

General Education Reform Proposal: Revisions & Clarifications

The University Studies Program (USP) proposal has been revised and will now be submitted to faculty governance. The changes and clarifications that have been made to the proposal based on campus input collected via recent surveys, open forums, and discussion board posts, are highlighted herein.

The three major changes to be found in the final revision include:

- The description of the **Culture** category in **EXPLORE** has been revised;
- The designated percentage of **Signature Question** content in **Quest II** and **III** courses has changed from 50 percent to a minimum of 30 to 50 percent;
- The **CONNECT** course will now synthesize all three **Signature Questions** rather than focusing on one of them.

Additional substantive clarifications are also included in the final revision of the proposal and are described below.

General education reform is needed, now—and it will continue to be needed in the future. This proposal represents a **first step**. It has been generated by extensive interdisciplinary conversations that began with a formal charge in 2007 (which led to the **Essential Learning Outcomes** and a Framework for General Education Reform), a new charge and new teams, and finally, this proposal in March 2012.

The passage of this proposal will create something that has not previously existed at UW Oshkosh—a **program**—that will need ongoing coordination, assessment, and revision. Importantly, the curricular changes that will be launched by the acceptance of this proposal are a **starting point** for a living, breathing program of general education on this campus. Just as we continually alter our major and minor programs based on student learning needs, developments in our disciplines, logistics related to demand and personnel, information provided via program assessment, accreditation requirements (in some disciplines and colleges), so we, as a campus community, must be prepared to continually reflect upon, update, and improve this University Studies Program for general education.

Over the past six years, several committees have been charged with the task of leading the general education reform process on our campus. The first group was “LERT” – the Liberal Education Reform Team, which had several iterations from 2007-2011. After that group concluded its responsibilities, the current group was charged in June 2011, with multidisciplinary summer working teams moving the framework based on the **Essential Learning Outcomes** forward into a draft proposal. After that intensive summer work, the fall semester began with an invitation for campus input on a draft proposal.

Throughout fall 2011, interim, and spring 2012 semesters, multiple public mechanisms for generating awareness and collecting further ideas from the campus community have been in place to ensure the transparency of the reform process. These mechanisms have included:

- weekly emails (Tuesday email blasts, currently archived on the website);
- an extensive general education reform website including relevant resources, national models, and a discussion board accompanying the regularly-updated versions of the proposal;

- multiple open sessions at the *Provost's Teaching and Learning Summit* (October 2011);
- student general education and relevant transfer experience feedback gathered during the *Provost's Teaching & Learning Summit*;
- continued input through biweekly meetings with members of the summer working teams, who comprise the larger reform committee;
- leadership team attendance at biweekly Faculty Senate meetings for reporting and input;
- meetings with all interested departments/programs and colleges (more than 50 to date), including the Senate of Academic Staff and the Oshkosh Student Association;
- meetings with all chairs and divisions of the College of Letters and Science;
- ongoing email comments and suggestions from many individuals, compiled and discussed by the committee charged with the reform of general education;
- meetings with representatives of the Center for New Learning and offices of the Registrar, Advising, and Admissions;
- collaborative conversations with students, faculty and staff from area two-year and technical colleges;
- coverage in the *Advanced Titan*, WRST, Titan TV, the campus *Engage* magazine (forthcoming) and the *Oshkosh Northwestern* (forthcoming).

This semester (spring 2012), the reform committee launched a second website (the University Studies Program Proposal website), distributed printed copies of the draft proposal, administered online surveys to 1) faculty/staff and 2) students, compiled survey results, posted all results (including each comment) to the website, and held two campus-wide Open Forums.

This monumental reform undertaking has been possible only by this extensive participation of the UW Oshkosh campus community. The faculty/staff survey results indicate that a majority of respondents support the University Studies Program proposal and its various elements, while the comments provided substantive material to consider. The student survey comments reveal a need for our campus community to enhance and demonstrate the value of general education for students.

To construct the final version of the proposal, the leadership team met for another weekend "revision retreat" to consider the survey results, each survey comment, discussion board interaction, open forum comments (which were carefully documented and grouped by theme), and recent emails and personal conversations.

What follows is a list of changes and clarifications to the University Studies Program proposal based on all of these forms of feedback:

A. CHANGES:

1. **EXPLORE CATEGORIES:** The description of the **Culture** category has been revised to read as follows: "*Students will explore human thought, its intellectual foundations, and/or creative expression in courses in the humanities and the fine and performing arts.*"

The three categories for **EXPLORE** courses represent complex goals, including ensuring disciplinary breadth; not limiting interdisciplinary programs and cross-listed courses; maintaining math and lab science requirements; selecting names that will be easily understood, referenced, and coded for student use; and allowing for exceptions in the few areas (disciplines/departments/colleges) where substantive variety exists. Note first that courses in all four COLS divisions are critical to and required of students in the USP and for that reason the divisions are linked to and identified with the three categories. Note also that the short terms (**Nature, Culture, Society**) are intentionally brief to guide students' understanding of the kinds of arenas of intellectual inquiry they will be exploring; the descriptions of these categories are intended to offer more revealing guides for the teaching community to determine the placement of Explore courses in the USP curriculum.

2. **SIGNATURE QUESTION CONTENT IN QUEST COURSES:** percentage of **Signature Question** content integration in **Quests II** and **III** have been revised and further specified as follows:
 - The course will be expected to include "significant engagement" with the **Signature Question** linked to it. "Significant engagement" is defined as an apparent focus and/or integration of the content into a minimum of 30 to 50 percent of the course. (The minimum **SQ** content in **Quest I** remains 25 percent; this percentage is lower than **Quest II** and **III** because **Quest I** courses must also incorporate the First-Year Experience elements.)
 - Evidence of significant engagement with the **Signature Question** content includes relevant student learning outcomes and graded assignments and is intended to be apparent in the course syllabus.
 - All **QUEST** instructors (**I, II, and III**) will be supported by collaborative professional development to assist with the curricular modification necessary to integrate **Signature Question** content into their courses (if such content is not already present in the proposed course).
 - Like all elements of the USP, the **Signature Questions** will be open to assessment, critique, and revision as the program is implemented and comes into being as a campus curriculum.

Further note that each **QUEST** course will be identified with a **Signature Question**. Changes to **QUEST** courses (including its **Signature Question**) will occur only through the curricular review process (i.e. courses cannot change their **Signature Question** from semester to semester without curricular review).

3. **CONNECT WRITING COURSE:** The **CONNECT** writing course will provide the opportunity for students to synthesize **all three Signature Questions** (as opposed to focusing on one **Signature Question** of the student's choosing). Expanded philosophical goals and professional development commitments related to the **CONNECT** course are further developed in the revised proposal.

B. CLARIFICATIONS:

1. **QUEST III CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:** support in the form of professional development as well as dedicated campus assistance for the **Quest III** civic engagement project will be provided. As stated in the proposal, this project is envisioned to afford an initial opportunity for **campus or community** engagement, to prepare and motivate students for further, more substantive civic engagement in their majors and beyond. Options for types of projects will be collaboratively constructed, connections with campus and community groups (and mechanisms for interaction between them) will be established, and logistical support will be provided. As has been noted previously, these projects can be accomplished as a whole class, in small groups with a peer mentor, or through documentation of individual involvement. While the establishment of this component of the program will be challenging, the committee recommends retaining it in the proposal based on research regarding positive benefits for students (“high-impact practice”), the success of other campuses similar to ours in incorporating such programs into their curricula, established campus resources (American Democracy Project, peer mentors, volunteer coordinator with multiple related programs, etc.), and support among many students and members of the academic community. The implementation of this component of the USP is envisioned to require collaboration among student support staff and instructional personnel.
2. **TERMS FOR USP COMPONENTS:** While many terms were considered by the reform teams for the separate components of the program, the terms **QUESTION**, **EXPLORATION**, and **CONNECTION** were ultimately selected to build upon the successful Odyssey program for incoming UW Oshkosh students. The terms also reinforce the goal of assisting students in developing responsibility for their own learning while underscoring the fact that knowledge is driven by inquiry.
3. **QUEST II CAP:** The “cap” of 50 for **Quest II** classes is not arbitrary. While very small classes would be ideal, they are also expensive. **Quest II**, capped at 50, will be paired with two sections of the writing or speaking class, each capped at 25. To change the cap of **Quest II** to 40 would create problems with the pairing process necessary for the formation of the learning community. Also, as previously specified, **Quest II** classes with lab sections will have their lab section paired with the writing or speaking course, while the lecture section may remain large. (Further note: no class size cap has been proposed for **EXPLORE** courses.)
4. **SELECTION OF THREE SIGNATURE QUESTIONS:** Our campus **Essential Learning Outcomes** list five “Responsibilities,” three of which have been designated as **Signature Questions** in the USP. The other two (Ethical Reasoning and Action, and Lifelong Learning) have been integrated in other ways in the proposal. The three **Essential Learning Outcomes** that were phrased as **Signature Questions (Sustainability, Civic Knowledge and Engagement, Intercultural Knowledge and Competence)** were selected because they correspond with distinctive campus initiatives and student learning commitments that are already established as identifying features of UW Oshkosh. Like all elements of the USP, the **Signature Questions** will be open to assessment, critique, and revision as the program is implemented and comes into being as a campus curriculum.
5. **COURSE VS PROGRAM ASSESSMENT:** The **ePortfolio** is proposed as a tool for assessment within each USP course as well as assessment of the program overall. In individual USP classes, an assignment (or assignments) of the instructor’s choosing shall be uploaded into the **ePortfolio**. Programmatic assessment of the USP will occur during the **CONNECT** and **CAPSTONE** courses through a sample selection of student **ePortfolios**.

While the programmatic assessment procedures need additional clarification, **CONNECT** and **CAPSTONE** instructors will not be responsible for the assessment of the University Studies Program overall. See the assessment section of the revised USP proposal for additional information. Note that professional development and on-line resources related to assessment of the **Essential Learning Outcomes** will be ongoing.

6. **TRANSFER STUDENT CAMPUS ACCULTURATION:** One of the goals of the University Studies Program transfer policy is to ensure maximum ease of course transferability both for students transferring into UW Oshkosh and for students transferring from UW Oshkosh to other institutions. The proposed zero-credit Transfer Experience Course (TYE) for students transferring to UW Oshkosh with 30 to 59 credits is designed to expand the current optional, valuable, but not well-attended acculturation to UW Oshkosh workshop into a required, substantive experience at no cost to transfer students. Note that this group of transfer students is exempt from completing **Quest I** and **II**, which are designed for first-year students. Transfer student experts working with the Titan Transfer Center and grant monies will implement and assess the TYE to determine the efficacy of this model. At that time, recommendations regarding the program will be provided to those responsible for the USP, as the academic success of transfer students continues to be a priority for our campus.
7. **NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS:** Non-traditional students, including students in the Center for New Learning and others who complete the bulk of their classes on-line, are important members of our student body for whom the **Essential Learning Outcomes** are as vital as they are to all other students. In addition, non-traditional students may be engaged primarily in “remote” learning, may have life experiences significantly different from those of traditionally-aged students, and may have logistical/life demands that affect their curricular and co-curricular choices. While some of these students will take “unpaired” **QUEST** courses given the demands of their curriculum, a designated committee is envisioned that will address matters related to USP requirements and non-traditional students, including how the current Credit for Prior Learning policy may relate to the **Quest III** civic engagement project and/or online options for USP courses.
8. **ADVISING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** professional development related to USP advising will be made available. An important component of the implementation process will include the development of clear and informative materials for students, parents, and other constituents, as the UW Oshkosh campus community enhances its public affirmation of the value of **Liberal Education** through its University Studies Program.

Some have noted that the University Studies Program proposal seems complex. To the extent that the USP is intentionally based on the achievement of student **Essential Learning Outcomes** and proven pedagogical practices (first-year experience, learning communities, etc.), this program is more elaborate than our current general education requirements. The current system has not required many on campus to have a comprehensive understanding of how it functions.

The University Studies Program will in fact demand a more active participation from all of us; it will require significant trust, collaboration and connection across units as we implement the details of this cohesive **program**. The benefits for our students’ learning, however, are worth the efforts of implementation. This exciting proposal will allow our campus community to increase student engagement, enhance students’ academic success, contribute to student retention and graduation rates, and allow intellectual invigoration through a collaborative commitment to research-based instructional practice.