

On November 19, 2008 the Faculty Senate approved the following step-by-step procedure for considering and approving a new General Education Program.

1) Articulate the mission of the General Education Program (GEP) at UWSP.

✓ Approved May 2008

2) Develop the explicit goals and program outcomes of the GEP.

✓ Approved February 2009

3) Identify the GEP model (core, distribution, decentralized, etc.) including its relationship to degree types (BA, BS, BFA, BM).

4) Identify the structural components of the GEP and specify measurable learning outcomes for each.

5) Develop course criteria for the GEP.

6) Make recommendations regarding the administration of the GEP.

GEPRC Proposal, Step 3: Identify the GEP model (core, distribution, decentralized, etc.) including its relationship to degree types (BA, BS, BFA, BM).

The committee recommends that UWSP employ a distribution model in creating a curriculum to meet its recently approved GEP Program Outcomes. (For a brief description of the differences between core, distribution, and decentralized models, see the attached Appendix I.)

By its very nature, the distribution model allows substantial flexibility in the shaping of a curriculum. Consequently, to this broad recommendation, the committee adds the following specific proposals:

- a) The General Education Program should apply to all students regardless of degree type (BA, BS, BM, and BFA).
- b) A baccalaureate degree at UWSP should be defined by the GEP requirements plus those of a major. (In other words, neither the university nor the colleges should establish separate and rigid sets of degree requirements.)
- c) No single course should be allowed to satisfy more than one GEP requirement. (In other words, there should be no “silver bullets” in the new GEP.)

Explanation of Proposal

The committee recommends that UWSP employ a distribution model in creating a curriculum to meet its recently approved GEP Program Outcomes.

The committee believes the distribution model offers the best approach for UWSP in providing students with the new perspectives referred to in the recently approved GEP goals and outcomes. Although a core curriculum offers significant advantages for assessment, staffing difficulties at institutions as big as UWSP make this approach untenable. Likewise, although a decentralized model offers the most flexibility to departments and programs in structuring a general education curriculum, its administration and assessment would be problematic at best.

The chief pitfall associated with general education programs utilizing the distribution model is that their curricula are not built around clear learning outcomes and therefore are incoherent and difficult to assess. This is an apt description of UWSP's current GDRs. By contrast, because the new GEP will rest on a foundation of clearly stated, measureable learning outcomes, we can take advantage of the flexibility of the distribution model while avoiding its principal shortcoming.

As to the more specific recommendations:

- a) The General Education Program should apply to all students regardless of degree type (BA, BS, BM, and BFA).

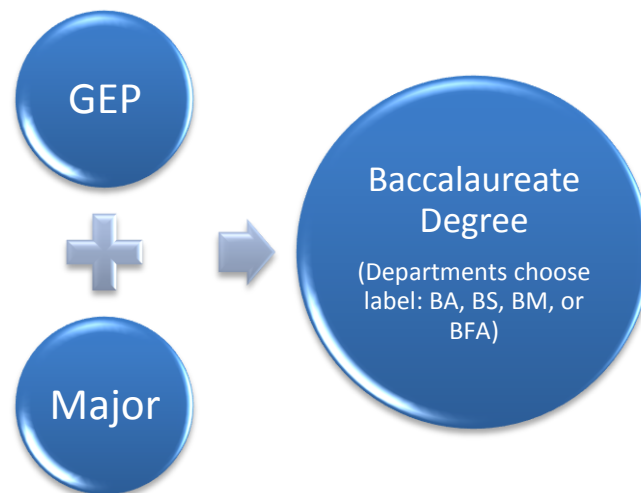
This recommendation is based on the idea that UWSP's new General Education Program should apply uniformly to all students. In other words, we favor creating a GEP curriculum that is truly "general." This would mark a significant change from our current GDRs in which the differences among degree types (BA, BS, BM, and BFA) are built into the structure of the program. Consequently, if this proposal is accepted, UWSP would need to establish a different method for distinguishing among the degree types. Hence, our second proposal below:

- b) A baccalaureate degree at UWSP should be defined by the GEP requirements plus those of a major. (In other words, neither the university nor the colleges should establish separate and rigid sets of degree requirements.)

Members of the committee are grateful for the feedback we received on this issue as the result of our first proposal for Step 3. However, it is clear that there was a great deal of confusion regarding what we were suggesting. Consequently, we would like to explain our idea in a different way.

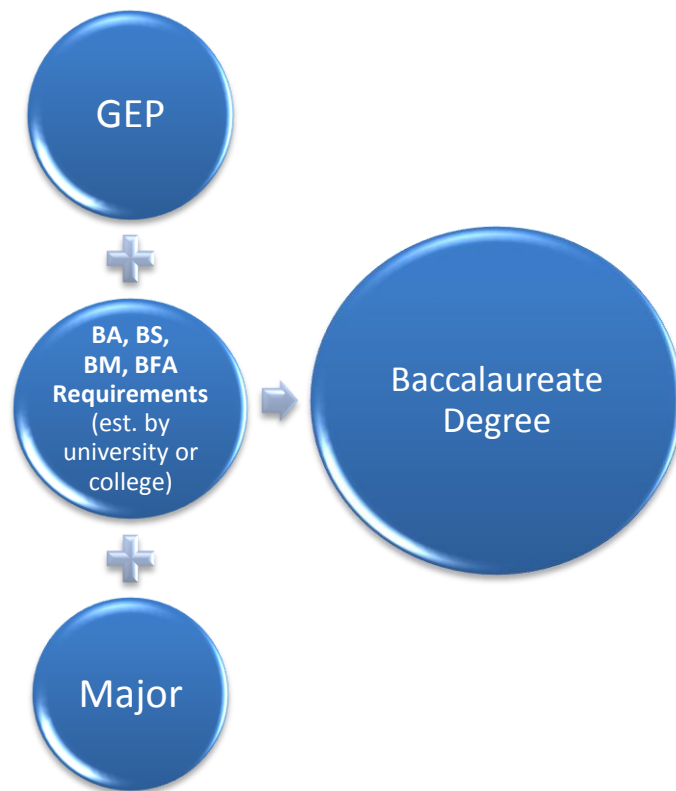
It is important to note first that the definition of what constitutes a bachelor's degree varies greatly among institutions, as does what distinguishes a BA from a BS or other degrees. In other words, there is no essential meaning of a BA or a BS. Some institutions offer only a BA, regardless of major. Some institutions offer a BA for all majors in their Colleges of Letters and Science and a BS, BM, or BFA for majors in the professional/performance fields. In general, the BS appears to be reserved for the more specialized, professionally oriented degrees. However the various degree types are distinguished, it is clear that they function simply as labels whose meaning varies substantially from campus to campus. Consequently, UWSP would seem to have some latitude in deciding how to handle this issue.

Essentially, we propose that the *university* establish the simplest possible definition of a baccalaureate degree, that is, that it be comprised of the requirements of the GEP plus those of the major.



If approved, this would comprise a *uniform* definition of a degree at UWSP that applies to *all* programs across campus. Departments would simply be left to decide which label or labels to choose for their degrees, and to distinguish between them if they choose to offer more than one option to their students.

The principal alternative to this proposal would be to insert a third layer of requirements into the definition of a degree.



Under this option, students would face a set of requirements that, in the committee’s opinion, are clearly more complicated. If the university establishes rigidly defined requirements for the various degrees, they would function essentially as additions to the GEP that would, in practice, differ little from our current system. If UWSP’s four colleges create four sets of such requirements, this would complicate the situation even further.

Ultimately, the committee remains convinced that the first option is the better alternative because it offers the simplest set of requirements for students to navigate, especially those students who might wish to switch majors. Some may still object that a BS in one department should be the same as a BS in another department. In fact, under our proposal, it will be. If, for example, at the end of the general education review process, a department looks at the new GEP and decides that there is not enough math for their particular majors, then that department can add an additional requirement to their program. But this would comprise a change to the *major*, not a change to the degree in question. Likewise, if a department opts to create two tracks for its majors, one leading to a BA and the other to a BS, the degrees themselves would remain essentially the same. Both would be comprised of the GEP plus the requirements of the major. The BA and BS labels would simply refer to different emphases in the coursework required *within* the major.

For most departments and programs—and for their students as well—the choice of which label to apply to their baccalaureate degrees is subjective. But for those programs in which it does matter, either pedagogically or professionally, the committee continues to believe that these distinctions are best made at the department level by faculty who best know their disciplines, their students, and their students’ employment needs.

Should this proposal be accepted, then faculty in each department across campus will need to carefully reexamine their own programs to ask what their students need in a college degree, to what extent their programs (along with the new GEP) actually meet these needs, and whether the BA/BS distinction really matters to their students beyond the university. But such conversations—thoughtful, far-reaching, and focused on student needs—are exactly what any curricular reform should inspire, and we hope that departments look forward to engaging exactly these kinds of questions as the new GEP takes shape.

- c) No single course should be allowed to satisfy more than one GEP requirement. (In other words, there should be no “silver bullets” in the new GEP.)

Once again, the committee is grateful for the earlier comments we received from the campus on this question. In particular, we gave strong consideration to the alternative proposed by Mary Bowman and others; namely, that we establish a minimum number of GEP credits required regardless of “silver bullets.” In the end, however, we continue to believe it is essential that such courses be disallowed.

There are several reasons. Perhaps most important, the practice of allowing courses to fulfill more than one GDR requirement contributes to a pervasive “check-the-box” culture of general education in which fulfilling requirements becomes more important than the content or pedagogical value of the courses themselves. Some students we spoke with reported resenting the existence of “silver bullets”: although they take such courses out of necessity in order to minimize their time-to-degree, they sometimes find that the courses fail to deliver the multiple GDR perspectives they are intended to satisfy.

The problems with “silver bullets” exist on several levels. First, the current practice of allowing such courses creates an inappropriate incentive for faculty and departments to add additional GDRs to their courses in order to increase enrollment, not necessarily

because it is pedagogically warranted. We hope to avoid this in the new GEP. Second, the current practice creates a similar inappropriate incentive among students to shop for “silver bullets” in order to minimize the number of courses they take, not necessarily because students need or wish to take the class. Third, given that the new GEP will likely require substantially fewer credits than the current GDRs, disallowing “silver bullets” would help to limit the impact of this reduction in practice. Fourth, and finally, no other alternative offers as effective a deterrent against this kind of reduction in credits. For example, if we continued to allow “silver bullets” and instead established a minimum number of credits required for the GEP, it seems likely that students would simply seek to take any additional GEP credits within their majors, thus undermining the breadth that general education is supposed to deliver.

The need to protect the breadth of the new GEP deserves further explanation, especially as it might compare to the current GDRs. There are several ways in which to measure how big the present GDR curriculum is. First, one could simply examine the requirements as they are stated in the University Catalog. Under the current GDRs, the majority of students are required to take as many as 66-71 credits to complete the general education curriculum.

	BA	BS	BM/BFA
English	6	6	6
Writing Emphasis	6	6	6
Communication	2	2	2
Math	3	7	0-7*
Natural Science	6-10	12-15	6
Minority Studies	3	3	3
Non-Western Culture	3	3	3
History	6	3	6
Foreign Language	8	0	0-8*
Humanities & Social Science	18	18	18
Environmental Literacy	3	3	3
Wellness	3	3	3
TOTAL:	67-71	66-69	63-64

*Students choose between Math and Foreign Language

Second, one might count how many GDR credits students actually take in practice, which involves subtracting those credits that students avoid by testing out of certain requirements and by taking “silver bullets” that fulfill more than one category in the GDRs. Members of GEPRC conducted just such a count using a small sample of students. (See Appendix II.) According to this survey, students are able to save an average of 2.7-9.9 credits in “silver bullets,” depending on their majors. Consequently, under this scenario, students appear to reduce the GDRs to an average of 58 credits.

Third, and finally, one might count only those GDR credits that are taken outside the major. Here, there is great variability across campus, since some programs have incorporated many GDR courses into the requirements of their majors. (Again, see Appendix II.)

Two recent outside reviews of UWSP—the AASCU review of general education and the HLC accreditation report—recommended reducing the size of our general education curriculum. The impact of such a reduction in practice depends in part on how one chooses to measure the current GDRs. On its face, a reduction from 66 to 45 credits appears to be a substantial downsizing—and for students in some majors, it clearly will be. Yet for other programs, especially those with numerous GDRs built into their majors, the new GEP could potentially bring an increase in the total number of credits required of their students.

However one chooses to measure the current size of our GDRs, it is clear that a significant reduction in the formal number of credits required could have a profound impact on the education that students receive. If the new GEP is reduced substantially, it is crucial that each course be allowed to fulfill only one general education requirement. This will help to ensure that students continue to receive a broad education despite a reduction in overall credits in the GEP curriculum.

(Please note: this recommendation does not affect the potential overlap between the new GEP and the majors. In other words, it is the opinion of the committee that courses required in a major should still be allowed to fulfill applicable general education requirements as they do now.)

Appendix I

GENERAL EDUCATION MODELS*

All programs in general education share similar goals: to communicate a set of skills, experiences, and knowledge that universities deem important to all students, regardless of major. Most programs require competencies in English, Math, and Foreign Languages, as well as basic courses in the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Natural Sciences. Some include additional components, such as courses relating to ethnic diversity, non-western culture, or environmental studies.

The major differences in the ways schools approach general education lie in how such programs are structured. The Research Team identified three broad approaches. The first and most restrictive may be referred to as the Core Model. It requires students to complete a prescribed set of common courses. The courses are typically interdisciplinary, are often taught by faculty from various departments, and attempt to introduce students to the specific skills and content that universities wish to convey. The second approach, less restrictive than the Core, can be referred to as the Distribution Model. Under this scheme, students are free to choose their courses from various menus divided by category, each of which has been approved by a central governing committee to fulfill a certain type of general education credit. (For example, rather than a single core course in the Humanities, students can choose from a menu of Humanities classes, taught independently by faculty in a variety of departments.) This is the model we currently use at UWSP. Third and finally, the least restrictive approach can be referred to as the Decentralized Model. Such programs allow the various colleges and/or departments to craft their own general education requirements which their respective majors must fulfill.

Each general education model has its strengths and weaknesses. The Core Model perhaps best facilitates the assessment of general education, since all students take exactly the same courses, the content of which is prescribed. In addition, because the core courses are not part of any particular major, the instructors can focus on general education goals rather than specific content. At the same time, this approach presents numerous difficulties in staffing and allocation of resources, because core courses are usually taught by faculty from numerous departments who must share responsibility for the Core. To achieve maximum effectiveness, it is probably best to have faculty who are dedicated to general education teach the core curriculum, instead of rotating new hires through the dubious responsibility of “taking their share of the bread and butter courses”. However, finding a sufficient number of dedicated faculty members could be problematic, especially since hiring is typically done to meet specific departmental needs. Thus, the Core Model works best when a separate academic program is established to administer the general education curriculum.

The Distribution Model relies on individual departments for staffing and allows students greater flexibility in selecting their courses, but it also complicates assessment and can lead to turf battles among departments over control of general education courses and the resources they entail. In fact, once a university or college decides to use this approach, it is extremely difficult to make substantial changes in the general education requirements without raising objections

from departments that perceive they will lose resources in the process. Thus, the Distribution Model becomes a vehicle for maintaining status quo, unless new general education objectives are simply added to existing requirements.

The principal advantage to the Decentralized Model is that it allows departments and programs the greatest flexibility in designing a curriculum appropriate for their students; but at the same time, this approach is essentially an affront to the whole concept of general education. This model is especially problematic in the area of assessment, and it creates a complex array of differing requirements that can complicate switching majors, not to mention simply explaining those requirements to students.

** Taken from the "UWSP General Education Research Team Report," by Karyn Biasca, Patricia Holland, David Ozsvath, and Gregory Summers, August 15, 2007*

Appendix II
Analysis of Credits to Complete GDR

<i>Major</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Credits to Complete GDR (including credits earned in major)</i>	<i>Credits to Complete GDR (excluding credits earned in major)</i>	<i>Credits Saved through Silver Bullets</i>	<i>Credits Saved through Placement Exam (English, Math, Foreign Language)</i>
History	BA	58.0	52.0	3.0	6.0
<i>36 credit major</i>		61.0	52.0	6.0	3.0
		47.0	38.0	9.0	11.0
		52.0	43.0	3.0	14.0
		58.0	52.0	6.0	3.0
		58.0	52.0	3.0	6.0
		57.0	51.0	3.0	6.0
		56.0	41.0	6.0	8.0
		50.0	44.0	6.0	11.0
		61.0	55.0	3.0	3.0
<i>History BA Average</i>		55.8	48.0	4.8	7.1
	BS	60.0	57.0	9.0	0.0
		57.0	51.0	3.0	7.0
		58.0	52.0	9.0	0.0
		59.0	56.0	6.0	0.0
		60.0	57.0	6.0	0.0
		50.0	47.0	9.0	10.0
		51.0	48.0	9.0	7.0
		53.0	47.0	3.0	10.0
		55.0	52.0	3.0	10.0
		52.0	49.0	6.0	10.0
<i>History BS Average</i>		55.5	51.6	6.3	5.4
Paper Science	BS	58.0	33.0	6.0	3.0
<i>108 credit major</i>		60.0	32.0	9.0	0.0
		60.0	32.0	9.0	0.0
		54.0	26.0	9.0	3.0
		57.0	29.0	9.0	0.0
		58.0	29.0	9.0	0.0
		60.0	32.0	6.0	0.0
		57.0	29.0	9.0	0.0
		57.0	29.0	9.0	0.0
		60.0	32.0	6.0	0.0
<i>Paper Science BS Average</i>		58.1	30.3	8.1	0.6
Physics	BS	68.0	53.0	3.0	3.0
<i>61 credit major</i>		64.0	55.0	6.0	0.0
		68.0	54.0	6.0	13.0
		65.0	46.0	9.0	0.0
		62.0	47.0	6.0	4.0
		68.0	56.0	11.0	0.0
		64.0	49.0	6.0	0.0
		61.0	52.0	9.0	0.0
		59.0	31.0	9.0	4.0
		65.0	57.0	12.0	0.0
<i>Physics BS Average</i>		64.4	50.0	7.7	2.4

Appendix II
Analysis of Credits to Complete GDR

<i>Major</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Credits to Complete GDR (including credits earned in major)</i>	<i>Credits to Complete GDR (excluding credits earned in major)</i>	<i>Credits Saved through Silver Bullets</i>	<i>Credits Saved through Placement Exam (English, Math, Foreign Language)</i>
Chemistry	BS	62.0	44.0	12.0	0.0
62 credit major		67.0	50.0	14.0	0.0
		59.0	44.0	12.0	6.0
		55.0	41.0	9.0	0.0
		59.0	44.0	9.0	0.0
		62.0	47.0	3.0	0.0
		59.0	44.0	6.0	0.0
		66.0	47.0	9.0	0.0
		62.0	47.0	9.0	0.0
		58.0	43.0	6.0	6.0
<i>Chemistry BS Average</i>		60.9	45.1	8.9	1.2
English	BA	47.0	41.0	9.0	11.0
38 credit major		57.0	51.0	6.0	7.0
		51.0	39.0	9.0	7.0
		59.0	50.0	6.0	6.0
		59.0	50.0	6.0	6.0
<i>English BA Average</i>		54.6	46.2	7.2	7.4
	BS	55.0	49.0	6.0	6.0
		49.0	43.0	9.0	3.0
		50.0	41.0	9.0	7.0
		52.0	43.0	9.0	6.0
		55.0	49.0	6.0	6.0
<i>English BS Average</i>		52.2	45.0	7.8	5.6
Sociology	BA	55.0	49.0	6.0	6.0
34 credit major		60.0	54.0	6.0	3.0
		63.0	57.0	6.0	3.0
		54.0	54.0	6.0	7.0
		53.0	47.0	6.0	11.0
<i>Sociology BA Average</i>		57.0	52.2	6.0	6.0
	BS	64.0	58.0	6.0	0.0
		57.0	51.0	6.0	3.0
		60.0	57.0	9.0	0.0
		58.0	52.0	6.0	3.0
		58.0	55.0	6.0	3.0
<i>Sociology BS Average</i>		59.4	54.6	6.6	1.8
Dance	BA	58.0	49.0	3.0	11.0
48 credit major		61.0	55.0	3.0	8.0
		63.0	54.0	3.0	8.0
		66.0	60.0	6.0	4.0
		62.0	53.0	3.0	7.0
		67.0	58.0	3.0	4.0
		55.0	46.0	3.0	12.0
		56.0	48.0	3.0	12.0
		68.0	59.0	0.0	4.0
		61.0	52.0	3.0	8.0
<i>Dance BA Average</i>		61.7	53.4	3.0	7.8

Appendix II
Analysis of Credits to Complete GDR

<i>Major</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Credits to Complete GDR (including credits earned in major)</i>	<i>Credits to Complete GDR (excluding credits earned in major)</i>	<i>Credits Saved through Silver Bullets</i>	<i>Credits Saved through Placement Exam (English, Math, Foreign Language)</i>
Dance	BS	64.0	55.0	3.0	3.0
48 credit major		65.0	59.0	3.0	0.0
		64.0	58.0	3.0	4.0
		60.0	51.0	3.0	4.0
		72.0	63.0	3.0	0.0
		67.0	64.0	4.0	0.0
		62.0	53.0	3.0	3.0
		63.0	57.0	3.0	3.0
<i>Dance BS Average</i>		64.6	57.5	3.1	2.1
Drama	BA	66.0	58.0	3.0	3.0
44 credit major		56.0	53.0	3.0	15.0
		67.0	62.0	3.0	3.0
		59.0	51.0	3.0	8.0
		53.0	50.0	3.0	12.0
		53.0	51.0	3.0	12.0
		60.0	52.0	3.0	8.0
		60.0	55.0	3.0	8.0
		56.0	48.0	3.0	12.0
		53.0	45.0	3.0	15.0
<i>Drama BA Average</i>		58.3	52.5	3.0	9.6
Theatre	BFA	56.0	47.0	3.0	8.0
78 credit major		59.0	48.0	3.0	8.0
		74.0	68.0	0.0	0.0
		54.0	51.0	3.0	9.0
		56.0	48.0	3.0	8.0
		56.0	48.0	3.0	8.0
		62.0	56.0	3.0	0.0
		52.0	44.0	3.0	11.0
		59.0	51.0	3.0	8.0
		53.0	49.0	3.0	11.0
<i>Theater BFA Average</i>		58.1	51.0	2.7	7.1
CNR	BS				
Forestry (104-112 credit major)		57.0	22.0	13.0	0.0
Forestry		57.0	20.0	9.0	3.0
Forestry		60.0	26.0	9.0	0.0
Forestry		60.0	27.0	9.0	3.0
Water Res. (96 credit major)		60.0	26.0	9.0	0.0
Fisheries (106 credit major)		57.0	26.0	9.0	3.0
Fisheries		53.0	23.0	12.0	8.0
Gen. Res. Mgt. (60-68 credit major)		58.0	23.0	12.0	3.0
Gen. Res. Mgt.		56.0	23.0	12.0	0.0
Land Use Plan. (82-92 credit major)		61.0	29.0	9.0	0.0
Wildlife Mgt. (110-116 credit major)		57.0	20.0	12.0	3.0
Wildlife Mgt.		53.0	20.0	12.0	7.0
Wildlife Mgt.		58.0	20.0	9.0	3.0
Soils/Land Mgt. (99 credit major)		56.0	24.0	6.0	0.0
Soils/Waste (99-102 credit major)		62.0	26.0	6.0	0.0
<i>CNR BS Average</i>		57.7	23.7	9.9	2.2

**Appendix II
Analysis of Credits to Complete GDR**

<i>Major</i>	<i>Degree</i>	<i>Credits to Complete GDR (including credits earned in major)</i>	<i>Credits to Complete GDR (excluding credits earned in major)</i>	<i>Credits Saved through Silver Bullets</i>	<i>Credits Saved through Placement Exam (English, Math, Foreign Language)</i>
Interior Architecture	BA				
<i>80 credit major</i>		68.0	53.0	9.0	3.0
		68.0	56.0	6.0	0.0
		67.0	58.0	9.0	3.0
		53.0	41.0	6.0	9.0
		61.0	49.0	9.0	6.0
<i>IA BA Average</i>		63.4	51.4	7.8	4.2
	BS				
		64.0	46.0	6.0	3.0
		68.0	59.0	6.0	0.0
		67.0	42.0	9.0	3.0
		59.0	35.0	6.0	3.0
		64.0	43.0	9.0	3.0
<i>IA BS Average</i>		64.4	45.0	7.2	2.4