

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

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

✓ Approved May 2008

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

✓ Approved February 2009

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

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

5) Develop course criteria for the GEP.

6) Make recommendations regarding the administration of the GEP.

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

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

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

- a) The General Education Program should apply to all students regardless of degree type (BA, BS, BM, and BFA).
- b) In addition to the GEP, separate degree requirements for the BA, BS, BM, and BFA should be developed at the university-level by the Academic Affairs Committee after Step 4 is complete.

This was approved by Faculty Senate, April 2009.

Explanation of Proposal

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

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

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

As to the more specific recommendations:

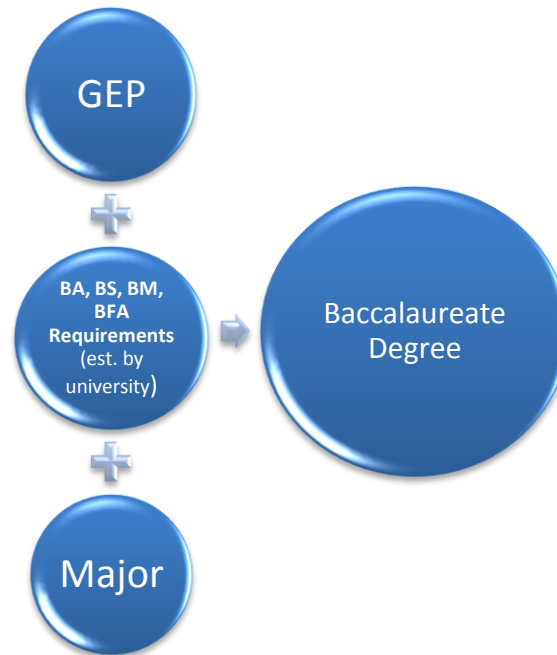
- a) The General Education Program should apply to all students regardless of degree type (BA, BS, BM, and BFA).

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

- b) In addition to the GEP, separate degree requirements for the BA, BS, BM, and BFA should be developed at the university-level by the Academic Affairs Committee after Step 4 is complete.

Members of the committee are grateful for the many comments we received on this issue. It seems clear that the campus community wishes to maintain separate university-level requirements to distinguish the degree types. Consequently, we have revised our proposal accordingly.

If this proposal is accepted, the baccalaureate degree at UWSP would be comprised of three sets of requirements:



The committee continues to believe that this arrangement is simpler and therefore much better than allowing the colleges to establish such requirements. Much like the GEP, we believe that such requirements should apply uniformly to all students regardless of major. In addition, we hope that departments are given discretion over which degrees they offer their majors.

Finally, if this proposal is accepted, we recommend delaying the formulation and approval of university degree requirements until after the structural components and learning outcomes of the GEP have been approved (Step 4).

Appendix

GENERAL EDUCATION MODELS*

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

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

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

The Distribution Model relies on individual departments for staffing and allows students greater flexibility in selecting their courses, but it also complicates assessment and can lead to turf battles among departments over control of general education courses and the resources they

entail. In fact, once a university or college decides to use this approach, it is extremely difficult to make substantial changes in the general education requirements without raising objections from departments that perceive they will lose resources in the process. Thus, the Distribution Model becomes a vehicle for maintaining status quo, unless new general education objectives are simply added to existing requirements.

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

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