

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 (AA, BA, BS, BM, and BFA).
- b) 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. 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, measurable 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 (AA, 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 (AA, 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.

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. 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.

In practice, there are four distinct options for determining which level of governance at UWSP will establish the differences among the degree types: 1) the university, 2) the colleges, 3) the departments and programs, or 4) some combination thereof.

Ultimately, if this proposal is accepted, the choice of which of the above alternatives to pursue would be outside the purview of GEPRC. It would rest instead with the Academic Affairs Committee, as defined by the Constitution of the Faculty Senate. That said, we suggest that the departments themselves are best suited to make these distinctions for their respective majors. For some departments, only the BA degree may seem appropriate; for others, the BS degree. In some departments, faculty may see good reasons to offer more than one degree option, and perhaps to require different coursework in each. Whatever the case, if departments wish to require additional coursework for any particular degree, these courses would be added as part of the major, not through the GEP.

There is some risk in this approach that departments will create a tangled array of requirements that some students will find complicated and difficult to navigate. Yet departments will also have a strong incentive to limit the credits they require of their majors and to consider any additional coursework carefully. What's more, the university would still have the ability to exercise control over this process because any change to a department's major would still require the approval of the University Curriculum Committee, and would thus need strong justification.

This approach offers several advantages worth considering. For example, departments would gain tremendous flexibility to tailor their programs to their students' needs. Each department could offer only the degrees most appropriate to its majors, and could shape those degrees as the department sees fit. (Low credit majors in the humanities might require a minor, for example. Science departments might demand particular training in math for their BS degrees.)

To reiterate, the ultimate decision about the meaning of the various degree types rests with the Academic Affairs Committee. But as to the relationship between general education and degree types, our specific proposal is that the new GEP should apply uniformly to all students regardless of which degree they pursue.

- b) 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.)

Although the committee recognizes that some courses in the new GEP may legitimately appear to satisfy more than one GEP requirement, we strongly recommend that this practice be disallowed. There are several reasons. First, the current practice of allowing

these so-called “silver bullets” 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, and finally, 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.

This latter point deserves further explanation. There are several ways in which to measure how big the current 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.)

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

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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

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Analysis of Credits to Complete GDR**

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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

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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