

Listed below are emailed comments received by GEPRC concerning our proposed Program Goals and Outcomes.

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I like this proposal very much. I would like to recommend one small change. In the first narrative paragraph, second sentence (“But global citizenship must begin at home with individuals learning to see the world from perspectives other than their own”), cut “But.” You could replace “But” with “In addition” or something like that: the current version suggests you are somehow discounting the point made in the previous sentence, when in fact you are adding to and clarifying it.

Take care,

Rob Harper (History)

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To the GEPR Committee,

I greatly appreciate the work that you have put into the important task of revising the General Education Program. Thank you for inviting feedback on the proposed goals and program outcomes. I wanted to share three concerns.

First, both the narrative and the list of outcomes seem to leave out two components stressed in the AAC&U definition of “liberal education”: history, and “ways of knowing.” College educators in many disciplines continually lament the fact that students do not know history, and that this lack of knowledge greatly impedes their understanding of the present. Perhaps the committee worried that mentioning the word “history” would seem protectionist of one particular discipline, though of course each discipline has a history and has some curriculum oriented toward understanding the relations between past and present. To avoid this concern, though, one could instead use the word “past” or the phrase, “past and present.” For example:

Some perspectives come from honing new intellectual skills, by learning math and science, for example, or cultivating *an understanding of the past and* an appreciation of the arts and literature.

Demonstrate broad knowledge of the world’s *past and present* peoples, cultures, and social institutions.

Second, I see a difference between having skills, having knowledge, and having an understanding of the processes by which knowledge is produced in various fields. The draft seems to focus on the first two (skills and knowledge) and leave out the third (“ways of knowing”). In my view, though, the single most important reason for requiring an English major to take a science class is for that student to gain an understanding of the fundamental methodologies by which scientific knowledge is generated and tested. S/he may not come away from an introductory level course with a thorough understanding of star formation or plant biology. But s/he should be able to appreciate scientific forms of reasoning, and hence be a more informed consumer of scientific information. Your emphasis on acquiring new perspectives seems to point toward the importance of understanding ways of knowing. What does the world look like from the perspective of a physicist, as opposed to that of a philosopher, a sociologist, or an artist? What kinds of questions does each discipline ask, and how do professionals in each discipline arrive at answers? However, this important component does not find its way into the learning outcomes as presently formulated. In my view, this absence limits the richness and depth of the learning outcomes, and might ultimately limit the richness and depth of the courses offered to help students meet them.

Third, the definition of “liberal education” given in the first sentence of the narrative description (“a liberal education—an education that equips students to recognize their talents and discover their potential”) translates only imperfectly the definition given in the recently approved mission statement (“equipping students with the knowledge and skills to facilitate intellectual and personal growth, pursue their advanced studies, and improve the world in which they live”). It also seems out of joint with the definition adopted by the UW System from the AAC&U (“Liberal education is a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement”). The definition given in the narrative makes it sound as though liberal education is exclusively a matter of personal development and personal discovery. I think this is a less inspiring definition than either the one in the mission statement or the one from AAC&U. Also, it does not seem to match the remainder of your narrative, which emphasizes seeing the world from other perspectives and stepping outside the familiar, rather than cultivating what is already inside the self. I wondered if the committee considered simply using the AAC&U definition, and then adding something like: At UWSP, we particularly emphasize the importance of preparing students to be global citizens... (and continue from there).

Thanks again for your time, and for considering these suggestions.

Best wishes,
Lorri Nandrea
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Don,

I just wanted to let you know that I really liked the draft learning outcomes. I don't have any substantial edits.

Tim Ginnett

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Hi, Don,

I applaud your efforts on the GEP committee and the documents you and the committee have prepared to date. I'm sure this is a gargantuan task!

You have asked for input on the documents. I have read the ones that were distributed via MOD and just have two comments.

1) I noticed the lack of the term "critical thinking" in the documents. I do see places where critical thinking is implied, but "critical thinking" is a fundamental construct of higher education and I'm just wondering why this terminology was not used in the GEP documents. If it is just a matter of word choice, the committee may wish to consider including "critical thinking" in its description of the goals of the GEP courses. If it was purposely omitted because of the focus on assessable outcomes, is there some way to include the term "critical thinking" within the context of an assessable outcome, as its omission seems conspicuous?

2) While it is included in the preamble of the proposal, "science" is missing from the four statements of learning outcomes. The first outcome suggests scientific exposure, but I think this outcome would benefit and be clarified from inclusion of the term "science".

Thanks for your consideration off the above and for all of your hard work on the GEP committee.

John P. Droske
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Dear Don and Greg,

I might not be able to make it to the meeting next week, but I have a few thoughts concerning the proposed goals and outcomes (“Explanation of Program Outcome Proposal” PDF).

- 1- With the exception of the third outcome (“Recognize, etc.”), the “Explanations” seem to be mostly rearranging the furniture and not really explaining the stated goal beyond the wording of the goal itself.
- 2- Is it too late to revise the language of the goals themselves? I’m thinking especially of #2, “Demonstrate broad knowledge of the world’s peoples, cultures, and social institutions”—could we consider adding “including our own”? “Know thyself” is one of the oldest pieces of advice for those wishing to know where to start along the journey toward knowledge, and it seems important to emphasize that students’ ability to appreciate other cultures depends to some degree on their awareness of their own.
- 3- On a practical level, I’m concerned about the statement, “We deliberately sought to avoid language that would point directly at specific courses, departments, or programs.” I understand the reasoning for this, but in the end somebody, eventually students, will need to choose specific courses housed in specific departments or programs. The idea of making specific course recommendations is unpleasant because there certainly will be “winners and losers” and there is bound to be much debate and disagreement concerning which courses will “count.” But I think it would be healthy to be as explicit as we can about this now (perhaps in the “Explanation” sections) to identify which courses or departments or disciplines will be called upon to help achieve each particular outcome. The more we pass the buck of making these hard decisions to students who “have no clear idea why UWSP requires the completion of a general education curriculum,” the harder it will be to achieve our primary objective of revising the GDRs. Also, it will help people understand what we really mean by the various

outcome statements. Perhaps in later stages of this process we will be looking more at the details of specific course requirements, but I think the more specific we can be now the better. If GDRs will ultimately come from a select few departments, we should know that up front; likewise, if we are trying to spread them out evenly through every department or college, we need to be explicit about that too. Right now it's vague enough for everyone to be vacillating between excessive anxiety and excessive complacency about how these changes will affect their departments.

Thank you for considering these thoughts, and thank you for your work on this important committee.

M. Wade Mahon

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Hi Greg

First, I would post this to the web site offered in the explanation document, but there is no link in the "upper right hand portion of the screen" and the little sign-in box does not accept me as an authorized person. Hence, this e-mail since its unlikely I will be at the public meeting.

The substantive comment involves the fourth bulleted point. To satisfy that point there will have to be courses designated as interdisciplinary, presumably because of content, or actually interdisciplinary in being courses taught by more than one academic area. The former is either going to be met with new courses not currently on the books or it will be basically a fiction by saying a current course cuts across disciplinary lines. I would anticipate that most course so designated would be an academic fiction. The latter, forming new courses taught by faculty from multiple areas, seems to me to be largely impractical.

My basic suggestion is to drop that point. It seems an unnecessary complication without actually doing anything substantive because a truly substantive response is going to be too difficult to implement. Rather, if you want a real global perspective, then encourage growth in International programs and require some academic time spent out of the country. That's not going to be possible for most students because of expense, but it would more realistically satisfy the educational requirement you are aiming at.

In the end, the goals and objectives statement is well crafted, but I fear what will happen is when you start becoming course specific you will wind up packaging courses that merely touch on areas as opposed to actually satisfying your objectives if you leave that last point in.

Just one man's opinion...

Tom Rowe

Psychology

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Hi Greg and Don,

Like Tom Rowe, I also had problems figuring out how to leave feedback using the <https://committees.uwsp.edu/gedpolrev/outcomes/default.aspx> website.

Here's the Library faculty's collective response:

Both the UW System's "Shared Learning Goals for Baccalaureate Students" and LEAP's "Essential Learning Outcomes" acknowledge the relevance of information literacy. The former specifically mentions it as a component of "Effective Communication skills," and the latter subsumes it under "Intellectual and Practical Skills," assigning it the same high-level standing as "inquiry and analysis," "written and oral communication," and "quantitative literacy." Given the importance of information literacy in our global information-driven society, please consider giving it the prominence that it deserves by

incorporating it into the GEP Learning Outcomes. This could be easily accomplished by inserting the term “information-literacy” (here hyphenated since it functions as an adjective, or unit modifier) into the first of the four GEP Learning Outcomes:

- Demonstrate quantitative, analytical, communicative and information-literacy skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing global society.

(We moved together “quantitative” and “analytical” since, as types of reasoning skills, they are closely related.)

The Library faculty appreciates your good work.

Axel

Axel Schmetzke, Ph.D.

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Thanks to the committee for their work on the current draft of the GEP learning outcomes.

I like very much the discussion with which you preface these outcomes. In this preface, the committee’s rationale for selecting this model is connected to its view a liberal arts education should foster the capacity to see oneself and others from new perspectives, and to gain empathy for and understanding of persons, ideas and cultures which are different from their own. This is a great pedagogical goal to emphasize. I would however like to see stronger lines of connection between the philosophy of liberal education expressed in this preface with the four specific learning outcomes you present.

The comments which follow are my own, but were developed in the context of a conversation with the entire Philosophy Department at our recent faculty meeting. I especially thank Dona Warren, James Sage and Karin Fry for their contributions to my thoughts about the GEP draft.

1. I am not confident that your preface provides adequate justification for the selection of these four specific program goals. I would have liked to see a rationale for departing from the traditional model of a tri-partite program in which some GEP requirements are divided between the physical sciences (including math), the social sciences and the humanities. Such a distributive model is at the foundation of UWSP's current Gen Ed program; students must take some courses in all three divisions of the liberal arts. I'd like to know the reasons why you decided to depart from this model. The four program outcomes you set forth do not clearly stipulate whether exposure to all three areas of the liberal arts will remain a program goal or not.

2. Program goal number 2 "demonstrate broad knowledge of the world's peoples, cultures and social institutions" needs to become more specific I believe. "Broad knowledge" is a very vague term, and further, stops short pedagogically at the stage of accumulating information. This outcome could be more closely linked to the philosophy of liberal education specified in your preface by linking the accumulation of knowledge to the exercise of critical thinking skills and the fostering of intellectual maturity. Such goals are suggested in several of the learning outcomes set forth in the UW System Liberal Arts Learning Outcomes: #3 "interpret and evaluate information from a variety of sources, #4 "make complex connections....," #7 demonstrate intellectual agility and the ability to manage change and ambiguity, and especially #9 "*acquire a deep understanding of one's self and respect for the complex identities of others, their histories and their cultures.*" This last goal (#9) most precisely gets at the reason why students need to gain a "broad knowledge" of the larger world. Its language about seeking knowledge *of self* and others, and seeking understanding of *the complexities of other worlds*, may also be helpful if you want to make your program goal number 2 more specific.

3. As the Philosophy department faculty discussed your third program goal, it became apparent that the language is ambiguous. Some of us read this outcome as referring to personal responsibility, social equity and environmental sustainability as three distinct goals. Others read the final clause "in managing the world's resources" as qualifying not just environmental sustainability but also personal responsibility and social equity so that the entire outcome refers to issues of environmental sustainability and awareness. If the latter interpretation is correct, then we felt that the outcomes may be too heavily focused on environmentalism to the exclusion of other important educational goals relating to personal responsibility and civic engagement. Further, it might be helpful to specify *why* it is important to foster an ethic of responsibility and engagement. My suggestion for this third program outcome would be something along these lines: "*cultivate an ethics of personal, social and environmental responsibility with the aim of preparing students to actively participate as citizens of a multifaceted democracy and a globally connected society.*" This language has the extra benefit of connecting the

challenges of citizenship within a pluralist democracy with the goal of fostering global citizenship.

4. The fourth program goal “apply their knowledge and skills” doesn’t clearly say how or why they should apply their knowledge and skills. I like better the language of goal #5 of the UW System Liberal Arts Learning outcomes: “Transform information into knowledge and knowledge into judgment and action”

Sincerely,
Alice Keefe
Professor of Religious Studies
Department of Philosophy

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