

Faculty Senate approves student learning outcomes as part of liberal education reform efforts

by Jaime Hunt - Wednesday, May 28, 2008

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/933/faculty-senate-approves-student-learning-outcomes-as-part-of-liberal-education-reform-efforts/>

To better prepare students for a global economy, the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is undertaking an effort to redefine curriculum to provide the broad knowledge and skills students should expect to get from a liberal education.

Toward that end, the University's Faculty Senate has approved a set of UW Oshkosh Student Learning Outcomes, which provide a framework that represents how a liberally educated college graduate should operate. The learning outcomes were developed by the University's Liberal Education Reform Team (LERT) and Resource Group, comprised of faculty, staff and students. The proposed liberal education learning outcomes include:

- Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world through study in fine and performing arts, humanities, mathematics and science, and social science.
- Both intellectual and practical skills, including identification and objective evaluation of theories and assumptions; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; technology and information literacy; teamwork; leadership; and problem solving. The skills should be practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects and standards for performance.
- Responsibility, as individuals and communities, including knowledge of sustainability and its applications; civic knowledge and engagement — local and global; intercultural knowledge and competence; ethical reasoning and action; foundations and skills for lifelong learning. These skills will be developed through real-world challenges and active involvement with diverse communities.
- Learning that is integrated, synthesized, and advanced, including synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

“Many students believe that they attend universities primarily to receive credentials for employment and that general education courses are, for the most part, irrelevant in terms of achieving this goal,” said Chancellor Richard H. Wells. “However, UW Oshkosh believes we need to deliver a strong, intentional liberal education if our students are to succeed in this ever-changing global century.”

The value of a liberal education, which includes a general education curriculum that provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and ways of knowing, along with more in-depth study in at least one field or area of concentration, cannot be overstated,” said John Koker, dean of the College of Letters and

Science. “It is a means to developing well-rounded individuals with critical thinking and problem solving skills. The set of learning outcomes we have adopted will act as a framework as our faculty design, develop, implement and assess curriculum. The learning outcomes will help us to become more intentional in what we do and to communicate clearly those intentions to students.”

The LERT effort is guided by the framework established by the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) campaign and its report, College Learning for the New Global Century, which spells out the essential aims, learning outcomes and guiding principles for a 21st-century college education. The next steps for LERT are to conduct a self study to determine how the various campus units are currently addressing the learning outcomes, and to create a plan that will enable UW Oshkosh faculty and instructional staff to set specific objectives that will lead to students’ achievement of the learning outcomes.

“We will use the Student Learning Outcomes to communicate to students, parents and the broader community the meaning and value of a quality university education,” said Provost Lane Earns. The adoption of the Student Learning Outcomes reinforces UW Oshkosh’s leadership role in AAC&U’s national LEAP campaign and the state’s companion initiative entitled Liberal Education and Wisconsin’s Promise.”

“The members of the LERT group spent the past year talking with faculty, students and staff on campus about the proposed student learning outcomes, and their commitment to transparency and their passion for liberal education were instrumental in moving this initiative forward in such a timely manner,” said Susan Nuernberg, an English professor and one of the co-captains of the LERT team.

For more information about LERT, visit www.uwosh.edu/projects/lert/lert.php.