

Listed below are comments received by GEPRC on the initial Step 3, GEP Model Proposal. They include: 1) comments sent by email; 2) comments posted on the Web site; and 3) comments made during the open forums.

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I do feel that a course taken for a general degree requirement could count for more than one requirement. In this era of interdisciplinary study, it is not uncommon for courses to cover more than one field in depth on a simultaneously basis. Therefore, I am in favor of a course “counting for more than one GEP requirement.”

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I am a non-traditional student attending full-time at UWSP. I am currently reading all of the GEP proposal, but find myself compelled to email before done.

The part of the proposal that deals with the “silver bullet” GEP requirements is what has leaped to my attention. As a non-traditional student who transferred in to UWSP, this issue is disconcerting. Not all of my courses that were supposed to transfer in as GDR’s transferred correctly. I have had to wrestle with my schedule to get the classes I need to complete my degree and my GDR’s. This puts a higher burden on transfer and non-trads alike.

I understand the need to take classes out of our degrees and to attain a liberal and well-rounded education—it makes us more marketable and therefore attracts more students to UWSP for that “it” factor. If you make it harder for transfer and non-traditional students to complete our degrees, it will be counterproductive and a detriment to UWSP and the marketability of the university. I know I do not like some of the attitudes of students that want the short and sweet way to a degree. But as a non-trad, I also know that in a competitive society in a down economy—we will find the way that will work for us the best and if the university appears to not be non-trad or transfer student friendly, we’ll go elsewhere we’re flexible.

I am not a traditional non-traditional student, I am in this for the long haul and have structured my life to fit in during the day and take what I need to succeed, not all non-trads have that option. GDR’s have made my degree richer and quite a bit more insightful, but they should not be a burden and should not make other transfer students or non-trad hesitant to attend UWSP. Please take this into consideration when grappling over how to make the UWSP brand the best UW brand degree to attain. After all, in our market based society all of this is a product and with our buyers, there are more choices. Let’s keep them here.

Thank you,

Laura Hauser-Menting
Non-Traditional Transfer Student

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Don and Greg,

I have just a few comments:

1. You mention designating the degree requirements for the AA degree. However, a number of years ago it was determined that degree requirements for the AA would be uniform throughout the UW System and would be considered as fulfilling general degree requirements for the bachelors degree expect for upper division and skills courses that each school may determine. Therefore we can't change AA requirements as I understand it. (The purpose was to facilitate students going to and completing work at the two year colleges).
2. Somewhere in the document there should be a notation that UW System rules require that a general education requirement include a course in minority relations or ethnic studies. As I recall, this is the ONLY System requirement and was passed by the Board after a fraternity at UW-Madison did a minstrel show in blackface.
3. I question the recommendation to give departments the power to determine requirements in their major that would lead to a BA or BS. The issue, as I see it, is that to do so would essentially allow departments to determine the general education requirements for their major, over and above the university-wide requirements. Thus a department may require a different set of courses for a BA with that major than a BS. Although departments can have additional requirements now, whether as required courses outside their major or as prerequisites for their courses (e.g. math in economics courses), they should not be allowed to determine the requirements for the UWSP degree outside of the requirements for the major in the degree. One consequence of this proposal would be less uniformity among departments, which may look good on the surface as tailoring a program, but will have the consequence of making it very difficult for students to change majors resulting in extending their time to degree for those who choose to do so. There is clear evidence of this result

from schools that have similar systems, either for majors or colleges. Thus at UW-Madison a student beginning as a botany student and then switches to history will not only have different departmental requirements but different general education requirements because in Madison's case each college has additional requirements over the campus-wide general education specification.

Over the years UWSP has had problems differentiate these two degrees. Until the present system, the requirements for the BA were more stringent than for the BS. Thus UWSP graduated very few BA degrees. The current system was instituted to correct for this. I don't have a strong opinion on whether each degree should have different requirements or whether degrees should be designated by major, such as applied areas received a BS as you noted in the document. However, I don't believe departments should be able to set different BA and BS degrees requirements for their majors.

I hope this is useful.

Ed Miller

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Greg,

The GEP proposal looks great for the next step, but I have one question: Does the "no silver bullet" provision mean that no course can ever count for more than one GDR, or that students can only get credit for one GDR at a time? I fully support the latter, but have concerns about the former. It makes sense, for instance, for students to be able to get credit *either* for "History" or "non-Western" GDR's in World History—though, certainly, not both at one time. Please feel free to stop by if you have any questions about my highly opinionated thoughts on the matter.

Yours,
Gar

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The faculty of the Department of Sociology recognize the challenging task the GEPRC faces and the hard work the committee has put into this job. We offer the following constructive comments on your most recent work. First of all, we agree with the committee's recommendation that a distributional model is most appropriate for UWSP. We won't comment further on this point since the case has been made for this position by the GEPRC and others in their public responses. We have comments in three other areas as follows:

#### USE OF THE DATA ON GDRs

We think that the data on GDRs is informative, and ought to be used to answer the central question regarding Gen Ed, which is how much are we asking of our students and is it more than appropriate? If one of the main purposes of Gen Ed review is to develop a program that is more "reasonable" in credit requirements (around 44 credits), the data demonstrate that we are not far from that goal now. On average, the students in the survey average 48 credits (beyond credits within their majors). This means that GDRs at UWSP are not nearly as onerous in practice as they appear on paper. This finding ought to be made clear to accreditation agencies and our entering students, not to mention to ourselves. UWSP has an ambitious GDR program to which departments with high credit majors have adapted by incorporating GDR courses from other disciplines into their majors and through advising. This is something which should provide pride, not criticism. In our opinion it is far better for departments with high credit majors to take this approach than it is to reduce the general degree requirements overall for all students.

#### BA and BS Degrees.

We think that the decision regarding what constitutes a BA or a BS degree must remain at the university level. In addition to the arguments made by others in this forum in favor of this approach, we would add the following points. UWSP should present itself to its students and the public with uniformity regarding what constitutes a BA or BS. A BA in one discipline should not differ from the same degree in another discipline. If a department feels that a student should take courses in a particular area, they should be considered requirements for the major, not GDR requirements. Double majors are a good illustration of the problems department or college level GDRs would produce, though the logical inconsistencies they illustrate would extend beyond double majors. Suppose, for example, that two academic majors have different requirements for the BS degree and a student meets the requirements for the BS in one major but not the other. Does that mean that the student doesn't get the second major? If so, wouldn't that mean that the student didn't meet the requirements for the second major, not that she didn't meet the requirements for the BS? Consider another example of a student with a major in a discipline requiring a BA and a major requiring a BS. Does this student have to meet two sets of GDRs to graduate? This would seem to undermine the main purpose of streamlining Gen Ed: i.e., not to place unnecessary obstacles to timely graduation.

Another reason to keep GDR requirements at the university level is that not doing so will dilute the meaning of a BS or BA degree. Departments and Colleges face the pressing responsibility of fostering students through their majors. Degree requirements not serving this pragmatic end are unlikely to be imposed at the college or department level. In the absence of a university wide oversight of the degree requirements, no constituency exists to speak on behalf of degree requirements not tied directly to a major or college. One obvious example is foreign language. If a foreign language requirement is not included in the Gen Ed, what department is going to include it as a requirement in its degree requirements?

A final reason for keeping degree requirements at the university level is that the history of general education debate at UWSP reveals that colleges have quite contrasting views on degree requirements. One clear example (but by no means the only one) is the question of what constitutes a social science general education course. One college favors applied social science and another thinks it should be only basic social science. If a BA in one college accepts applied courses and another accepts only basic courses, what should an undeclared student do to avoid making the wrong decision and delaying graduation? In our opinion it is clear that the university must speak with one voice on degree requirements.

#### “Silver Bullets”

The most convincing argument against “silver bullet” courses is that they allow students to reduce the number of general education courses they take, thereby diminishing breadth. But one of the main motivations for revising general education is to reduce the credit requirements. Is it better to reduce the general education credit requirement by offering courses that meet multiple requirements or is it better simply to eliminate general education requirements? In our opinion, it is better to allow silver bullets than to eliminate requirements. Eliminating requirements for all students reduces breadth more than the modest use of silver bullets by some.



The data the committee produced on GDR credits by major show no evidence of widespread abuse of silver bullet courses. They seem to be used most frequently in some high credit majors, and are a reasonable way of getting students through these programs in a timely fashion. As has been stated in the forum by others, it is quite legitimate for a course to meet multiple GDR requirements. A course can meet both natural science and environmental literacy; MNS and Humanities Area 1; Social Science and MNS, to name a few. We doubt that the stringent GDR course review process in use has let many inappropriate courses slip though. (Obviously, if the use of silver bullet courses were to extend significantly beyond their present use, we would no longer favor their use).

Moreover, prohibiting courses from counting for two requirements for which they have been approved sends the wrong message to students. They will perceive this policy as intended to force them to take more courses than necessary, which is exactly the opposite of what the general education review is attempting to accomplish.

In sum, in our opinion, the strengths of certain aspects of the present GDR program ought to be recognized before they are significantly changed. The data do not show nearly as onerous a credit requirement as has been widely perceived. Our attention should be focused less on meeting an “on paper” goal in terms of number of credits and more on how to improve general

education. Secondly, keeping degree requirements at the university level is a genuine strength of our program and moving toward college or department degree requirements is likely to result in significant unintended consequences. Third, the present use of silver bullet courses does not seem abusive or detrimental to our students. In contrast, the modest use of silver bullets combined with the practice in high credit majors of incorporating extra-department GDR course into their major requirements serves the purpose of preserving the breadth of the GDR program for all of our students.

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Posted: 2/22/2020 9:10 AM View Properties  Reply	
 <p>Warren, Dona</p>	<p><u>Dona Warren's Response to Step 3</u></p> <p>Thank you, once again, for all of your work on general education review and for providing us with such a clearly-explained proposal! My feedback consists of two endorsements, each with a caveat: 1) an endorsement of the distribution model for the general education requirements with the strong caveat that the degree requirements be set at the college or university level rather than at the level of individual departments, and 2) an endorsement of the proposal that no single course be allowed to satisfy more than one general education requirement, with the caveat that this policy be taken as a working hypothesis open to revision at subsequent stages of the process. I'll elaborate on each combination of endorsements and caveats:</p> <p><u>1) The Distribution Model for the General Education Requirements (with Degree Requirements to be set at the College or University Level).</u></p> <p>I think that the General Education Review Committee has argued quite persuasively in favor of the distribution model for the general education requirements. As the Committee notes, this model fits our campus very well and by grounding our general education program on a foundation of learning outcomes we will avoid the incoherence and assessment challenges that can afflict this model. The Committee's proposal that the general education requirements should apply to students regardless of degree type also makes good sense.</p> <p>However, counter to what I understand the General Education Review Committee to be suggesting, I would recommend that the responsibility for setting the requirements for degree types - determining what courses a student must take in order to earn a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree, for example -</p>

not be left to individual departments and programs but instead be set at the College or University level. My reasons for this recommendation are four-fold: setting the degree requirements at the college or university level will enhance the coherence and “marketability” of the degrees, will more easily permit students to declare multiple majors, will protect against degree deflation, and will preserve much departmental autonomy.

i) Setting the Degree Requirements at the College or University Level Enhances Coherence and “Marketability.”

Although, as the Committee notes, “the definition of what constitutes a bachelor’s degree varies greatly among institutions, as does what distinguishes a BA from a BS or other degrees” I’m uncomfortable with the prospect that the definition of what constitutes a bachelor’s degree, or distinguishes a BA from a BS, could vary greatly *within* the institution. This great internal variation would be the probable consequence of requiring individual departments and programs to set their own degree requirements. There’s an advantage to knowing and being able to say that all students with a Bachelor of Arts degree from UWSP have had the benefit of a certain type of education, and an advantage to being able to make the same claim for all degree types. It gives a coherence to our programs and a “marketability” to our graduates that would be sacrificed if Bachelor of Arts students who major in philosophy, and Bachelor of Arts students who major in English are subject to different (and potentially non-overlapping) degree requirements.

ii) Setting the Degree Requirements at the College or University Level More Easily Permits Multiple Majors (and consequent Interdisciplinary Expertise)

As the Committee acknowledges, obliging departments to determine degree requirements could “create a tangled array of requirements that some students will find complicated and difficult to navigate.” It seems to me that this is a very serious and almost unavoidable consequence of requiring (for example) the Philosophy Department to determine what a Bachelor of Arts degree will amount to for its majors and requiring the English Department to do the same. A student who is contemplating majoring in both Philosophy and English would have to complete two sets of degree requirements in addition to completing two sets of major requirements, and this additional burden could very easily serve as a disincentive to declare a double-major. (A recognition of this broad fact is one of the reasons that the committee cites, in Appendix I, for rejecting a decentralized model for the general degree requirements, noting that a

decentralized model of general education “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.” I think that the same points apply to a decentralized model of degree requirements.)

In contrast, if the degree requirements are set at the college level then students will have to complete only one set of degree requirements if they major in more one than department with the same college. If the degree requirements are set at the University level then students will have to complete only one set of degree requirements if they declare a major in more than one college. Because interdisciplinary problem solving is one of the four broad learning goals for our general education program – and rightly so, it seems to me – the degree requirements are probably best determined at the administrative level that will maximize the likelihood that students will declare more than one major. Toward this end, I think that they are best set at the University level in order to most easily allow students to complete majors in more than one college.

iii) Setting the Degree Requirements at the College or University Level Protects Against Degree Deflation

As the Committee notes, “departments will also have a strong incentive to limit the credits they require of their majors and to consider any additional coursework carefully.” This is certainly true, and a possible consequence of this natural and strong incentive could be “degree deflation” as departments and programs would be practically compelled to consider the attractiveness of their major as they set the requirements for the degree types within their major. Faculty at UWSP are certainly keen to provide their students with the best education possible, but if a program is eager to attract majors it would be tempting to “water down” the degree requirements associated with that major in order to recruit students. If a student is required to take two semesters of foreign language in order to earn a BA degree with a major in English, for example, it isn’t difficult to imagine that some other department might decide to offer a BA degree without a foreign language requirement in the interest of growing its major.

In an ideal world, of course, departments would be guided entirely by the best educational interests of its students, but I hazard to suggest that in an ideal world we wouldn’t be trying to limit our general education program to 45 credits in the first place because students and parents in an ideal world would enjoy unlimited monetary resources, possess an unquenchable

commitment to the value of broad education, and seek out schools with the thickest possible set of general education requirements. The fact is, of course, that the world isn't perfect and that we probably do need to "trim down" our general education requirements in order to remain competitive. Compelling departments to determine the criteria for the degree types, however, will subject them to the same competitive pressures that are currently bearing down upon the institution as a whole, and I think this would result in more than a trim general education program; I fear it would tend toward anorexic degrees types.

iv) Setting the Degree Requirements at the College or University Level Preserves Much Departmental Autonomy

I agree with the Committee's assertion that "for some departments, only the BA degree may seem appropriate; for others, the BS degree. In some departments, faculty may see good reason to offer more than one degree option, and perhaps to require additional coursework in each." Such departmental autonomy can be preserved, however, even if the degree requirements are set at the university level. The History Department can still require its majors to take the BA, if it chooses. The Physics Department can still require its majors to take the BS. And the Philosophy Department can still allow students to choose the degree type of most interest to them. Furthermore, if a department decides that the requirements for a given degree are insufficient to meet the needs of their majors, it can certainly impose additional requirements. Physics, for example, could include a mathematics requirement beyond that stipulated in the standard BS. None of these important departmental freedoms are contingent upon the degree requirements themselves being set by the individual departments.

2) No Single Course should be Allowed to Satisfy more than One GEP Requirement (with this Proscription Standing as a Working Hypothesis Subject to Future Revision)

I'm convinced by the reasoning that the General Education Review Committee advances against allowing any single course to satisfy more than one General Education Requirement. I suggest, however, that we take this to be a working principle and allow ourselves to modify this proscription if future developments indicate that such a modification would be wise. My thinking runs as follows:

Looking at the previously-approved goals for the Gen Ed program, I imagine that credits *might* be distributed along the following lines.

- Demonstrate critical thinking, quantitative, and communication skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing global society. (9 credits)
 - Critical Thinking – 3 credits
 - Quantitative Skills – 3 credits
 - Communication Skills – 3 credits
- Acquire broad knowledge of the physical, social, and cultural worlds as well as the methods by which this knowledge is produced. (9 credits or 18 credits)
 - Physical World – 3 credits or 6 credits (I'm ignoring the extra credits involved in lab classes here just for the sake of a quick-and-dirty, very simplified view of the *possible* contours of credit distribution.)
 - Social World – 3 credits or 6 credits
 - Cultural World – 3 credits or 6 credits
- Recognize that responsible global citizenship involves personal accountability, social equity, and environmental sustainability. (9 credits)
 - Personal Accountability – 3 credits
 - Social Equity – 3 credits
 - Environmental Sustainability – 3 credits
- Apply their knowledge and skills, working in interdisciplinary ways to solve problems. (3 credits)
 - Interdisciplinary Problem Solving – 3 credits

(This weighs in at 30 or 39 credits and so gives us the flexibility to add at least 6 additional credits while remaining at or below our target of 45 credits.)

Naturally this course-distribution is sheer speculation, but it, or something like it, strikes me as an initially plausible way to structure our general education program; it ensures that students will take at least one course explicitly devoted to each of the broad educational goals that will define our general education program and this would both give these goals deeper meaning and make assessment of our general education program more feasible. It would, however, pose some challenges – among them the need to find enough courses to fill the critical thinking requirement.

As I'm sure I've made clear in numerous venues, I think that there should be such a requirement and I think that meaningful critical thinking courses can be offered in a wide variety of disciplines – including but not limited to English, philosophy, history, chemistry, and geology. All that would be

required of a critical thinking course is that it intentionally focus on helping students to cultivate critical thinking skills and that it be assessed in those terms. I have no doubt that such courses can be developed across the campus, and that many of the courses currently taught could satisfy a critical thinking requirement with minimal retooling. But I also realize that we faculty are quite busy enough as it is, and that a history professor might not want to completely transform her class into a “critical thinking through the study of history” course. She might, instead, want to teach a course that focuses upon critical thinking and history to a roughly equal extent, or she might want to teach a course that focuses almost entirely upon history while including some limited critical thinking instruction.

In order to accommodate such instructors, we might want to adopt a hybrid approach to a critical thinking requirement, allowing the three critical thinking credits to be earned in one course devoted entirely to critical thinking, or in two or three courses, each of which might count toward a partial fulfillment of the critical thinking requirement while simultaneously counting toward some other learning objective. I have no idea if that would work, and it would certainly be easier (and probably preferable) to require courses specifically dedicated to critical thinking. If it should prove unfeasible to offer sufficient courses specifically dedicated to critical thinking, however, and if we make an unmodifiable decision now to the effect that no course will satisfy more than one general education requirement, then the result will necessarily be that although critical thinking is mentioned as an important goal of our general education program, the general education program will require no courses explicitly devoted to the attainment of this skill. (One might respond that all courses develop critical thinking and so no course needs to take it on as a primary learning objective. I’m familiar with this line of reasoning, but I don’t find it compelling. From the fact that critical thinking is *used* and so *refined* in many courses, it fails to follow that critical thinking doesn’t need to be explicitly *taught* in any course. The analogous points are easily recognized with respect to quantitative and communication skills.)

Naturally, the argument that I present above regarding critical thinking applies equally to other worthy educational outcomes. Accordingly, I would recommend that we *provisionally* adopt the policy of forbidding any course from satisfying more than one general education requirement and that we proceed on this basis. If the policy doesn’t work, however, because practical constraints prevent important educational objectives from being satisfied by courses specifically dedicated to those objectives, then the question of allowing single courses to satisfy multiple

general education requirements can be revisited.

Thanks once again for all your work! And thanks for reading this rather long feedback!

Posted: 2/23/2009 2:52 PM

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Ozsvath, David

I echo Dona's comments (the easy way to take credit for great ideas), with one exception. It might prove more effective to deliver interdisciplinary courses (and especially a "Freshman Experience" type of course) through a Core Model. That is to say, there are perhaps some General Ed. objectives that can be best addressed through courses that are not offered through a particular department but by a team of faculty who are officially or unofficially associated with an administrative unit known as the General Education Program (or some such name). I believe that this will also be the best way to insure the quality of our Gen Ed program.

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Posted: 2/23/2009 9:50 AM

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Palmer, Debbie

On behalf of the entire Psychology Department faculty, we are commenting on the new GEP Model Proposal. We agree that the distributed model is appropriate and will serve our students well within the Psychology major. As a department we discussed the issue of determining what constitutes a B.S. versus a B.A. degree. Our current mindset regarding this matter is that we would most likely only offer one degree - whether it be a B.S. or a B.A. remains to be determined. In general, we agree with the rationale presented regarding removing the "silver bullet" option, given that the GDR course requirements will be reduced. Robert Nemeth and Debbie Palmer

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Posted: 2/23/2009 10:06 AM

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Hill, Steve

Regarding silver bullets

I'm not part of any of the working teams -- just an interested faculty member. I'm not sure I see the wisdom of prohibiting silver bullet courses. Forgive me if I've misunderstood the purpose and particulars here, but I've read over the material a couple of times and I see some issues, at least as they apply to my courses.

A little disclosure first: I regularly teach a course (environmental journalism) that has both WE and, as of the fall (assuming approval on March 2), EL designations.

While I did seek EL designation in part to increase its attractiveness to students, it doesn't change the fact that the course was already meeting EL requirements from the beginning; I was unaware of the designation at the time I designed the course, but neither did I change course content just to seek EL designation. Environmental

journalism is, on its face, about creating environmental literacy. And because it's an advanced journalism course in which written work is the ultimate goal, it's also a natural WE course. (As an aside, part of me would love to teach it as a "regular" course, whatever that is, because it would certainly reduce the demands on my time -- but then it wouldn't be much of a course.)

Second, some questions:

(1) Is it really a problem on campus that faculty are attempting to create silver bullets? How many such courses exist, and how many do we know were created as an attempt to fill seats rather than fill legitimate educational needs?

As a regular teacher of WE courses, I don't see a surfeit of other WE courses that would help keep students from beating down my doors every semester to take basic journalism. I'd like to see demand in that course reduced by more WE courses campuswide. I see no reason why WE courses shouldn't exist in greater numbers across campus and still meet other GEP requirements. Why can't a history course be a writing course, and why can't we teach critical thinking in natural sciences?

Conversely, I'd like to see demand for my environmental journalism course increased, but I still have to tightly control access because it's an advanced course. Nonjournalists can take the course, but they have to demonstrate to me both interest and capability before I let them in.

(2) What, really, is the harm in a silver bullet anyway?

If a course legitimately meets more than one requirement by its very nature (as, in my opinion, environmental journalism clearly would), wouldn't it be more useful to committed students to take such a course and then have more flexibility to take an additional course that would address some other interest or perceived need for that student? In our journalism emphasis, for instance, students can take only a single journalism elective. I would think this type of problem is more widespread than that of double-dipping and getting an inferior education because of it (if that is indeed a problem, as I address in my next question). Students need more flexibility, not less, and silver bullets can certainly help.

(3) Doesn't this whole discussion of silver bullets assume that students learn less because of them?

Can't well designed silver bullets increase learning -- partly by providing integrated topical-methodological combinations, and partly by increasing flexibility within a student's degree program?

(4) If we don't want silver bullets to be created just to fill seats, shouldn't we let existing processes determine whether the courses are legitimate, rather than just proscribing them altogether?

I am on the university's curriculum committee, as well as our department's. Neither strikes me as being particularly lax in its role of determining whether courses will do what they're supposed to do.

Again, forgive me if I've misunderstood, but it would seem that we're unnecessarily limiting ourselves and our students. I would hope we would want to design MORE courses that are silver bullets. If designed well, they should be more challenging and also would provide more opportunity to meet multiple learning outcomes for assessment purposes. Shouldn't we be doing that instead?

Edited: 12/2009 1:35 PM

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Bowman, Mary

I emailed the following comments to Don and Greg over the weekend when the server was acting up. I post them here for everyone else's information.

- 1) I support using a distribution model. That will minimize the impact the new program will have on departments and is in generally a good model in my opinion.
- 2) I like the idea that the general education program should be the same for all students, with perhaps additional requirements according to degree type. I would agree that it should be the purview of each department to determine whether a B.A., B.S., or other type of degree is appropriate for their students. However, I think that determining what is required for each degree would be better handled further up, to minimize confusion and difficulty for students who change majors. I think perhaps the college level is a good place for this. (However, it may be useful to look at data about how frequently students change majors across college lines during our discussions of that policy.)
- 3) I have reservations about banning "silver bullets." The arguments the committee has made for this proposal are important ones, but I would prefer to see us come up with a different way of achieving the same ends. Here are my concerns:
 - Given the nature of the general learning outcomes, it's inevitable that some courses will naturally contribute to more than one outcome—e.g. many humanities courses include writing and so develop communication skills in addition to broad content and disciplinary knowledge, many social science courses include some skills in interpreting quantitative evidence, etc. It's therefore artificial to restrict a course to one category (or to make students decide how it will count). To my mind, that only

plays into the cross-it-off-the-list mentality that so many students have and that we should be working against. (BTW, for the same reason I wish we could come up with a better metaphor than “silver bullet”—which suggests Gen Ed requirements are something we need to kill, and the more one can kill at once, the better.) I think it will seem artificial to students, also, and that may feed resentment.

- Given the strong “suggestion” from the Provost that the entire program not require more than about 45 credits, we’re going to be trying to accomplish as much (if not more) with fewer courses than under our current program. Under that constraint, we may be able to do more—require more specific kinds of things—if courses can count in more than one area. For example, instead of having students take Comm 100 and be “done” with oral communication (because those are all the credits we have room for), we could instead require an additional number of courses (maybe 2-4) that include some oral component (a presentation, or a grade for participation in discussion)—this is possible only if those other courses are not only serving to develop oral communication skills but also “count” toward something else. This kind of approach is more developmentally and pedagogically appropriate for the skills outcomes especially. Students ideally will continue to develop as writers, speakers, and thinkers throughout their entire college careers, not stop at the end of freshman or sophomore year.

I suggest that instead we try to come up with other constraints built into the specific requirements as they are structured that will address the problems with the current “silver bullet” practice. For example, we might have a minimum number of credits (perhaps in total, or perhaps within the various categories) that students have to take, regardless of silver bullets, so that someone taking a lot of silver bullets will still have to take as many, or nearly as many, courses as someone who doesn’t; they would just have more electives. That might reduce the artificial demand for such courses (and thereby any inappropriate “stuffing” of courses with GDRs on the part of departments). We could require a minimum number of gen ed courses to be taken outside the major if that is a concern.

From: Summers, Greg

	<p>Posted: Thursday, February 19, 2009 3:57 PM Subject: Comment on GEP Model Proposal</p> <p>Please use this space to offer comments and suggestions regarding the GEP Model Proposal. To begin, click the "Reply" button to the right. (If you don't see this button, click the "Sign In" icon in the upper right corner of the screen.) You may respond directly to this message or to any posted below.</p>
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Posted: 3/3/2009 4:11 PM

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Keefe, Alice

Thanks to the committee for its work on the next step of the Gen Ed model proposal.

I concur that the distributive model is the best choice for our university. I also concur with the recommendation to eliminate silver bullets, although the message posted by a non-traditional student makes me wonder if by doing so we'd be putting ourselves at a disadvantage in attracting transfer students. Will the committee address this concern?

Finally, I echo the comments of Dona Warren regarding the problems with locating the decisions about degree requirements within departments.

Sincerely,
 Alice Keefe
 Dept. of Philosophy

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Posted: 3/3/2009 4:47 PM

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Polum, Laura

Thank you to the committee for all of your hard work. It is evident that you have taken your charge seriously and put forth a tremendous amount of work.

I also agree with all of the points in Dona's response. In particular, I believe that the degree requirements should be set at the university level. I have worked as an academic advisor at both UWSP and UW-Marathon County for the past 11 years. Since I have assisted students with preparing to transfer to all 13 of the UW campuses, I have had ample opportunity to assist students in trying to navigate the general degree requirements at each campus. Without a doubt, the variability between degree types from department to department or college to college within a university complicates the transfer process for students and sometimes limits the majors that students are willing to consider declaring due to needing to "back pedal" in their GDR's for a new major of interest. The reality of limited financial resources and time are major considerations for most non-traditional, placebound, and commuting students.

The beauty of working towards a liberal arts degree is that students are constantly growing and changing in terms of who they are throughout their college careers. They become interested in new and interesting fields and ideas due to the opportunities that they experience here. Thus, through a well-developed, campus-based degree requirement program, students would be afforded more opportunity to use their credits for more detailed exploration at the upper level in their discipline rather than "making up" general requirements if they change majors due to their growth process.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide feedback. Thank you, again, for all of your hard work.

Laura Polum
 Student Academic Advising Center

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Posted: 3/9/2009 11:21 AM

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Rowe, Thomas

I see step (a) as providing a serious impediment to students who may want to switch majors. If the specific requirements for a BA or BS are controlled within departments, and especially if a student wants to switch to a different major that offers only a BA from one that offers only a BS, that could require the student to take quite a few more courses to make up the difference. We know that a majority of students switch majors at least once. This complicates things for them. Yes, the current situation could also cause such a problem, but it would be limited to once such instance, and few who would pursue one type of major would switch to the other anyway.

Further, while it may seem that a department should understand what differences there should be between a BA and a BS in that field, the University should also understand the same thing from a more generic standpoint. We may have an unusually large number of credits here as GEDs, and it may be necessary to trim those, but that does not relieve us of the obligation of considering what a college degree should entail and does not necessarily mean that an individual department knows better than the college community as a whole what a degree from this institution should cover for anyone graduating here. A BA degree has a different focus from a BS degree. If a department wants to offer only one or the other, that is a different issue. Individual departments should NOT have the authority to pick and choose the different courses for the two degree types if they choose to offer both types.

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Posted: 3/9/2009 11:07 AM

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Hastings, David

Thank you to the committee on this thorough and impressive study and proposal! I support the "Distribution Model" for the new program. For all reasons stated, this certainly has the potential for providing our students with an important and meaningful learning experience. I also agree that the concept of "silver bullets" needs to be looked at and perhaps eliminated in the present form. I think one basic idea, however, of the "silver bullet" courses is an important one: the notion of achieving successful learning outcomes with a variety of methods and "big ideas". So as the process moves on, it will be a wonderful opportunity to start with learning outcomes and perhaps come up with new interdisciplinary courses that could be the most effective way to achieve the GEP learning goals.

Posted: 3/9/2009 8:10 PM

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Kellogg, Angela

The advisors in the Student Academic Advising Center thank the GEPRC for the hard work they've done so far. We recognize this is no easy task, and appreciate the thoughtful, thorough, and transparent way in which the team has conducted the process thus far.

The Academic Advisors in the SAAC Office recently discussed Step 3 of the GEPRC proposal. Nearly 1/3 of every freshman class who enters

UWSP is undeclared and advised through the SAAC office, and many of those who initially declare majors switch their majors during the course of their college careers (many times more than once). The SAAC advisors are on the “front lines” of working with students and the general degree requirements on a daily basis, and thus are well-positioned to see how GEP changes impact the current 800+ undeclared/exploratory students and UWSP students in general.

Overall, we felt this GEP proposal was well written and provided strong rationale for the model and its relationship to degree types. We agree that the distribution model is well suited for UWSP, particularly due to the flexibility it gives students in selecting courses from a wide array of possibilities that provide them the opportunity to explore various areas and interests.

In terms of your other recommendations, we understand some of the issues that the committee raised regarding courses which satisfy more than one requirement. We can see that the existence of these “2-for-1 courses” could potentially lessen the number of general education courses students take in what is already a reduced-credit GEP. Perhaps Mary Bowman’s suggestion might offer a good compromise to the situation in which “silver bullet” courses still be allowed, but students would still need to take the total number of required general education courses, whatever that number might be.

We would also like to support Dona Warren’s recommendation that requirements for degree types be set at the University or College level. We have similar concerns with leaving the distinction between the degree types up to the individual department. Although the proposal clearly states that the definition of what constitutes a B.A. or B.S varies greatly among institutions in the U.S., we fear that without a campus definition, departments might do just what the GEPRC cautions against, i.e. “...create a tangled array of requirements that some students will find complicated and difficult to navigate.”

We also suggest that the Academic Affairs Committee clarify what a B.S. and B.A. means at UWSP. Instead of a wide variance within the institution, we should be seeking coherence on what these degree types mean at UWSP. The committee has gone to great lengths to lessen the numbers of General Degree Requirements. However, as stated in the proposal “if departments wish to require additional requirements for any particular degree, these courses would be added as part of the major, not through GEP.” Thus, if most departments

choose to do this, it would merely shift some of these requirements from the GEP into the individual majors, which seems to defeat the original purpose of reducing the GEP. Departments might create different tracks in their major based on degree type, which then would just create a “hidden” layer of general education requirements.

We particularly worry about how inconsistent degree requirements across units and “hidden” GEP requirements within majors would impact students. There are already many majors for which students have to back-track and take “extra” GDRs once they decide on their major. If we leave the degree type definition up to the departments, we fear this will make it even more difficult for students to take general education courses they’re interested in without having to worry about the “hidden” general education courses that could vary greatly between majors. A GEP often provides exploratory students a safe harbor in which to explore their interests, therefore an inconsistent GEP would make it much more difficult to move between majors efficiently once a student solidifies their educational goals. Students may also make forced decisions regarding which major to pursue based on these additional BA/BS requirements embedded within the major.

Again, we thank you for your work and appreciate the opportunity to offer our input.

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 Open Forum  
 Tuesday, February 24  
 8:00 am  
 LRC 310

No one from the campus attended.

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 Open Forum
 February 25, 2009
 12:00 pm
 LRC 301

Four members of the GEPRC were present. Four additional faculty and staff attended the session.

Much of the conversation revolved around the proposal to eliminate “silver bullets” i.e. courses that count for multiple general education requirements. Women’s Studies were cited as a program that could be negatively impacted by the elimination of silver bullets.

There was also a good deal of conversation regarding the proposal of a single general education array regardless of degree type. The concerns included the possibility of majors growing much larger to compensate for the classes that would have been included in the current BA/BS GDR structure. There was also concern expressed that students would have more trouble than they currently do in shifting from a major requiring BA GDRs to BS or vice versa.

Gary Olsen, Secretary of the day

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General Education Policy Review Committee  
Open Forum on General Education Model Proposal  
Monday, March 2, 2009 6-7pm LRC 310

In attendance were Justin Glodowski, Gary Olson, Julie Schneider and Greg Summers from the GEPRC and Tracy Feldman, Biology and Dona Warren, Philosophy

G. Summers spent 5-10 minutes explaining the “Model” proposal. T. Feldman wondered if we had suggestions how faculty could impart to students the importance and value of General Education. GEPRC members explained that this could be introduced in a freshmen seminar, but should be reiterated throughout the program.

D. Warren commented that she felt the freshmen seminar shouldn’t be major-based. Dept. could teach them, but they shouldn’t be too discipline specific so that they would be appropriate for all students, undeclared included. The GEPRC wondered whether faculty would be willing to teach freshmen seminars that aren’t discipline specific and focus mainly on what college is about (study skills, time management, etc). D. Warren said she would be very interested in teaching such a course.

We discussed the “silver bullet” part of the proposal, i.e. to eliminate them. D. Warren said that although she agreed with our rationale, she wondered if some courses couldn’t be “silver bullets” with skills + knowledge, e.g. critical thinking and natural science.

We also discussed allowing dept. to choose what degree type(s) their major would fall under. D. Warren initially believed this to be an unsound idea; however, after G. Summers explained that the dept. would not have to add

any courses to their major if it didn't want to and should consider only doing so if they felt strongly that the GEP did not provide a learning outcome essential to the major, she felt she could support dept. determining degree types.

Julie Schneider, secretary of the day

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