

Official Memorandum of Action – MOA-16/06
General Education Revision

Name of Council/Committee:
Ad Hoc General Education Committee

Meeting Date:
8 February 2016

Implementation Date:
Upon Administrative Approval

RECOMENDATION:

The Ad Hoc General Education Committee recommends that the Faculty Senate officially recognize the need to revise and refocus WMU's current general education curriculum and initiate this revision with the following priorities. (see attached)

Daniel Jacobson

12 February 2016

Daniel Jacobson or Bruce Ferrin, Co-Chair, Ad Hoc General Education Committee

Date

☒ Approve
Comments:

☐ Disapprove

☐ Return to council/committee

*Approved, as amended, by the Faculty Senate
on 7 April 2016*

C. Dennis Simpson

3 March 2016

C. Dennis Simpson, Faculty Senate President

Date

☒ Approve
Comments:

☐ Disapprove

☐ Other action

Timothy J. Greene

9/9/16

Timothy J. Greene, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Date

☒ Approve
Comments:

☐ Disapprove

☐ Other action

John M. Dunn

9/12/2016

John M. Dunn, WMU President

Date

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RATIONALE:

WMU's current general education curriculum does not have a purpose that is clear or meaningful to our students and even some faculty; therefore, it cannot fully serve our students' needs, maximize the strengths of the faculty and university, or function as the unifying fabric of a WMU undergraduate education. Western's general education curriculum should be revised to align as closely as possible with the university's documented mission, vision and Strategic Plan — in particular, by making it more "Learner-Centered." To accomplish this, and to embrace best practices for student learning (as current research and several innovative general education models show), the curriculum must balance essential student learning outcomes with content delivery.

WMU's current mission, vision and Strategic Plan, were adopted in March 2016, but WMU's existing model with its cafeteria-style structure of Distribution Areas and Proficiencies is nearly 30 years old, and is based on curriculum design concepts that are over 100 years old. A WMU education must prepare students for the present and the future.

The essential learning outcomes the Ad Hoc Committee recommends are fully aligned with AAC&U's L.E.A.P. initiative (*Liberal Education and America's Promise*). Universities in 12 states (Michigan, California, Texas, Massachusetts, Indiana, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington, Virginia, Utah, Kentucky) have endorsed LEAP, and are leading the way in the reform and modernization of general education curricula. Institutions such as Grand Valley State University and University of North Dakota – Grand Forks (a WMU peer institution) have already implemented innovative and successful 21st-century general education revisions based on these LEAP principles; Michigan State has adopted LEAP outcomes and is in the midst of implementing them. The new general education curricula at these institutions focus on (1) developing meaningful curricular paths for students, (2) incorporating clear learning outcomes across the curriculum, and (3) employing valid assessment methods that allow students to demonstrate what they can do and what they know. These are the goals of general education reform at WMU.

RECOMMENDATION:

In order to give the general education curriculum a clear and meaningful purpose that aligns with WMU's vision, mission and Strategic Plan, the Faculty Senate should

1. Endorse a learner-centered approach to general education that balances learning of essential skills and content while prioritizing student learning outcomes that prepare our students to succeed in an ever-changing 21st-century world.
2. Adopt the following university-wide set of essential learning outcomes that can be traced across the curriculum:

WMU Essential Student Learning Outcomes

Through learner-centered approaches, the WMU General Education program will enable students to:

- a. Expand their understanding of human cultures and the physical/natural world
 - Increase their foundational knowledge of the sciences, social sciences, humanities and the arts
 - Apply different methods of intellectual inquiry, investigation and discovery
 - Develop awareness of how everyday actions affect quality of life for all
- b. Enhance intellectual and practical skills
 - Demonstrate effective and appropriate oral, written and digital communication abilities
 - Develop creative and critical thinking
 - Demonstrate and apply information literacy and scientific literacy
 - Analyze and interpret quantitative data
- c. Exercise personal and social responsibility

- Develop understanding and practices for personal wellness
 - Practice sensitivity to diversity and inclusion
 - Exercise civic responsibility and become engaged in their communities at the local level and beyond
 - Develop global awareness
 - Gain familiarity with a language other than English
 - Develop practices for planetary sustainability
- d. Exhibit integrative and applied learning
- Apply ethical, critical, and informed thought within and across disciplines
 - Work both independently and in collaboration with others to achieve goals
 - Become lifelong learners
3. Adopt a curriculum structure that supports essential learning outcomes, and that simplifies and refines the menu-driven structure of the existing general education curriculum. The new structure should merge proficiencies with content knowledge by scaffolding intellectual and practical skills across disciplines and curricula:
- Build foundations;
 - Integrate and apply them through additional content courses — some of which will address "big questions" and real-world problems;
 - Use these learning outcomes as a means to enhance and support students' successful work in their chosen major(s) and/or minor(s), culminating with a capstone;
 - Make appropriate connections with relevant programs such as the First-Year Experience, Broncos First, and the WMU Signature initiative.
4. Ensure the ongoing assessment of essential learning outcomes across the undergraduate curriculum for the benefit of our students, and to remedy the concerns raised by the Higher Learning Commission.
5. Appoint an ad hoc committee with a minimum of two charges: a) to create (an) alternative model(s) of a revised general education curriculum based on the recommendations outlined in this MOA; and b) to engage the university community in the naming of the new general education curriculum.