning to address real-world issues. Students take one 3 or 4-credit class.

Critical Thinking (The Sciences)
Students engage knowledge in the sciences to practice critical thinking, to examine evidence and context, and to reason ethically and creatively.

5. Sciences [B], [P] – Students build foundations in scientific method, science inquiry, and critical thinking. Minimum 7 credits; students must take one 3-credit [B] course and one 3-credit [P] course. Students must take at least one lab course.

Critical Thinking (The Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities)

Students engage knowledge from the social sciences, arts, and humanities to think critically, to examine evidence and context, and to reason ethically and creatively.

6. Arts and Humanities [H], [G] – 3 credits—Students explore the cultural and social underpinnings of knowledge in the arts and humanities toward participating in the building of inclusive communities.

7. Social Sciences [S], [K] – 3 credits – Students explore the cultural and social underpinnings of knowledge in the social sciences toward participating in the building of inclusive communities.

Self in Society

Students explore values, assumptions, and biases from diverse sources, learn to critically assess knowledge, and participate in communities beyond the classroom.

8. World Civilizations [A] – 6 credits (GE 110 and 111) – Students explore how events and patterns in the present and past have structured human societies and interactions with their contexts.

9. Intercultural Studies [I], [G], [K] – 3 credits – Students critically assess their own core values, cultural assumptions, and biases in relation to those held by other individuals, cultures, and societies.

10. American Diversity [D] – Students learn to employ self-understanding and effective interaction with others of diverse cultures, values, perspectives, and realities. The American Diversity requirement will be met by passing a designated [D] course which also meets a GER requirement in another area at the same time.

11. Tier III Community Engagement [T] – 3 credits – Students engage in a culminating experience at the senior level and have an opportunity to work collaboratively and to integrate and apply their learning to community concerns, practicing personal integrity, citizenship, and service to others.

APPENDIX F

Proposed NWCCU Accreditation Standards (November 2009)

2.C Education Resources

2.C.1 The institution provides programs, wherever offered and however delivered, with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission; culminate in achievement of clearly-identified student learning outcomes; and lead to collegiate-level degrees or certificates with designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.

2.C.2 The institution identifies and publishes expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Expected student learning outcomes for courses, wherever offered and however delivered, are provided in written form to enrolled students.

2.C.3 Credit and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, are based on documented student achievement and awarded in a manner consistent with institutional policies that reflect generally-accepted learning outcomes, norms, or equivalencies in higher education.

2.C.4 Degree programs, wherever offered and however delivered, demonstrate a coherent design with appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning. Admission and graduation requirements are clearly defined and widely published.

2.C.5 Faculty, through well-defined structures and processes with clearly-defined authority and responsibilities, exercise a major role in the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum, and have an active role in the selection of new faculty. Faculty with teaching responsibilities take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly-identified learning outcomes.

2.C.6 Faculty with teaching responsibilities, in partnership with library and information resources personnel, ensure that the use of library and information resources is integrated into the learning process.

2.C.7 Credit for prior experiential learning, if granted, is: a) guided by approved policies and procedures; b) awarded only at the undergraduate level to enrolled students; c) limited to a maximum of 25% of the credits needed for a degree; d) awarded only for documented student achievement equivalent to expected learning achievement for courses within the institution's regular curricular offerings; and e) granted only upon the recommendation of appropriately-qualified teaching faculty. Credit granted for prior experiential learning is so identified on students' transcripts and may not duplicate other credit awarded to the student in fulfillment of degree requirements. The institution makes no assurances regarding the number of credits to be awarded prior to the completion of the institution's review process.

2.C.8 The final judgment in accepting transfer credit is the responsibility of the receiving institution. Transfer credit is accepted according to procedures which provide adequate

safeguards to ensure high academic quality, relevance to the students' programs, and integrity of the receiving institution's degrees. In accepting transfer credit, the receiving institution ensures that the credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic quality, and level to credit it offers. Where patterns of student enrollment between institutions are identified, the institution develops articulation agreements between the institutions.

Undergraduate Programs

2.C.9 The general education component of undergraduate programs (if offered) demonstrates an integrated course of study that helps students develop the breadth and depth of intellect to become more effective learners and to prepare them for a productive life of work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment. Baccalaureate degree programs and transfer associate degree programs include a recognizable core of general education that represents an integration of basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social sciences. Applied undergraduate degree and certificate programs of thirty (30) semester credits or forty-five (45) quarter credits in length contain a recognizable core of related instruction or general education with identified outcomes in the areas of communication, computation, and human relations that align with and support program goals or intended outcomes.

2.C.10 The institution demonstrates that the general education components of its baccalaureate degree programs (if offered) and transfer associate degree programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that are stated in relation to the institution's mission and learning outcomes for those programs.

2.C.11 The related instruction components of applied degree and certificate programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that align with and support program goals or intended outcomes. Related instruction components may be embedded within program curricula or taught in blocks of specialized instruction, but each approach must have clearly-identified content and be taught or monitored by teaching faculty who are appropriately qualified in those areas.

APPENDIX G

Committee Research

Selected Readings:

Adelman, Clifford. 2009. *Bologna Process for American Eyes*.
http://www.ihep.org/assets/files/EYESFINAL.pdf

Altbach, Philip G, Liz Reisberg, Laura E. Rumbley. 2009. *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution, Executive Summary*. UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education.

American Council of Learned Societies and the Teagle Foundation, 2007. "Student learning and Faculty Research: Connecting Teaching and Scholarship."

Bok, Derek. 2006, updated 2008. *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should be Learning More*.

Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University. 1998. *Reinvention Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities*.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. 2008. *A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice,* ed. William Sullivan and Matthew Rosin (2008).

Colby, Anne, Elizabeth Beaumont, Thomas Ehrlich, and Josh Corngold. 2007. *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement*. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise. 2007. American Association of Colleges and Universities.

European Commission. 2007. *Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning: European Reference Framework*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf.

Gaston, Paul and Jerry Gaff. 2009. *Revising General Education—and Avoiding the Potholes: A Guide for Curricular Change.* American Association of Colleges and Universities.

General Education in the 21st *Century: A Report of the University of California Commission on General Education in the* 21st *Century*. 2007. Berkeley, CA: Center for Studies in Higher Education. http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1245x2bn

Howard Hughes Medical Institute. 2009. *Scientific Foundations for Future Physicians: Report of the AAMC-HHMI Committee.* Association of American Medical Colleges. https://services.aamc.org/publications/showfile.cfm?file=version132.pdf&prd_id=262&prv_id=321&pdf_id=132

Keeling, Richard, ed. 2006. *Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience*. American College Personnel Association, Association of College and University Housing Officers-International, Association of College Unions-International, National Academic Advising Association, National Association for Campus Activities, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association.

Leskes, Andrea and Ross Miller. 2005. *General Education: A Self-Study Guide for Review and Assessment*. American Association of Colleges and Universities.

Leskes, Andrea and Barbara D. Wright. 2005. *The Art and Science of Assessing General Education Outcomes: A Practical Guide*. American Association of Colleges and Universities.

Meyer, R and JR Pratt. 2007 "The Clarkson Common Experience Curriculum: Graduation Requirements Based on Student Learning Outcomes." Proceedings, ASEE Conference Annual Conference.

Shoenberg, Robert. 2005. *Why Do I Have to Take This Course? A Student Guide to Making Smart Educational Choices.* American Association of Colleges and Universities.

Sullivan, William M. and Matthew S. Rosin. 2008. *A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Teagle Foundation, *Fresh Thinking on Liberal Education,* White Papers http://www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/publications.aspx

Conferences attended by some committee members:

"Education, Innovation, and Discovery: The Distinctive Promise of the American Research University," Conference sponsored by The Reinvention Center, Nov. 13-14, 2008, Washington, D.C.

"Ready or Not: Global Challenges, College Learning, and America's Promise," sponsored by AAC&U, Jan. 21-24, 2009, Seattle, WA.

WSU materials reviewed:

Faculty Senate. 2007. Review of General Education.

Law, Richard. 2007. "World Civilizations Program Assessment Plan 2006-07."

Shoenberg, Robert. 2005. "Undergraduate Education at Washington State University."

2008-09 WSU Catalog.

WSU Syllabi from range of General Education courses across campus.

Materials on the Six Goals of the Baccalaureate.

General Education Program website. http://gened.wsu.edu

Vancouver General Education

College of Sciences white paper on general education in the sciences (2009)

Selected new/revised General Education programs reviewed:
Committee members individually reviewed programs at such institutions as University of
Washington, University of North Carolina, University of Rhode Island, Ohio State, UCLA,
Clarkson University, and many others. The group as a whole considered:

The Melbourne Model (University of Melbourne, Australia): academic "breadth" study
http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/about/melbournemodel.html

City University of Hong Kong, Intended Learning Outcomes of General Education,
http://www.provost.cityu.edu.hk/ge/v3/staff_about.php?role=teacher

Macquarrie University, Global Leadership Certificate.
http://www.international.mq.edu.au/glp

University of Nebraska-Lincoln ACE (Achievement Centered Education) General
Education Program
Http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-fa08/pr-fa08_Intentionality.cfm