

Listed below are comments on the Step 4b, GEP Structural Components Proposal provided to the committee during the Open Forum, sent by email, or gathered during conversations with the committee.

Open Forum on General Education Program Proposal
Step 4b, Structural Components
September 1, 2009
10:00am-12:30pm
CPS 116

Below are comments, concerns, and suggestions gathered from the open forum held to discuss the Step 4b proposal. The comments are organized by category.

General Comments

Foreign Language

- Foreign language lacks the attention it should have in this proposal. Why no mention of it at any level in the proposed structure?
- Foreign Language faculty questioned how students can be global citizens without having studied a foreign language. When it was noted that the committee still recommends that this requirement be added to the admissions standards, FL faculty stated that, if it is, all students should be tested to determine what level of foreign language they have attained and be required to make up the deficiency. Dale Rohm agreed and reminded people that all incoming students are tested to determine their math abilities, and that simply taking math in high school does not exempt a student from having to take a math course(s) at UWSP. Randy Olson said that when UW-Milwaukee and Eau Claire instituted a foreign language admission requirement without placement testing, they saw a drop in their admissions. Don Guay mentioned that when Academic Affairs sets the degree type requirements, FL may end up distinguishing the B.A. from the B.S. as it does now. Academic Affairs was encouraged to make this decision soon so that the “total package” can be evaluated.

Implementation

- Concern was expressed about how the general education outcomes would be assessed. How can we avoid a “No Pointer Left Behind” system of assessment?
- Concern was expressed about the need for faculty training in many aspects of the curriculum. How can we avoid “unfunded mandates”?
- Are there parts of the new curriculum that can be rolled out over time, rather than immediately when the new general education curriculum launches?

Foundation

First Year Seminar

- Can this be a silver bullet course, if other components, such as “diversity”, “information literacy”, are to be potentially incorporated in a FYS course? Or should it strictly be just a FYS course?

- Dona Warren would prefer to see this be a more robust 3 credit course. She also doesn't think that exposing students to critical thinking skills in a one-credit FYS and again in the Investigation courses is enough. There should be a separate box in the Foundation level.
- The suggestion was made that the FYS should be regarded as an extension of Orientation, with "check-ups/refreshers" at fall and spring break.
- There was another suggestion made that the FYS be a three-credit course stretched out over the entire academic year.
- There appeared to be concern that a one-credit FYS would lack rigor and time for engagement with content.

Writing, Speaking, and Information Literacy

Quantitative Literacy

- A strong argument was made by numerous people in the sciences and mathematics that quantitative literacy is not as developed beyond the Foundation level as the Program Outcomes. How will students build on the skills they develop early in their studies?

Investigation

U.S./International Pluralism

- There was general concern about embedding these two components in every course at the Investigation level and how the learning outcomes will be assessed effectively. It was noted that instructing students in diversity is not the same thing as exposing them to the issue. The latter could wind up significantly "watering down" the current engagement with the topic.
- There was also general concern with the training required to teach these subjects. Diversity, however defined, must be taught by faculty who are committed to the subject and have the needed expertise.
- It was suggested that Foreign Language is a must for International Pluralism. Without a substantial knowledge and skills of a foreign language, we cannot speak of international pluralism.
- There are several existing courses focusing culture and cross-cultural subjects by instructors who are experts in those areas (example: Middle Eastern history). Strong concern was raised about "diluting" courses on culture if they are to be taught by those who do not have expertise in the subject matter. If instructors who do not have established knowledge/expertise, then they need proper and extensive training. How would this be accomplished?
- Mary Bowman suggested a hybrid approach: required Minority Studies and Non-Western courses and, in addition, learning outcomes in the broader general education curriculum that address and reinforce students' engagement with diversity.

Critical Thinking and Information Literacy

- Is embedding critical thinking also diluting it?

Arts

Humanities

Social and Behavioral Sciences

Historical Perspectives

- The suggestion was made that this category should be folded into Humanities.

Natural Sciences

Integration

- “Wellness” is an important component; it is a broadly-defined term that should be included somewhere in this structure on “Becoming a Global Citizen.” Just as our campus is known for its environmental focus, it also has a reputation for its focus on Wellness. Measures of students’ healthiness have gone down in the last few years.
- Quantitative Literacy should be embedded at this level, too, as it does not advance beyond the Foundation level.
- Edgar Francis suggested that this level might include a category called “Applying Foundational Skills within the Major.”

Themes

- What will be the administrative oversight of Themes? Who will decide the themes? How will they be assessed?
- What if certain departments decide not to do themes at all?
- Themes are very exciting!
- Can some other categories, such as “U.S. & the World” be a theme, too (overlap)?
- Is there a danger that not enough courses will be offered or that students need prerequisites to the upper-level theme courses which could prevent students from a timely graduation?
- What if students start a theme and then decide they don’t like the topic and want to change?
- Some faculty do not like teaching upper level courses to students outside their major because, although there might not be a prerequisite, students are not prepared for or interested in the course content.

U.S. and the World

- Foreign Language is essential for this type of experience!
- The differences in requirements between this category and “U.S Pluralism” and “International Pluralism” at the Investigation Level should be made clearer.
- Should those courses at the Investigation Level be pre-requisites for these courses? Can those courses bear credits towards fulfilling this category?

Environmental Responsibility

- Good category!

Writing in the Major

- Include oral communication as well. Can this category be renamed as “Communication in the Major?”
- Quantitative literacy is also as important – can it be scaffolded up & carried through too, similar to other categories that are built up from Foundation Level? Students should be able to think in terms of numbers/quantitative analysis beyond foundation-level math classes and apply them in other relevant areas.
- Leave the control of this requirement to the individual departments.
- Will double majors have to do too much writing?

Experiential Learning

- Include athletics as part of experiential learning.
- One person suggested that this should be an external experience/off-campus experience?
- One person asked if this category will effectively become a requirement for 8000 independent studies. How will this affect faculty workload?
- Several people noted that students, especially those who are in accredited programs, may get this kind of experience anyway from their major. Do we want to require additional experiential learning as a Gen. Ed. requirement for such students?

Capstone Experience in the Major

- How can this be a Gen Ed requirement? Shouldn't departments be able to decide if they want to offer this?
- Can the capstone count for Experiential Learning?

Miscellaneous Comments

- Is there administrative financial support for those new additions to the Gen Ed program that will require more training, organization and oversight, etc, i.e. Freshmen Seminar, Exp. Learning, Assessment?
- It's difficult to provide accurate feedback w/o knowing more details about how this will affect staffing and what the degree type requirements will be. The whole process seems too rushed.
- Do we expect to assess at the course level? Has someone experienced in assessment been working with the GEPRC to vet the learning outcomes?

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Hi Don; First of all, I thought you did a heck of a job covering everything and answering all the concerns from those present. Great work, that wasn't an easy task.

At the risk of sounding territorial, protecting my own turf, supporting my own programs, etc. I would like to echo what Marty Loy said about the importance of Wellness and the small wellness requirement we have on campus. I know several others around me were wondering about why Wellness wasn't a foundation. I would like to add a different perspective from what Marty articulated. My rationale for wellness and physical activity is to enhance the likelihood of academic success in the participants, and to help reduce the amount of addictions, substance abuse and mental health problems found on the typical campus. I've been reading a lot of the Brain Based research lately, and there is a strong correlation between activity, mood changes and learning, via changes in the brain neurons and neurotransmitters.

Thanks for all the great work your committee is doing.

*Dr. Scott Frazier  
Professor and Director of Physical Education  
UW-Stevens Point  
715-346-2039*

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Hi Don,

I thought the forum last week was very productive. I have some follow-up thoughts as well as some comments on some of the details that we didn't have time to get to.

Obviously there are strong feelings about a foreign language requirement, on both sides. Personally, I think making two years of FL an entrance requirement is a good strategic alternative, effectively requiring FL without including it in the limited number of credits we are trying to keep the Gen Ed program under. While it may look like a de-valuing of FL to take it out of Gen Ed, we could spin that choice (and should, for high schools especially) as one that actually emphasizes the importance of FL, as too foundational to wait until college to start.

I think the point that someone made that quantitative literacy is the only foundational skill that isn't systematically being reinforced is a valid one. I wouldn't go as far as someone did and say that all of these skills should be incorporated into the major, or into all Investigations courses, because quantitative skills are simply not used in some fields. (In mine, for example, numbers are used only in very specific, non-computational ways, or in very specialized types of research that, as far as I know, no one here does. So incorporating quantitative skills in literature courses would be artificial, if not impossible.) One possibility I want to offer is that we identify four skills that need to be incorporated at the Investigations level—information literacy, critical thinking, pluralism, and quantitative literacy—but not require every course to include all four. (Even requiring three, as in the current draft, concerns me as possibly too challenging for some courses, at least in the short term, and so running the risk of not having enough courses that qualify.) We might, for example, say that a course needs to do at least two of these, and encourage people to include more than two where it is appropriate to do so. Maybe we could talk about having three of these in every course as a long-term goal.

I do agree with the view that we need a specifically diversity-focused course requirement, something that can be reinforced, but not replaced, by incorporating diversity into as many other courses as

possible. That may mean getting rid of something in the current draft; if so, the U.S. and the World may be expendable. It makes sense to have it, as a kind of “gen ed capstone,” but if the rest of the Gen Ed program is doing what we hope, it would be reinforcing rather than creating the global perspective. Perhaps departments can be encouraged to include that kind of material in their major capstones where feasible/appropriate.

I have a suggestion in case departments are concerned about having to create Writing in the Major programs. This won't be a problem for some, but for departments that don't have many (or any) WE courses now, or that just have one or two people teaching them and little involvement in writing from everyone else, creating a program is going to take some work. At Lacrosse, which has a very extensive WitM program, they still have the alternative of two WE courses for students whose major does not yet have a WitM. We might consider doing that too, and reassure concerned programs that they don't have to put together a WitM in just two years.

There's a lot of good stuff in the learning outcomes statements. It's clear the committee has been working hard on those over the summer. The FYS ones, especially, seem solid to me—covering the basics, but not expecting more than can be accomplished in that space of time. Some others still need some tweaking, in my opinion. In particular, the Humanities outcomes are very different in conception from the other areas, and I would like to see them more consistent. All the others include words like *methods, concepts, techniques, theories*, etc.—words that reflect the disciplinary nature of these courses, the “methods by which knowledge is produced” of our general outcomes. There's nothing like that for the Humanities, and I think there should be. I also don't think these statements really get at what we actually do in Humanities courses. The first bullet, I think, is unassessable—what will we use as criteria to decide whether a student has “an understanding of the human experience”? I don't consider myself competent to make such a judgment. We certainly hope that students gain a better understanding of human experience from learning about what various thinkers and writers have had to say about it, but that's not really what we teach. The second bullet gets into a chicken-and-egg issue that may be of interest in some fields, but not all. The third bullet is good as far as it goes, but there's nothing that asks the ethical judgments that are made to be grounded in valid ethical reasoning or a valid interpretation of the behavior in question. Here is a possible revision:

- Use concepts or methods of humanities disciplines to interpret human culture and artifacts, to identify what these artifacts can tell us about the human experience, and to form ethical judgments about human conduct in art or life.
- Identify ways that cultural artifacts or practices are shaped by the cultures in which they were created and in turn influence their cultures.

Some smaller suggestions:

In the communication outcomes (p. 7 of the draft), we need to explicitly address the information literacy and critical thinking goals. (I also question the word “articulate” in the second bullet in each list. It's a subjective term, for one thing, and as I think of it, it's too high a standard. These should be things the majority of students in the course will accomplish.) I would revise the writing outcomes like this:

- Identify basic components and elements that shape successful writing, such as topic, purpose, genre, and audience.
- Use a range of search tools to locate potential sources, including books and periodical articles.
- Evaluate the quality of potential sources, including critical evaluation of their arguments or use of evidence.

- Compose a grammatically correct and organized piece of writing with properly documented and supported ideas, evidence, and information suitable to the topic, purpose, and audience.
- Critique their own and others' writing to provide effective and useful feedback to improve their communication and critical thinking.

These changes may also be appropriate for the oral outcomes also, but see what the comm. people think. To the oral outcomes I think we should also add the phrase "and deliver" after "Compose"—otherwise, we're saying they just need to write the presentation and not give it. Also, there's nothing in the outcomes to reflect the emphasis on the use of visual materials in the descriptive paragraph.

In the Arts outcomes, the first bullet seems too goal-y and not outcome-y enough yet. How will we know if students have "developed" an understanding? I think something that starts with "Demonstrate an understanding of aesthetic, . . . by . . ." will get us there.

Much smaller: in the first U.S. Pluralism outcome (p. 9), we might want to change "the variety" to "a variety." The definite article indicates that each course will cover all categories of difference, which is probably impossible.

The last bullet under Environmental Responsibility mismatches subject and predicate. Should end "what environmental responsibility is" or "what it is to be environmentally responsible."

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Mary Bowman  
English Dept.  
x4338

Hi Don,

Nice job today, but I was glad I wasn't you. Here are a few comments I have

1. Quantitative Literacy Should be Included in the Investigation and also integration steps not as a specific course but something to include in course work.
2. In the Investigation step, the courses should include critical thinking, information literacy, pluralism, and quantitative literacy. Of course some course lend themselves more to pluralism than quantitative literacy and vice versa, just "request" that they try to include some of both in their courses.
3. In the Integration section, rather than writing in the major, change it to communicating in the major to include oral, or visual presentation, but leave it to the dept. as to what is appropriate for them.

I like integrating different subject materials into themes. That's a good idea. One theme could be "Energy in the World". Obviously course could contain physics, political science (policy), perhaps some history. I imagine there are more.

Good Work,

Brad Hinaus  
Physics and Astronomy

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Sept. 11, 2009

Dear GERC members,

Below are some of my thoughts on the proposal you've submitted to the faculty.

Comments on Investigation Level: the Arts and the Humanities

I would recommend including "the Arts" and "the Humanities" together, given that the arts have traditionally been considered as part of the Humanities within liberal art curriculums in this country. The goals and objectives of the history/interpretation of the creative arts are included, hopefully sufficiently clearly, within our working list of humanities objectives, formulated in 2000 by a UWSP faculty senate subcommittee charged with the task of defining more precisely the objectives of the Humanities component of our GDRs:

1. *Students will be able to formulate ethical judgments about human conduct (in life and as represented in art), and render judgments about the merits of artistic expressions.*
2. *Students will be able to grasp particular intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic concepts, and also see these particulars in relation to larger, more universal, and more enduring concepts.*
3. *Students will be able to make an imaginative leap outside their own particular perspective, and, for example, empathize with a character in literature or the drama or another work of art, or with a historical figure, seeing the world as it existed in another time and another place.*
4. *Students will develop the critical ability not only to understand intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic concepts, but also to challenge them, and envision possibilities beyond the known and established.*
5. *Students will be able to express their understanding and interpretation of humanistic studies clearly and in forms appropriate to the particular discipline.*

Certainly, these objectives should be reworked and refined to make them more clear and concise. This process should probably aim to more clearly articulate the outcome #3: the goal of fostering the capacity for empathetic engagement with people, ideas and worlds of meaning different from one's own, which is an overarching goal of the proposed GDR revision as a whole. I'd be glad to participate in this process of working on the outcomes for Humanities in the proposal.

Comments on Integration Level: Themes

I regret to say that I believe the "themes" component at the integration stage of the proposal is overly ambitious and unworkable. These objections, which my colleagues in the Dept of Philosophy agree on, will be part of the discussion we'll have with GERC members when they meet with our department on Sept. 18.

On the positive side, I am aware of and excited about the pedagogical power of tandem courses, and enjoyed my experience teaching in the FIG program in the 1990s. One alternative for the committee to consider, would be a progressive introduction of tandem courses at the Freshman level, building on the FIG model and expanding it step by step. Professors from various disciplines who want to participate could sign on and work together with other professors to create three interlinked courses for first year Freshmen, all from different disciplines, and all of which would fulfill GDR requirements.

Freshmen would have a dual incentive for signing up for such Freshman level tandem courses: they would be guaranteed admission to three courses that count for their GDRs and they would have the promise of a richer educational experience. Professors would also have a dual incentive for working together and offering tandem courses: they could offer exciting entry level courses to Freshmen which may attract students into majoring or minoring in their discipline and they would benefit from the rich pedagogical atmosphere fostered by the tandem course structure. No professor would be required or

forced to participate in Freshmen level tandem courses, and initially at least, not every Freshmen would be required to take them.

Comment on the Integration Level: on NW and MS

I heartily recommend keeping our NW and MS requirements in place, although revisions to their outcomes and perhaps a change in terminology for these requirements are probably in order. UWSP currently offers an impressive array of courses in both areas, and we have in our faculty many who specialize in areas directly relevant to minority issues or global studies, and sufficient courses are offered each semester so that students have little difficulty fulfilling these requirements in a timely fashion. As the old adage says, “If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.” These aspects of our GDR program are working well, and our institution has invested a great deal in faculty positions in relevant areas. Let’s keep these requirements. To make sure courses satisfying these requirements are suitable to the integration level of the GEP, we could eliminate silver bullets and plan for our NW or MS courses could be offered at the 300 level, perhaps even with prerequisites required, so that students will be appropriately challenged.

Comment on Writing in the Discipline

UWSP clearly has a “bottleneck” problem with our WE requirement that needs to be fixed, but I do not support scrapping our WE program altogether in favor of a “writing in the discipline” program. I say this because I believe that the best people to teach writing and communication are those trained to do so, and the best courses to teach writing and/or communication are those primarily focused upon that task.

Comments on the Foundation Level:

I am wondering why Wellness is not considered part of the foundation level. It seems to fit much better here than with the themes at the integration level.

I note that “speaking” is included as a foundational goal along with writing and information literacy. Currently the course that fulfills this goal is unpopular with our students. Generally any course that is universally required is universally disliked. I hope the committee will take a look at this problem.

Sincerely,
Alice Keefe
Professor of Religious Studies

Bill Lawlor

Comments on 4b

1. “In proposing this structure, we sought first to avoid creating a GEP that was comprised by a simple menu of categories and courses that are disconnected from one another.”

This sentence is incoherent. The problem arises from a misunderstanding of “to comprise.”

2. “In particular, we suggest that basic writing skills be developed through a two-course sequence, with one course taken in the freshman year and the second during the sophomore year. Although this would delay students’ completion of the sequence, the delay could potentially improve student performance by allowing them more time to develop their writing ability during their freshman year.”

This proposal will lead to a dysfunctional set of requirements. Students who are ready to progress to a higher level of writing will be held back because they are required to take a course in a particular year of study.

3. “Rather than students addressing diversity issues as an isolated topic in a single course, we encourage faculty to find natural points of entry for discussing diversity across the curriculum, acknowledging that fully investigating the physical, social, and cultural worlds of human society demands that students seek information and perspectives from people of all social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.”

This statement is incoherent. Perhaps a word has been omitted from the opening phrase.

4. “*Writing in the Major*

Writing in the Major courses provide students with systematic opportunities to develop writing skills in the context of their chosen fields, beginning the process of learning to write effectively in discipline-specific formats and styles. The courses that comprise these programs need not be held to exactly the same standards as the current Writing Emphasis criteria demand. Yet they should fulfill the same basic purpose.

Among the clearest messages the committee received when we first sought input on how to reform our General Degree Requirements was that: 1) students, faculty, and staff all hoped to see strengthened requirements for effective writing; and 2) nearly everyone believed that the current Writing Emphasis requirement had become dysfunctional. The committee believes that a writing-in-the-major program could address both these concerns.

Upon completing this requirement, students will be able to:

- Apply discipline-specific standards of writing to compose an articulate, grammatically correct and organized piece of writing with properly documented and supported ideas, evidence, and information suitable to the topic, purpose, and audience.
- Critique their own and others’ writing to provide effective and useful feedback to improve their communication.”

The second sentence is incoherent because of the misunderstanding of “to comprise.”

The statements about Writing in the Major reveal fundamental weaknesses in writing. Neither the hope for strengthened requirements nor the belief that the WE requirement is dysfunctional is explained. No evidence is provided. No reference is made to peer evaluations or student evaluations of WE classes.

A previous version of this portion of the proposal provided a link to a program at UW-La Crosse. Now that link is gone. Has UW-La Crosse been abandoned as a model?

The goals marked by bullets are already in place as requirements in the WE program.

English Department’s Response to GEPRC step 4b

- The department supports the decision to move the two-semester Freshman English sequence requirement to a first- and second-year requirement. Our own experience teaching Freshman English and the relevant research suggests that doing so will enable us to effectively meet the learning outcomes for those courses. Given English 102’s focus on research, documentation, and writing academic arguments, we feel that a move to the second year would prove more useful to students who by that time will have had more exposure to the kinds of research and writing that will be expected of them. The revamped structure also nicely dovetails with the first-year focus on “Foundation” and the second-year focus on “Investigation.” We believe that

students need to leave UWSP with a solid grounding in effective writing and that these two classes, combined with later writing classes, are crucial building blocks to ensuring that success.

- We also feel that “Discussing diversity across the curriculum,” while being a very significant goal, is just that: a long-term goal. In other words, it is not something that can be quickly implemented in order to immediately replace the traditional diversity requirement(s). In our view, it will take years to gradually encourage faculty across the university to incorporate diversity into their syllabi, and indeed that encouragement should start with the new GEP proposal. However, including “pluralism” learning outcomes in a wide range of courses on the Investigation level should not replace the (still very much needed) specific and concentrated diversity requirement(s). If anything, it should be added to the traditional requirement(s). The shift from the traditional requirement(s) to achieving the goals of Inclusive Excellence cannot happen overnight, and if we imagine or pretend that it can, the result might be a weakening of diversity content in our GE curriculum and a false start to the Inclusive Excellence initiative at UWSP.

Inclusive Excellence, as it is conceived by the AACU and endorsed by the UW System, is not meant to eliminate specific courses designed to meet the diversity requirement(s) but to add a diversity component to a wider range of courses. The two are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they are mutually enhancing, and both are needed for a truly successful General Education Program.

We also don’t believe that it makes sense to require critical thinking, information literacy, and pluralism skills in *all* GE classes as we could wind up requiring everyone to do everything, which would dilute our focus. This problem would only be exacerbated if quantitative literacy or other important skills were to be added to the list.

- We feel that the current draft of learning outcomes for the Humanities *needs substantial and fundamental revision*. While perhaps this could be best accomplished by convening an ad hoc committee of faculty from across the humanities, we offer the following as a starting place:
 - Read and think critically about the nature and effects of representations; be able to analyze the role of language and images in shaping, expressing, and contesting individual and social values
 - Formulate ethical and moral judgments about life as imaginatively represented in artistic works and express arguments orally and in writing about the merits of artistic expressions
 - Recognize the beliefs, attitudes, and laws that shape cultures and the ways in which cultures transmit values and practices
- We like the themes component in principle, but in its present form it will be a logistical nightmare and risks creating weird distortions in the curriculum. Here is our suggestion. Rather than *starting* with the themes, as in the present draft, the committee should start with *existing* course offerings across the whole university and divide them into a very large number of clusters. We would end up with lists of existing courses that can be seen as linked under some rubric (a topic, object, method, or idea). For example, “Victorian England” would include, among others, our courses on Victorian literature, history courses on 19th century Britain, and biology courses on theories of evolution. Students would choose three (or perhaps just two)

courses from one category that are offered by different departments. We should allow a single course to be listed in more than one category (so, for example, the biology course on evolution should also be listed in the category "Revolutionary Paradigms," together with courses on Marx, Freud, and Einstein). We would also need to provide a mechanism whereby faculty proposing new or subtitled courses could apply to have the course listed in one or more categories. The lists would be semi-stable, featuring courses that are offered regularly but changing each year to include or exclude course that aren't offered regularly. One should also provide a mechanism for proposing new categories.

This manner of thinking about themes could successfully promote collegial and interdisciplinary exchange, accommodate a very large number of courses from all departments, and also potentially forestall turf wars.

- "Writing in the Major" has great potential. We want to point out, however, that some departments might require considerable support and resources to make the program work effectively. Otherwise, we risk encountering the same difficulties with class access and sufficient willing and prepared faculty to teach those classes currently present in the Writing Emphasis program. We would recommend that if "Writing in the Major" is adopted, that the existing Writing Emphasis Coordinator position be continued and possibly expanded to provide support for departments as they develop their own writing curricula. We also suggest as an interim solution for programs first developing "Writing in the Major" classes that students be allowed to meet a portion of the writing credit outside their majors.

It is imperative that students have a writing course at the 300 level. These writing courses will need to have strict caps on enrollment and university-wide guidelines. We wonder whether the proposed "Writing in the Major" is sufficiently different from the current Writing Emphasis program to address the problems frequently attributed to it (and note that many of the goals listed for "Writing in the Major" are the same as those for "Writing Emphasis"). This proposal seems an attempt to render more practical the current limitations in the Writing Emphasis program; however, in doing so, it may only reproduce the same problems in individual departments. A workable solution may be similar to what we have proposed for better inclusion of the diversity component: encouragement of greater inclusion of writing in all GE courses coupled with dedicated upper-level writing courses.

September 24, 2009

General Education Program Review Committee
UWSP

Dear Members of Committee:

The Department of History discussed the General Education Program at our September 14 meeting. We appreciate the opportunity to share our ideas with you. Most of our discussion focused on the

“Historical Perspectives” category of the GEP—which we strongly support—and we offer our suggestions for specific revisions at the end of this letter.

As a department we do have some other concerns about the General Education Program. We present some of our thoughts below.

General Reaction

- We have concerns about the Pluralism in the United States and Abroad category in the Investigation level. Members of the department believe that the language needs to be more specific to indicate that “United States Pluralism” and “International Pluralism” courses are required in the General Education Program.
- Even if students are required to take United States Pluralism and International Pluralism courses, we are concerned about how this will essentially reduce exposure to diversity in historical education by eliminating one of the two existing requirements (i.e. Minority Studies and Non-West). The department is concerned that these courses succeed in the intended goal to expand student learning and appreciation for differences in cultures, societies, and human experiences.
- We regret that foreign language requirements are being reduced at the same time that the quantitative skills requirement will become required (with no test out option available). That directly affects the vast majority of our majors in both adding credits (math) and discouraging foreign language, which is a very important component for globalization of the curriculum and necessary for the study of many of the fields of history that we offer.

First Year Experience:

- We see possibilities and potential for first-year seminars offered by the History Department. We need to deliver them AND we would want to participate in the First Experience.
- Even so, we are unsure how we will teach these courses in addition to our regular course load. Most members of our department currently carry 2-3 sections of a freshman survey class. These surveys (GDRs or not) are core courses in our major. How will an 8- week seminar experience replace some of these surveys? How will an 8- week seminar actually cover both content and teach skills?
- Developing these courses could be challenging in light of SCH targets, staffing, and subject orientation. It will also have an impact on delivery of courses to all of our majors and minors.

Historical Perspectives:

- The members of the History Department strongly support the Investigation-level category of Historical Perspectives in the General Education Program. In these courses, students will develop the essential skills to read critically, manage and analyze information, and build logical arguments. When students pay special attention to continuities and changes in human communities over time, they are able to understand their own life experiences as part of an historical process.

- Below we have made some minor changes that we believe will help clarify the learning outcomes for Historical Perspectives courses, which we believe will be greatly beneficial in assessment.

(from pages 11-12 of the GEPRC Proposal, Step 4b):

Historical Perspectives

An understanding of the past and the methods by which people seek to explain it are essential to finding meaning in the present. By exploring the evolution of human societies—their institutions, ideas, and values—students gain a framework for understanding themselves and the world; and they learn to make connections between **history and** the natural sciences, the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities.

Upon completing this requirement, students will be able to:

- **Describe** Recall events from a past cultures, societies, or civilizations.
- Recognize ~~that historians use a variety of~~ **the varieties of** evidence **that historians use** to offer **diverse** perspectives on the meaning of the past.
- ~~Identify the roles of these events in shaping historical changes.~~ **Identify the role of human agency in shaping events and historical change.**
- Demonstrate an understanding of historical causality.
- **Evaluate competing historical claims that frequently inform the present.**

Concluding remarks:

As we look ahead to the implementation and administration of a new General Education Program, we are unsure that the new GEP will actually reduce time to degree compared to the old requirements. Before agreeing to a new program, we believe it would be wise to test the new system against the old using actual student transcripts or degree progress reports.

General Education Review

A Response from The Department of Foreign Languages including Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and Comparative Literature

1. What is your unit's general reaction to the new GEP structure? What are the positives and what are the negatives?

The new three part structure in the proposed draft is appealing. We wonder if the proposal is not trying to do too much at one time: a new freshman program which we understand is important for retention between the freshmen and sophomore years, a new general degree curriculum with the three course theme at the 300 and 400 level along with writing within the major and a capstone course. Yes, this is a highly idealized and elaborate structure, but can it become a fiscal reality in this time of austerity budgets?

Only through the Comparative Literature vein, could the department contribute presently to the 100 and 200 level courses within the structure proposed. At the 300-400 level, we would have better opportunities to contribute obviously in terms of language and culture, however all of our courses are taught in the foreign language which means that we would largely serve our own majors in some kind of theme that

would be appropriate to them. The other alternative is to develop new courses for the Gen Ed. Program taught in English. Then we would also have to be able to staff those extra courses.

2. How do you see the GEP structure generally affecting your major students? Do you think that the GEP as proposed will enhance their overall education in your major while enhancing their general education.

Many, but certainly not all of our majors and minors place into fifth semester courses as freshmen by taking the UW-System Language Placement Exam in French, German or Spanish. Many of those who place into third semester also become majors and minors. Not having a foreign language requirement will reduce enrollments in first year classes significantly and will reduce exposing students to foreign language study which will certainly have some effect on the numbers of majors and minors and a significant effect on the SCH generate by the department. The department firmly believes that eliminating the foreign language requirement will have a serious and negative effect on the overall education of all students.

3. How does your unit feel about Foreign Language requirement? Should language be a requirement for every student at UWSP? (Currently, three UW campuses require foreign language either as an entrance requirement or for graduation.)

The revised draft of the general education program states under Integration:

"Becoming a global citizen & lifelong learner"

We applaud this goal and find it wholly suitable for this university and the time in which we live. Among many other important issues, global citizenship includes an understanding of the tremendous economic and social inequalities that exist in the world today. While globalization has generated more wealth for some countries like the U.S., there are many others for whom poverty has increased. Our students and their children who will be the global citizens of tomorrow must understand the problems associated with globalization and the ways in which their lives are connected to those of people in other, perhaps less wealthy, countries. (We recognize that there are many other significant elements to global citizenship such as environmental interdependence but we are focusing our remarks on issues more directly related to foreign languages).

Global problems must be solved globally and therefore a global citizen must have an understanding of the moral and ethnic issues at hand as well as their economic and political implications. We should strive to help our students develop a global perspective that transcend

traditional racial, religious, political, and other boundaries that people use to divide themselves into 'us' and 'them': and considers all people as 'us'.

Yong Zhao (Professor of Education at Michigan State University) affirms that an effective way to develop a global mindset in which all people are viewed as 'us' is to understand others as human beings:

“To understand others requires us to interact with them directly. To interact with them requires us to have the ability to move across cultures comfortably and fluently. Such ability I refer to as cross-cultural competency. It includes both the ability to use the language and a deep understanding of the culture. Cross-cultural competency is also a necessary ability for all citizens in the global village in their professional life; they will need to work with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In addition, to perform the basic functions of citizens, they will need to make decisions about and interact with people from other cultures, such as immigrants in their communities.”

Zhao also notes that cross-cultural competency “first and foremost includes a deep understanding and appreciation of different cultures.” Zhao uses the definition of culture proposed by anthropologists Daniel Bates and Fred Plog in their book *Cultural Anthropology*: 'A culture is the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through setting the scene learning' (Bates & Plog, 1990). One of the important points of this definition of culture is that, culture is learned, which means that it is not genetically transmitted and others can learn the system. He adds that much of culture is transmitted from generation to generation in an unconscious manner: “members of a culture

know the values, beliefs, and customs so well that they do not consciously think about them, making it difficult for them to explain them to others.”

Zhao further affirms that a real understanding of other cultures requires us to experience the culture in context, rather than simply memorizing some facts or imitating stereotypes. He speaks of the need for cross-cultural competency which entails the ability to live in different cultures and move across different cultures fluently. Proficiency in foreign languages is an essential component of cross-cultural competency. Many of our colleagues across campus have focused on the issue of foreign language proficiency as a goal which is unattainable in one or two years of study. We believe that while communicative competency is important, even basic language instruction is a major step toward cross cultural competency, offering as Zhao notes: a window into the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a society.”

UWSP has long been proud of the opportunities for study abroad that it offers its students. Indeed, the university has received external recognition for the value and integrity of its study abroad programs. We encourage our students to spend a semester studying abroad and as a result we send the highest per capita percentage of students abroad in the UW-System.

Preparing global citizens would presume to include acquiring some foreign language training. It does not take an intuitive jump in logic to see the connection between preparing global citizens and learning or at least being exposed and expected to learn the rudiments of another language. We firmly believe that one cannot be a global citizen unless one has studied another foreign language. The notion of Monolingual Globally/oriented citizens smacks of colonialism. Obviously, a working and functioning knowledge of another language would be the ideal.

From the many comments in this blog, several of our colleagues in other disciplines clearly do not have understand what happens in the "modern" first year foreign language classroom. The department believes that they may be laboring under several misconceptions based, perhaps, on their memories of foreign languages classes in high school or college some decades ago. Foreign language instruction has gone through ten revolutions since I first learned German. Just as Geography today has become a transformed discipline compared to the way it was taught in the 1970s. We do not teach languages as we learned them back then.

First year language: What happens in that classroom and why is it so relevant to today's students on several different levels:

1. First year language study is not about mastery of a given language. That cannot happen in a two semester sequence. It is about learning the basics of another language, to gain an insight into another culture, another way of thinking and another way of viewing the world. All language today is

taught within its cultural context.

2. The first year student is placed outside of his comfort zone. For the first, possibly the only time in his academic career, he is forced to communicate in a language and culture outside of his own. This is a humbling experience. He is forced to confront "the other." Foreign Language instruction provides cross-cultural sensitivity training toward minority groups in a way that few other disciplines can, because it does not talk about minorities and minority issues, but forces the student to "experience" that role. An American student placed in that French classroom setting is forced to interact in French. His fluency in English has become a useless piece of baggage. He must interact in rudimentary French in a culture which is new and foreign to him. That is why foreign language study is so important not only for cross-cultural training in the global sense, but also for "Inclusive Excellence."

3. Language is the foundation of culture. One cannot separate language from culture, because language unlocks and is therefore the key to cultural understanding. To offer a culture course on Latin America in English is not the same as learning about that culture in the language of the culture. Reading in another language exposes students to another perspective that can never be duplicated by reading about another culture in English or even by reading in translation. All current foreign language textbooks integrate language learning in a cultural context. Even a cursory look at any first year language textbook reveals that all the exercises are practically based. Every page is filled with cultural artifacts, every exercise is practically based, learning vocabulary and phrases that one could use in the host country. First and second semester language students at the university level are exposed to a great deal of "realia," which includes selections from major literary works, newspapers, radio and television broadcasts and multiple other media. While mastery is not attainable in the first year, these students do learn many reading strategies and techniques that enable them to recognize the relative importance of many issues to the "other."

4. Americans generally learn English grammar through the study of a foreign language. English majors may be the only exception to this rule. Those who are enrolled in a first year language class, are finally forced to learn English grammar in order to learn the grammar of the foreign language. They suddenly become "conscious" of grammar and their writing in English does improve as a result of having studied a foreign language. Foreign Language study improved the quality of writing in the mother tongue.

Why not build a Foreign Language requirement into the General Education Program? You want to prepare global citizens, right? It seems logical enough. Obviously, for every student on this campus to take one year of foreign language study would mean to quadruple the size of the Foreign Language Department. Realistically, this cannot happen at this time..

Alternative solutions:

As has been discussed, another possibility would be to make a two year Foreign Language requirement in High School, a "soft" entrance requirement for UWSP. According to the statistics gathered by the Admissions Office for the entering class of 1,600 freshmen last fall (2008), 90% had satisfied this two year requirement. The remaining 10% could take one year of Foreign Language on campus.

For those nay-sayers among you, who fear a drop in applications, if such an entrance requirement were put into place, I urge you to turn to Chancellor Nook's State of the University Address, in which he specifically stated that raising standards does indeed bring us better students and also raises the respect for the institution while raising the number of applications.

As we all know, Foreign Language classes, as is indeed true of all high school classes regardless of discipline are uneven. Some students learn a lot and others learn very little. The Foreign Language Faculty would reserve the right to use the UW-System Language Placement Exams to test the foreign language ability of entering freshmen. The vast majority of entering freshmen would place into third semester and would have fulfilled the FL requirement without taking a course at the university. There would be those who would need an additional semester or possibly the two semester sequence. Requiring two years of a Foreign Language as an entrance requirement would enable this university to maintain integrity as we all aspire to prepare "global" students, by assuring that our graduates have been exposed to quality language instruction and hence are truthfully better prepared to become global citizens. Preparing global citizens requires exposure to quality foreign language instruction.

4.. For each of the following requirements, please consider: Can you support this requirement? Do you have current courses that could be adapted to fit this category? Would there be interest in your department in developing new courses to contribute to this category?

The First Year Experience. Currently, we teach one comparative literature course that could become part of the first year experience. All of our 100 and 200 level courses are intensive language courses taught in the language. We would first have to design first year culture classes taught in English and then find the time and the faculty to teach such courses.

Themes. All of our 300-400 level courses are taught in the foreign language. While it would not be difficult to design these advanced literature and culture courses around a theme, they would still only serve our own majors because they would be taught in the language. Our students could take a course in German history and in German philosophy in other departments, but non-German majors would not be able to take the advanced German Lit. or cultural class because it is taught in German. We at this time cannot award credit toward the major for courses taught in English. Even if we did design and manage to staff a course in German literature in translation to become part of a theme, our own German majors would not receive credit toward their major for that course. Having said this, we could design literature and culture courses in translation specifically for the General Education Program, but we would also have to be able to staff such courses.

Writing in the major. We do teach writing in the major for the discipline. However, the caliber of the writing in the foreign language at the undergraduate level, is not likely to ever reach the caliber of what writing could become in the mother tongue at that same level. Yes, we have course work in place, an advanced composition course and the senior seminar where writing in the discipline is already being taught.

Experiential Learning.

Traditionally, we as a department have not awarded experiential learning credits unless the student was enrolled in a language class that met regularly in the host country where they were working. We require a transcript and course syllabus with description and the number of contact hours per week. We do not award foreign language credit for living in a foreign country and interacting with the natives in English. Language is the key to unlocking culture. Without language one remains an outsider in the foreign culture. It would be a breach of our integrity were we to award foreign language credit for living in a foreign culture, when no formal language learning took place.

Capstone Seminar

French, German and Spanish 493 is a senior seminar in its present form and could be transformed

into a capstone seminar. Of course this would require teaching two to three sections of this course every spring in Spanish and at least one section each year in French and German.

5. Are there any categories for which you have specific suggestions for appropriate learning outcomes?

6. Are there any components that you feel should be added to this proposal. Any that should be eliminated? Reasons?

As we have stated at the outset, we believe you are trying to incorporate too much into this General Education Proposal.

Respectfully,

Richard Ruppel in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Languages

Comments on General Education Step 4B Department of Sociology

Diversity Issues

We think that separate course requirements in MNS and Non-Western Culture should be included, and that these courses ought to be taught by faculty with strong academic preparation in these areas.

Minority Studies

Significant issues related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender persist in American society. The UW System has recognized this by setting Inclusive Excellence as a high priority initiative. For these reasons, a distinct set of course in minority studies should be included in the General Education program.

Significant bodies of knowledge have been developed in the social sciences and in the humanities as a result of decades of focused scholarship. This content cannot be taught effectively across the curriculum. It should be taught by faculty with strong academic preparation in them.

UWSP would be well served by demonstrating that our campus is giving its best effort to the System initiative on Inclusive Excellence. This is not the time to weaken our commitment to this area.

Non-Western Cultures

The points made above regarding instruction in minority studies apply equally to non-Western cultures. Beyond this, over eighty percent of the world's population resides in non-Western cultures, and virtually all of the world's population growth (98%) is in these countries. In order to teach "global citizenship" effectively a course in non-Western cultures, taught by academically prepared faculty ought to be included in the General Education program.

Behavioral and Social Science in the Investigation section of the program

The Committee has created a separate requirement for Art as distinct from the rest of the Humanities. This is a good decision because it helps maintain UWSP students' exposure to these important components of a liberal education. The same reasoning ought to apply to the Social Sciences. Currently, the Humanities and Social Sciences share a section of the GDRs, with roughly equal representation. This balance ought to be maintained. The Social Sciences are

comprised of a number of diverse fields and include both basic and applied orientations. One course in the social sciences is insufficient to convey the range of thought in the social sciences. Respectfully submitted, Faculty, Department of Sociology, Robert Enright, Chair

GEOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY

University of Wisconsin Stevens Point



GEOG/GEOL Responses to GenEd Step 4 (page references)

1. (p. 2) merge Historical into Humanities
2. (p.12) remove third bullet; clarify terminology for personnel first, and the public (e.g., “experiential learning”, “inclusive excellence”)
3. (p. 5) move First Year Experience to new student orientation
4. (p. 15) eliminate GED mandates into major programs (e.g., writing in discipline, capstone experience)
5. (p. 2) separate writing, speaking, information literacy in Foundation
6. (p. 2) relabel “US & World” to “Global Viewpoints/Awareness”
7. (p. 2) remove mandatory themes; make a desirable option/aspiration
8. (p. 2) clarify 3 courses within 3 distinct categories to fulfill integration

UWSP Department of Political Science Departmental Response to the GEP Step 4(b) Document September 25, 2009

We begin by thanking the GEPRC Committee for their time and commitment to working on this important task of designing a new General Education Program for UWSP. We are heartened by the Committee’s demonstrated willingness to receive feedback from all quarters of the University community, to respond to questions and concerns, and to make changes at every step in the process in response to this feedback. We are happy to be able to contribute our voice to this collective process. What follows is a series of observations, comments, and concerns that we as a department discussed and agreed upon jointly. While the sections were drafted individually by members of our department, the document as a whole reflects consensus views shared by all of us.

First-Year Seminars

The Political Science Department shares many of the goals that the General Education Committee hopes to achieve through the implementation of First-Year Seminars. The Department certainly believes in the importance of providing “academically rigorous” (p. 5) training for its new students. We also believe students require certain skills in order to experience consistent success at UWSP. We are, however, concerned that many of these goals might not be best served by the present plan. Below are some of our concerns:

- **Academic Rigor?** – We wonder how rigorous the First-Year Seminars might be when they (1) are worth only one credit, and (2) spend much of their time teaching rudimentary skills that many, if not most, students will have acquired before arriving at UWSP. With regard to (1), students may learn the opposite of the intended lesson. (For example, “Why should I do my readings for this one-credit course?”) It seems that if academic rigor is a key element of the Committee’s intention, then these seminars should be three credit courses and more focused on substantive questions and topics.

- **Redundancy** – The Committee outlines several skills they hope will be developed in the First-Year seminar, including “Identif[y]ing and utiliz[ing] UWSP programs, resources, and services that will support their academic studies” in addition to “Describ[ing] the importance of a liberal education and the ways in which academic study is structured at UWSP.” The Political Science Department agrees that these are important in navigating one’s way through undergraduate study. However, much of this is already done through advising as well as Residential Life. As such, it seems that many of the Committee’s goals for the First-Year Seminar are redundant.
- **Beyond Our Training** – We are trained Political Scientists – not “skills teachers”. And while we do our best to train our students in many important skills – such as note-taking and time-management – we have not been trained in how to communicate those skills systematically to undergraduates. Those skills are presently handled by the Learning Skills Center, and they surely do a better job than we would likely do.
- **Too Condescending?** – It is quite possible that many students will find the First-Year Seminar a bit condescending. Many of our students come from the top of their respective classes and already have a good sense of note-taking, time-management, test-taking, etc. They will quite possibly find lectures on said subjects to be a demeaning waste of their time (hence defeating ‘time-management’). These students are adults and may in many instances feel as if they are being treated as children.
- **Lack of Resources** – The Committee’s recommendation is that the First-Year Seminars be taught by existing faculty members. But, faculty teaching these seminars will be unable to teach other courses mandated by other portions of the curriculum, whether for GDR’s or departmental requirements. Without authorization for several new hires, the requirements will surely result in a reduction of the number of upper-division offerings in Political Science, which are already limited by the small number of faculty members we have.

Although the Department did not vote on a formal suggested revision to the Committee’s proposal, we agree that the following would need to happen in order to make something like the First-Year Seminars work. (1) The courses would have to focus on substantive topics rather than study skills, per se. (2) These courses would have to be rigorous not merely in lip service, but in reality – by making them three-hour courses requiring actual reading, test-taking, etc. – where learning skills could be put into practice in context. (3) The University would need to authorize several more hires to allow the Department to meet this requirement while maintaining upper-division offerings.

Investigation Level: “Root” and “Applied” Disciplines... Who can offer courses?

An issue not addressed by the Step 4(b) document that needs consideration is which departments will be allowed to offer courses meeting each of the required areas. In the current General Degree Requirements it is the “root” departments connected to specific requirements, rather than “applied” departments, that are generally permitted to offer these courses. Currently there are a few exceptions in the social sciences and humanities, but they are very restricted. We believe that this same policy should continue under the new program, because if it is decided that any department that meets the learning objectives listed can offer courses in that category, then presumably a number of CNR courses will be allowed to fulfill the natural science requirement, statistics, and quantitative methods courses offered in several departments for the quantitative literacy requirement, and perhaps several departments, which have historically based courses, could have these included in the historical perspectives category. In our view, there are strong reasons not to allow this. We believe that students should take GEP courses from faculty with broad training in the “root” disciplines. That is, after all, one of the purposes of a liberal arts education. In other words, foundation courses should be “root” courses rather than applied courses. This

is not to negate the value of the latter, but we strongly believe that a General Education Program must be built on strong and core disciplinary foundations. This is particularly vital if assessable outcomes stress “skills” and “*core methodologies.*” (GEPRC Proposal, p. 4)

Investigation Level: “Real Gen Ed Courses”

The suggestion has been made that courses meeting the new Gen Ed requirements ought to be “real” Gen Ed courses and not just introductions to a particular field. This is bothersome from two perspectives. First, in terms of our primary GDR course, Political Science 101, we are not doing an introduction to our discipline; this is a course in American Politics which is quite suitable for potential majors, but equally suitable for students who will never see us again. For most of them it is about their government.

Second, and of more general applicability, is the question: is this a backdoor invitation to a “watered down” set of Gen Ed courses? It almost certainly wasn’t meant to be, but somehow it still sounds and feels that way and that would be a major mistake. It’s OK to make certain compromises for introductory level courses and probably even a few more compromises for courses that must reach a broad and not always committed audience. But those compromises ought not to be made up front and across the board by creating a different – and possibly lesser – course.

Investigation Level: Inclusive Excellence is so NOT Excellent

Requiring minority studies and nonwestern cultures to be incorporated in every course under the new vague rubric of U.S. and International Pluralism presents some very serious problems:

- It undermines those who have true expertise in these fields. It sends the message that anyone can teach minority studies or topics related to nonwestern cultures and peoples because it appears to require no specific knowledgebase. We would never suggest that our colleagues in other fields have so little to offer.
- There is a legitimate body of literature in both minority studies and nonwestern cultures which should not be ignored or misinterpreted by untrained scholars. It is insulting to suggest that incorporating Sitting Bull in a math problem provides the same depth and critical analysis as an entire body of literature.
- It also could become a mockery as overwhelmed or snarky instructors resort to circle-a-word Native American word search at Thanksgiving in order to fulfill the requirement.
- Those of us who read and understand the literature in minority studies find this whole endeavor ironic. This type of curriculum change could be viewed as an attempt by white administrators and faculty to gain control over minority studies education and scholarship. Once they declare that they are legitimate authorities on topics which they have not studied and have successfully delegitimized their learned colleagues, they become the oppressors of whom they speak. Oh, the irony!

Integration Level: We Come in Peace... Becoming a Global Citizen?

Global citizenry sounds catchy but it is actually a confusing and unattainable goal for our students. There is no “Global Nation State” and therefore we have no rights or responsibilities as citizens of the globe. Until we do away with our nation-state system of organizing the world, we cannot be citizens of Earth. Earth is not a political state, but citizen is a political term. This is more than semantics. Our students should know the difference between political citizenship and global brother/sisterhood. As planet dwellers, we do share common desires for clean water and

air, plentiful food sources, etc. But what often determines your share of the bounty is your actual citizenship status. For example, if you are an American, you have access to certain resources that most citizens of Afghanistan do not have. Words matter because ideas matter. This is what we do for a living – educate.

Investigation Level: Learning Outcomes and Assessment

In reviewing the learning objectives for the social and behavioral sciences, the Department of Political Science sees several problems. Presumably the idea of specifying learning objectives is to indicate the focus of the requirement and provide a basis for an assessment, a linkage that was at the heart of the AASCU Campus Site Visit Team review of our GDRs. However, we believe that the learning objectives included in the GEPRC proposal provide neither.

The first objective, focusing on social science methods, is typically not stressed in most introductory courses. In political science although introductory courses, e.g. Comparative Politics, American Politics, and International Relations (Political Theory is more a humanities course), may touch on some social science methods, such as survey research, our courses and texts in the field stress concepts, facts, and theories without giving much attention to methods. Research methods, which require a more in-depth treatment if they are to go beyond the superficial, is the subject for a political science sophomore level course, intended for majors. Other social and behavioral sciences courses are similarly presented. The belief is that before research methods are meaningful, students need to have a fundamental understanding of the facts, concepts, and theories of the discipline. If we were to add methods to the introductory courses for general education, we would then have to decide which methods to incorporate because although most approaches rely on empirical data, there is not a single approach. Survey research, aggregate data analysis, content analysis, comparative historical research, formal modeling, and roll call analysis are just some of the prominent methods. Would our decision be based on what the assessment determines to be social science methods? If each of the social sciences taken by students incorporated the same methods included in the assessment, wouldn't this introduce unnecessary redundancy in the curriculum? Would this approach essentially amount to a directive that interferes with academic freedom of the instructor?

The other two learning objectives are so general as not to provide much guidance. Since we believe that our courses are credible, we do all that is mentioned. Nonetheless, principles, models, and issues differ for political science than for example psychology. Even within political science, concepts and concerns of international relations differ from those of American politics. Thus the learning objectives provide little of the specificity, needed for meaningful assessment. More specific statements regarding understanding governance in the U.S., other nations, and cooperation and conflict among nations are still broad but provide more concrete assessable outcomes. This is the approach suggested in "What Will They Learn? A Report on General Education Requirements at 100 of the Nation's Leading Colleges and Universities." (2009).

Integration Level: Sequencing and Staffing Concerns

The Political Science Department considers that the proposed structure of the "Integration Level" may create problems for course sequencing. Within this section, it is unclear if the 3 required thematic courses will overlap with, or be independent of, the 5 other required courses, from "The United States & the World" to the Capstone seminar in the major. At this level, it appears as if students will take a total of 8 courses, most if not all of which, will be at the upper level.

On the one hand, the breadth of the integration section is good. In order to complete the general education requirements students will have to take a range of courses in which they encounter various pedagogical approaches to “becoming a global citizen” (more on this below). Thus, most students will be forced to approach that goal from a diversity of courses that expose them to different knowledge bases, ways of thinking, critiquing, assessing, and responding to challenges related to global citizenship.

On the other hand, *sequencing* all of the required courses may prove difficult. We anticipate that it will be challenging for our department, in particular, to offer the array of courses required by the new system, giving our small number of full-time faculty. While we already offer a range of courses under the current cafeteria (or bazaar) approach to the general education requirements, we are able to do so with few constraints about the timing of course offerings. While we are not necessarily enamored with the existing system in which students browse the bazaar of course offerings to find those that fit their general education needs, often with little regard to course content and student interest, as a small department we will be strained to provide a *specific sequence* of courses due to staffing concerns. Thus, it will be difficult for us to schedule our courses within the integration section by offering “theme” courses as the initial layer, more focused middle layer classes (The United States & the World) and the final layer Capstone seminar.

Integration Level: Themes

The department’s initial response to the thematic courses under the integration section was positive. In our view, offering thematic courses can closely match current faculty research interests, and students can take courses in which faculty are exploring new avenues of knowledge, research, and publication. Establishing such a close connection between research and teaching—and vice versa—benefits students and faculty immensely. Faculty will see their research energized in the classroom by a thematic course, and students will engage with faculty who are pursuing one of their important callings—the exploration and dissemination of knowledge through research.

There are several concerns, however. First, what is the duration or cycle of a “theme?” Is a theme intended to last one semester, one academic year, two academic years, etc? Without a more concrete idea as to how long “themes” will last, it will be very difficult to plan course offerings in future semesters. That is, if faculty must commit to a “theme” for an extended length of time, and thus to the general education program for that same time period, it may well force them to offer fewer courses for their academic majors. It is by no means a given that “theme” courses will count in an academic major, or that existing courses within a major will count as a “theme” course. In a small department such as political science, resource constraints may well drive how faculty engage “theme” courses, and faculty will most certainly feel a need to serve their academic majors first.

Linked to the duration themed courses is a potential problem with the text rental system. If themes last only one semester or one academic year (which seems more likely), how will that dovetail with the text rental system of 6 semesters’ usage for an introductory textbook, and 4 semesters’ usage of an upper level textbook? Or, will students be expected to purchase their course books? Or, perhaps more likely, will an exception to text rental be made to accommodate “theme” courses? Or will such courses simply be taught without books?

Finally, the potential exists for “theme” courses to create bottlenecks similar to those of the writing emphasis requirement. Whether the WE requirement is a real or imagined bottleneck (and statistics here are inconclusive), it is foreseeable that “theme” courses may create frustration. For example, which committee or layer of bureaucracy will certify a faculty member to teach a “theme” courses? Will departments be expected to offer at least one “theme” course per semester? What if no faculty member within a department has expertise in the chosen themes? It is conceivable that a department may be unable to offer themed courses due to a lack of expertise, which leads to the problem

of departments allowing faculty with little knowledge and exposure to a theme to teach a related course in order to meet general education requirements. Students are shortchanged in that last scenario, and the university also commits itself to a kind of academic fraud with the understanding that faculty can be experts in most anything these days.

Integration Level: Potential Impacts on Departmental Autonomy

Related to the concern about sequencing and staffing issues at the Integration level, we are also concerned that the number of requirements at this level may put constraints on the freedom departments have to structure and define the requirements and areas of in-depth study and knowledge that they expect of their majors. In other words, the multiple new obligations of faculty to provide courses that fit the new general education requirements, as well as the number of upper level courses that students will have to take to complete the general education requirements suggest that less attention and focus in a student's last couple of years will be devoted to developing coursework in their major. While the goal of providing students with courses and programs of study that are interdisciplinary and aim at integration is a good thing, it may risk watering down the development of the more in-depth skills and knowledge base particular to specific disciplines. Likewise, from the standpoint of the departments and faculty themselves, by putting such a large portion of the GED requirements at the upper level, we are concerned that this may limit (due to time and personnel constraints) the variety of upper level course offerings that we currently offer and gear primarily towards our majors. If this turns out to be the case, not only would this have implications for the quality of our majors, but also for issues related to faculty and departmental autonomy in determining academic goals for our majors, as well as being able as a department to offer flexibility to our members in terms of pursuing and developing their own research agendas.

General: Transition Problems

Students are expected to complete the academic requirements currently in place at the time they first enroll at UWSP. There is a provision to allow a student to choose revised requirements, but the path of least resistance would seem to be the requirements that a student has already invested a year or more in meeting. Consequently, there will be a period reasonably estimated at 5 or 6 years in which the university will be required to offer two sets of Gen Ed requirements.

Such a transition period is inevitable and hardly constitutes an argument against Gen Ed reform. But, the new Gen Ed requirements as laid out so far do represent a fairly substantial change from the old ones. For a small – or for that matter a medium-sized department – it is going to be very difficult to find the resources to offer courses in both sets of Gen Ed requirements and provide the kind of major every department wants to provide. With current staffing levels it is almost impossible to see how we could offer our current American Politics course – used for the social science GDR and required by the School of Education – plus a new Gen Ed suitable introductory course, plus participate in the Freshman Experience, and serve the curricular needs of more than 150 majors. We are hardly alone.

Again, this is not to argue that UWSP ought to keep its present structure of Gen Ed requirements to avoid a bit of a mess during the transition. But to keep that mess to a minimum, and, more to the point, to keep that mess from creating serious academic problems for a fairly large number of students, every department is going to need resources beyond what they have now, and, one fears, beyond what most can reasonably expect to get.

Concluding Thoughts: The Assessment Tail and the Curricular Dog

It seems apparent that some of the motivation for this Gen Ed review came as a result of concerns expressed by various reviewing bodies that our curricular dog had been constructed without reference to the size and “wagging ability” of its assessment tail. That’s logical enough, of course, since no one knew curricular dogs were supposed to have assessment tails when this dog was built. While it has been clear for some time now that no curricular dog can go forward without a well designed – and fairly powerful – assessment tail, it sometimes seems in looking at the proposed Gen Ed revisions that the tail was built first and when grafted onto the old dog it shook that dog so hard that it flew into pieces and the new dog designed to replace it isn’t all that recognizable to many faculty members.

Ever since university education began taking shape in Europe centuries ago there has been a core to that education, a core generally conceptualized as an answer to the question of what an educated person ought to have examined in order to justify his or her claim to be an educated person. Our current GDRs were constructed that way many years ago. To be sure, they are replete with the kinds of compromises about the answer to the question of what an educated person ought to have examined that arise out of the fact that the people answering that question followed such a general education with an intense immersion in their chosen specialty. But, despite all the politics and compromise that may be reflected in those GDRs, they still represent a consensus on what an educated person ought to have examined. It is likely that the proposed Gen Ed requirements represent an effort to update the campus answer to that age old question, but it might be very helpful to the campus discussion of those requirements to see them recast in that traditional mold. Then maybe we can pin the assessment tail on the new dog.

Greg, just some quick feedback from the Library faculty: We looked at the current proposal (draft), and we do not have any problems with.

Thanks for the good work,

Axel

Hi,

The L&S Advisory Committee has decided to comment on Step 4. The committee response is included, followed by individual comments from committee members.

Thank you,
Nathan

Nathan Wodarz

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Committee Response:

As the GEP Committee itself recognizes, this current proposal for the General Education Program at UWSP is ambitious. Although the L&S Advisory Committee sees the proposal as potentially energizing to the university, we have major concerns about the ability of the university to implement the proposal as it stands. We recognize that the GEP Committee would prefer to wait until Steps 5 and 6 to discuss the actual implementation of the proposal, but the L&S Advisory Committee is concerned that waiting until later in the process to raise the issue of implementation may lock the university into an unwise course of action. In the words of the GEP Committee, the outcomes are meant to "serve our students well for several decades," but a failure to support the learning outcomes adequately may well create for the next generation a set of General Degree Requirements that weakens, rather than strengthens, UWSP's General Education Program. We therefore believe it important that the GEP Committee does not view the results of Step 4 as set in stone. If components of Step 4 prove unworkable, the GEP Committee must be willing to return to Step 4 and re-think the outcomes generally. The process should resemble a feedback loop, rather than an inexorable march to a finish line.

The L&S Advisory Committee supports a university-wide writing requirement in the major as well as the inclusion of Experiential Learning and a First-year Experience in the General Education Program, but the committee also expresses deep concern about the university's ability to dedicate the money and the staffing to running these components. Without adequate support, departments and faculty members may have to shoulder an ever-increasing and demoralizing workload. Furthermore, writing intensive classes in the major may prove difficult for some departments to staff, and, if enrollment caps are not maintained, the classes may have little writing-related content. Most important, however, is that such difficulties potentially endanger the maintenance of high standards for our students.

In addition to resources, the L&S Advisory Committee is concerned that the First-Year Seminar may founder for lack of purpose. The goals of the seminar should be stated forthrightly: is the goal of the program to increase retention from the first to the second year? Is the goal to increase GPA or graduation rates? The committee also believes that any First-Year Seminar must be content based and faculty run, although we recommend that the particulars of the content be left to the instructor. First-Year Seminars based only on the acquisition of skills can hardly be "academically rigorous," as the GEP proposal states. The L&S Advisory Committee believes that skills are best learned in disciplinary-based courses that both challenge and interest the students. We doubt that this goal can be achieved in a one-credit course, so we encourage the GEP Committee to make any First-Year Seminar a three-credit course.

The L&S Advisory Committee is also concerned that learning outcomes behind the current GDRs on Minority Studies and Non-West courses may be lost in the GEP Committee's proposal. We support the overall intent to encourage faculty to include aspects of diversity across disciplines, but the inclusion of this material should not replace courses dedicated to pluralism inside and outside the United States. Not all disciplines can easily incorporate issues of pluralism in course content, and forcing instructors to cover such issues in all disciplines not only may water down disciplinary content but also may damage the students' exploration of the meaning of diversity and pluralism inside and outside the United States.

Finally, the L&S Advisory Committee considers two other issues related to the humanities important. The Humanities learning outcomes do not adequately stress teaching students to read and think critically, and the L&S Advisory Committee suggests reworking those outcomes to include the requirement to formulate both ethical and moral judgments. The L&S Advisory Committee also believes that in a global world the omission of a foreign language requirement is problematical. If the GEP

Committee does not wish to reconsider such a requirement for a General Education Program, then the committee strongly supports a foreign language entrance requirement, a university-sponsored placement test, or a requirement attached to the various undergraduate degrees.

Individual Comments:

- **Experiential Learning**
 - Will there be practical resources devoted to ensuring that experiential learning (e.g., service-learning) can be easily implemented by faculty on campus? In other words, will there be sufficient staff, coordinator(s) funded to do so?
- **Humanities Learning Outcomes**
 - Here are some ideas for rewriting the Humanities Learning Outcomes.
 - **Learning Outcomes for the Humanities**
 - * Read and think critically about the nature and effects of representations; be able to analyze the role of language and images in shaping, expressing, and contesting individual and social values
 - * Formulate ethical and moral judgments about life as imaginatively represented in artistic works and express arguments orally and in writing about the merits of artistic expressions
 - * Recognize the beliefs, attitudes, and laws that shape cultures and the ways in which cultures transmit values and practices
- **Writing in the Major**
 - Class size is important as well as standard (university) guidelines that define what “writing” should be.
Classes that become too large—over 23—will reduce their effectiveness. Students need to be able to interact with each other and the professor to provide detailed and timely feedback. Also, each course should follow consistent (university) guidelines to ensure “writing” does not become a relative term. Each professor would still have flexibility and choice in determining specific assignments and activities.
 - My biggest concern has always been how each department is going to decide on which of their courses will be considered “writing intensive”.
- **Foreign Languages / Global Citizenship**
 - I am particularly concerned with the section of the GEP that addresses “becoming a global citizen.” I would like to foreground the danger of monolingual complacency. If we are to educate budding global citizens, we need to teach them foreign languages. Although the foreign language requirement has been eliminated from the GEP, I urge the committee to consider alternatives such as a two-year foreign language entrance requirement, a university-sponsored placement test, or even to reconsider this curriculum omission.
- **Integration Level**
 - We have a number of questions about sequencing the courses at the integration level and are concerned that this could potentially create bottlenecks for students, and

potentially decrease our flexibility as a department in terms of deciding (based on staffing issues) when we offer specific courses. Related to this concern about sequencing and staffing issues at the Integration level, we are also concerned that the number of requirements at this level may put constraints on the freedom departments have to structure and define the requirements and areas of in-depth study and knowledge that a particular department expects of its majors. In other words the multiple new obligations of faculty in providing courses that fit the new general education requirements, as well as the number of upper level courses that students will have to take to complete the general education requirements suggest that less attention and focus in the a student's last couple of years will be on developing their course work in their major. While the goal of providing students with courses and programs of study that are interdisciplinary and aim at integration is a good thing, it may risk watering down the development of the more in-depth skills and knowledge base particular to specific disciplines. Likewise, from the standpoint of the departments and faculty themselves, by putting such a large portion of the GED requirements at the upper level, we are concerned that this may limit (due to time and personnel constraints) the variety of upper level course offerings that we currently offer and gear primarily towards our majors. If this turns out to be the case, not only would this have implications for the quality of our majors, but also for issues related to faculty and departmental autonomy in determining academic goals for our majors, as well as being able as a department to offer flexibility to our members in terms of pursuing and developing their own research agendas.

- Themes
 - Care must be taken with implementation of the themes. I do not want to see a situation in which departments tend to direct their majors to some themes, while others wither and die for lack of enrollment.

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Posted: 8/27/2009 2:33 PM

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Clark, Charles

Re Natural Science component, in the event there is a multi-course requirement in the area of NS, I question whether all gen. ed. natural science courses must be required to carry a lab component. I would suggest that if there is only ultimately one NS course required in the GEP, then there should be a lab requirement. However, if the decision is to require more than one NS course, then one of those courses could be a non-lab-based NS course. This would not preclude students from choosing more than one lab-based course, if they wish. I realize that this would call for curriculum revision in some science disciplines. Re the Capstone Experience in the Major, should this really be part of the GEP, as opposed to a requirement faculty in each major area can determine? I agree that a capstone in each major would be ideal, but I'm not certain that such a requirement belongs in the GEP, specifically. This seems to have the potential to impinge on the flexibility within specific disciplines for setting major requirements. Charles Clark

Posted: 9/22/2009 3:40 PM

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Warren, Dona

I would very much like to see a critical thinking requirement in the new Gen Ed program. Here's how I understand critical thinking skills:

- Recognize arguments, or units of reasoning designed to establish that an idea is (probably) true.
- Given an argument, recognize the conclusion of the argument and be able to understand how the argument attempts to support that conclusion. Understanding how the argument attempts to establish the conclusion involves identifying the starting assumptions, the intermediate steps, and the inferential connections between the ideas.
- Given an argument, evaluate it. Evaluating an argument involves assessing the starting assumptions and inferential connections. This may require individuals to determine whether a particular claim would strengthen or weaken the argument, assess the relevance of evidence advanced, evaluate empirical claims, detect bias, and so on.
- Construct arguments for positions by identifying and advancing appropriate reasons and evidence.

Here's why I think that we should require students to take a course that's devoted primarily to critical thinking:

1. As an institution participating in the VSA, UWSP is required to measure increases in critical thinking using a professionally developed assessment instrument. ([http://www.collegeportraits.org/WI/UWSP/learning\\_assessment](http://www.collegeportraits.org/WI/UWSP/learning_assessment))  
If there are no courses specifically devoted to critical thinking skills, we will have no dedicated courses to which we can 'feed-back' the assessment data and so it will be impossible for us to close the assessment loop.
2. Students do not come to college already proficient in critical thinking skills. I have pre-test data to support this claim, but reflection would probably do as well.
3. We can't reasonably expect critical thinking skills to be adequately *taught* in every course on campus even if critical thinking skills are *required* by many courses on campus. There are at least three reasons for this.
  - a. Teaching critical thinking skills requires some training and experience. There is a strong analogy with writing here. Just as the ability to write well does not automatically qualify one

to teach writing, the ability to think critically doesn't automatically qualify one to teach critical thinking.

- b. Not everyone is interested in teaching critical thinking skills even if they think that critical thinking is important and even if they ask it of their students. That's fine and reasonable. I think that writing is important, and ask it of my students, but I'm not interested in teaching writing.
  - c. Significant course time is required if students are to master critical thinking skills, and courses primarily devoted to other learning objectives simply don't have this time to spare. The analogy with writing holds here as well. Becoming a proficient writer requires specific time and attention that a course with other learning objectives can't be expected to expend.
4. Although critical thinking skills are addressed in Freshmen English, Freshmen English also shoulders the heavy and important responsibility of teaching writing skills. By introducing a separate critical thinking requirement, we can reinforce the skills developed in Freshmen English and strengthen education in critical thinking without increasing the instructional burden on Freshmen English instructors.

There are, of course, some possible questions about including a critical thinking requirement in the Gen Ed program. Some of these questions, with my responses, follow:

1. How can it fit within the trimmed-down credit cap?

I've blocked out a possible Gen Ed structure that includes a critical thinking requirement and involves only 44 credits. Even if we don't adopt something like my suggestion, we can still incorporate critical thinking if we reduce the credits required at the "integration" level. I would argue that reducing credits at the advanced level to ensure a solid grounding in critical thinking is well worth it.

2. Does critical thinking really exist as a set of skills that crosses disciplinary boundaries?

Yes. (See my understanding of critical thinking above.) Of course, different disciplines might emphasize different specific skills – sociology, for example, might discuss how to interpret survey data and philosophy might not – but interpreting survey data is an instance of the general skill of "evaluating empirical claims" and any critical thinking class would probably discuss that in some way.




3. Who would teach these courses? Could we offer enough sections?

I believe that we can offer enough sections if we stress that critical thinking can be taught in the context of any number of disciplines. Critical thinking has been traditionally taught in the Philosophy Department, but I don't see any reason why that needs to be so. Biology, Chemistry, Geography, Geology, Physics, Sociology, and English (just off the top of my head) can all offer such courses, as long as the learning objectives are critical thinking learning objectives and not "content-oriented" learning objectives. We may want to offer professional development opportunities to instructors who want to "re-tool" a course as critical thinking class, and that could be a wonderful thing. I suspect, however, that some instructors are already teaching good courses that could fit a critical thinking requirement with very minimal "tweaking." If we expect to meet a serious shortage of sections, I would suggest being very liberal in our criteria for such courses at first, with the understanding that the criteria will strengthen according to a pre-determined timeline. This would also enable instructors to develop their courses in a sane and reasonable fashion, rather than re-inventing the whole thing at once.

4. If students can learn critical thinking in all of these subjects, won't they just naturally pick up critical thinking skills as they study these subjects?

I don't believe that this is a very efficient or dependable way to help students acquire critical thinking skills. While it's true that we can't teach content without teaching something about good thinking, and although it's true that we can't teach anything about good thinking without teaching something about content, courses can legitimately differ in their emphases. In my Introduction to Philosophy course, for example, I introduce students to critical thinking but my primary focus is helping my students to understand philosophy. That's what I assess them on. In my Critical Thinking course, on the other hand, I introduce students to philosophy but my primary focus is helping my students to understand good reasoning. That's what I assess them on. I can see the same distinction being drawn in any number of disciplines. A critical thinking class offered in the chemistry department would use chemistry to teach critical thinking,

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|  | <p>and its learning objectives would be critical thinking learning objectives. It would assess students on critical thinking, albeit perhaps with examples drawn from chemistry.</p> <p>5. Is there really enough content to critical thinking to fill 3 credits? Absolutely. In fact, there's more than enough content to critical thinking to fill 6 credits, but 3 credits will give students a good set of useful, transferrable, skills.</p> |
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|  <p>Warren, Dona</p> | <p>I have three recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My departmental colleagues and I strongly assert that the General Education program should require specific courses devoted to United States Pluralism and International Pluralism (something analogous to the current NW and MNS requirements) instead of addressing these learning objectives by diffusing them throughout all courses at the integration level.       <p>While recognizing and applauding the Committee's desire to strengthen the University's commitment to inclusion, we believe that the robust learning outcomes merited by this commitment are by far most adequately served by devoting specific courses to them, courses taught by professors interested and trained in these issues. Naturally, the University may <i>also</i> choose to encourage all professors to include pluralistic content in their integration-level courses; that's a separate issue. We simply know from experience that the skills imparted to students in "pluralistically-focused" courses are sufficiently complex to demand the sort of deep, sustained attention that MNS and NW courses afford. My department would be happy to collaborate with other interested parties in framing learning outcomes for these categories.</p> </li> <li>2. I would like to see a richer set of learning outcomes under humanities, and think that something like "Demonstrate an understanding of the 'big ideas' that shape individual and societal worldviews, including theories about the ultimate nature of reality, knowledge, and value" should be included. I would be happy to be part of a conversation with other humanists about the framing of these outcomes.</li> </ol> |
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3. I suggest breaking our current work (i.e. Step 4 of the process for considering and approving a new GEP) into two stages:

1. Let's *first* approve the structural components of the GEP, including draft learning outcomes for the sake of example but not committing ourselves to them, and
2. Let's *then* develop and approve the learning outcomes.

This might slow things down a bit, but devoting concerted and single-minded attention to the learning outcomes should make the subsequent stage of this process - developing course criteria - significantly easier. I would also recommend that after the structure is approved, working groups of faculty be formed to guide the construction of learning outcomes. As noted above, my colleagues and I would be happy to work with others to develop NW, MNS, and humanities outcomes.