The General Education Task Force, originally convened in October of 2010 continued its work during the 2011-2012 academic year. The provost expanded the committee to include a member to represent the core writing program, a member from the College of Science core curriculum subcommittee, and the Director of the Core Curriculum. Committee members are listed at the end of this report.

The task force reviewed the results from the campus wide survey on competencies, conducted during Spring 2011. Competencies that ranked highest for both students and faculty included critical thinking, integrative thinking, written literacy, oral literacy, information literacy, and ethics. Examination of general education elements from campuses across the country also revealed that most retain specific content areas in disciplines that utilize different modes of reasoning; the Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences. The task force had been asked to consider an outcomes-based approach in defining general education in reviewing our core curriculum. With this in mind, the fall semester meetings focused on articulating outcomes that might be specific to the different modes of reasoning that are an essential part of the existing core, to help better define key elements that should be part of our general education. Each week the committee heard from a different member of the campus community who had deep experience with those elements of the core that focused on writing, quantitative thinking, natural sciences, social sciences, fine arts and the humanities. These discussions helped the committee focus on essential learning outcomes associated with these different modes of reasoning. The task force also met with members of the campus community who focused on diversity.

The Provost provided resources to collect data from other institutions that had recently gone through a revision of their general education in the form of an educational consulting firm that could do some research for our task force. The task force developed a set of questions for this firm, which then provided the task force with a report. Ideas from that report were considered in addition to our discussion in devising approaches for implementation. That research brief is attached to this document.

The focused discussion from the fall semester led to initial efforts to develop a set of outcomes for general education that could be implemented through a revised general education. The committee felt that it was important to provide two alternative approaches to be discussed across the campus. With that in mind, we developed two subcommittees, each tasked with developing an approach. One team, the Silver Team, was tasked with producing an outcomes based plan that incorporated the ideas developed by the committee, and would be relatively
easy to implement. The Blue Team was to devise a plan that moved towards a more integrative general education model, similar to models seen at other campuses across the country (see pg. 5 of attached research brief *Considerations for Development and Assessment of Outcomes-Based General Education Curricula*). The purpose of this was to see what an approach that tried to bridge the disciplines might look like.

The committee was not tasked with reducing credits within the general education to meet the new 120 credit degree requirement from the regents. At the same time, the committee was aware of many comments that had been forwarded through the survey to consider reducing the core. This concern had been originally voiced in the external review. The committee had communication with those at other NSHE institutions responsible for General Education about their requirements as well, knowing that while each campus may act independently, in the end general education requirements must be articulated between campuses. Both the Silver and Blue approaches did reduce the total credits from the current core, but retained a higher number than the minimum required by the Board of Regents.

Once the two draft approaches were prepared, members of the task force met with key groups across campus largely responsible for general education. These included Chairs and Deans from each college, the Academic Leadership Council, Core Board, Faculty Senate Academic Standards Committee, Faculty Senate Commission for the Future of UNR, International Activities Committee, the ASUN Senate, and the Core Writing Program. In addition, comments were openly solicited on a campus blog. The transcripts and notes from each of these meetings and the blog posts are included in the appendices.

The committee then considered the comments and feedback from these meetings in producing revised versions of the outcomes desired for graduates of UNR, and the Silver and Blue approaches for implementing these outcomes. Those revised approaches are attached as part of this report.

**Next Steps**

These revised plans will be the basis for a campus-wide discussion. In the fall semester, the intent is to present the revised plans to the campus for a decision about which alternative the faculty prefers. This process may include open forums, debates and other methods appropriate to fully explaining the two proposed approaches. The task force has communicated with the Faculty Senate, and the Senate will play a key role in devising a plan for a faculty vote. Following the campus-wide discussion, this vote is planned for the Fall semester of 2012. The outcome of a vote will indicate the approach faculty members prefer to take in revising the university’s general education requirements. A specific plan for implementation would still be required before any new general education requirement could be adopted.
The task force is grateful to the many members of the campus community who have participated in this dialogue and contributed to the process. We recognize that this is a challenging process, there are a number of ways to construct a general education, and no one approach is necessarily correct. This process provides an opportunity for faculty to help direct the approach that we feel will best serve our students over the coming years and further strengthens undergraduate education at UNR.

Report contents

1. Proposed Competencies of a UNR graduate
2. Revised Silver Alternative for General Education
3. Revised Blue Alternative for General Education
4. Comments on original Silver and Blue Alternatives received from campus-wide meetings and blog postings
5. Original Silver Alternative for General Education
6. Original Blue Alternative for General Education
7. Research brief, Considerations for Development and Assessment of Outcomes-Based General Education Curricula.

Respectfully submitted,

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Rosemary McCarthy

College of Science
ASUN
ASUN
ASUN
ASUN
College of Ag., Biotech. & Nat. Res.
College of Business
College of Education
College of Education
College of Engineering
College of Liberal Arts
College of Liberal Arts
College of Liberal Arts
College of Liberal Arts
College of Liberal Arts
College of Science
College of Science
Director, Core Curriculum
Division of Health Sciences
Division of Health Sciences
Reynolds School of Journalism
Competencies of a UNR Graduate

As a land grant, research institution, the University of Nevada, Reno will offer all of its students an education that prepares them to meet the multiple challenges of the future. This has two discrete components, a broad, general foundation that provides all students with fundamental intellectual skills and knowledge about the world in which they live, and a more advanced, specialized knowledge of a particular discipline, which is offered by the major. The University intends to cultivate student’s intellectual and practical skills, including inquiry and analysis; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy; and teamwork and problem solving. General education will promote personal and social responsibility through civic knowledge and engagement; intercultural knowledge and competence; ethical reasoning and action; and foundations and skills for lifelong learning. The University will cultivate student’s knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world as well as develop integrative and applied learning skills.

The following competencies describe the general characteristics found in graduates of the University.

Skills: Graduates demonstrate mastery of a range of broadly applicable fundamental skills and methods of inquiry. Additional details for these general skills are provided below to serve as examples that fall under each competency.

A. Communication Skills. Graduates exhibit effective communication skills, ranging from composition of thoughts to discourse for a variety of scholarly and professional purposes.
   - Oral and written discourse
   - Communication of quantitative information
   - Creative expression
   - Critical reading skills

B. Quantitative Skills. Graduates are able to understand and solve problems through the application of mathematics and statistics.
   - Knowledge of mathematical and statistical concepts and methods
   - Interpretation of quantitative information and relationships

C. Methods of Inquiry. Graduates are able to engage in systematic processes for researching problems in a range of content areas.
   - Framing the inquiry process by formulating hypotheses, questions, and problems.
   - Location, retrieval, and critical evaluation of information
   - Selection of appropriate observation, measurement, and evaluation methods

D. Critical and Creative Thinking. Graduates are able to employ appropriate methods and approaches to critically and creatively analyze information in a range of content areas.
   - Knowledge of and ability to select appropriate analysis methods
   - Interpretation of information in both focused and broad contexts
   - Formulating well-founded conclusions

E. Integration, Synthesis, and Application of Knowledge. Graduates are able to solve complex problems, and create new knowledge through a broad application of knowledge and skills.
   - Synthesis of new knowledge by integrating multiple sources of information
   - Application of knowledge in both focused and broad interdisciplinary contexts
Knowledge. Graduates possess fundamental content knowledge and understanding of different modes of reasoning and perspectives in a range of focused (core) subject areas.

F. Arts. Graduates are able to evaluate creative works, compositions, productions or performances in context and demonstrate knowledge of art’s role in shaping culture.
- Apply techniques of literary and artistic analysis to study and interpret works of art, music, dance or theatre in the context of culture, society or individual identity
- Engage in creative expression

G. Humanities. Graduates are able to understand the origins, development, and products of their own and other cultures.
- Recognizing the connection between ideas, values, and cultural products
- Understanding differing concepts of the relationship between self and society
- Identifying the origins of present practices in past history
- Critical reading, analysis, and interpretation of historical and contemporary cultural texts

H. Natural Sciences and Technology. Graduates appropriately employ scientific techniques to examine the natural world and understand the application of science through technology.
- Familiarity with the foundational theoretical principles of one or more of the physical, biological, or earth sciences.
- Recognize, search for, collect, organize and evaluate scientific information, methods and findings based on scientific modes of reasoning
- Understanding of and ability to evaluate science’s role in technological development

I. Social Sciences. Graduates are able to evaluate human perceptions and behaviors and/or social institutions and structures.
- Employ social science analyses to evaluate characteristics of and relations among/between individuals, communities or societies

J. Diversity. Graduates are able to analyze how people, groups, and cultures differ and how such distinctions position them with respect to societies.
- Understanding of diversity and equity as social, economic, and political issues

K. Globalization. Graduates are able to recognize and evaluate relationships among cultures and nations across the world.
- Ability to assess global interconnections and their implications

L. Ethical Reasoning. Graduates are alert to the roles they play in society and have the intellectual tools to make ethical choices.
- Recognize ethical issues and employ ethical self-awareness
- Understand and are able to apply and evaluate different ethical perspectives and concepts

M. Constitution. Graduates are familiar with the founding political documents of their society (U.S. and Nevada constitutions).
- Understand historical origins of state and local government
- Recognize the influence of constitutional principles on social change
SILVER ALTERNATIVE (revised version, 5/25/12)

In their general education, students will be expected to develop fundamental intellectual practices and habits of mind that cut across numerous courses and prepare them for their majors (Goal I). Thinking critically requires all students to understand multiple systems of producing and valuing knowledge and expression; therefore, they will be provided broad comparative experiences regardless of the particular major in which they develop advanced skills (Goal II). The last component ideally occurs at the senior level (Goal III), as students are completing their majors in a capstone course. The capstone experience demonstrates the effective deployment of skills acquired in earlier general education components (Goals I & II) as well as in their major.

Each of the 14 separate outcomes of the Silver Plan (below) will typically be incorporated into multiple courses throughout the general education curriculum. However, it is envisioned that no more than three of the outcomes should be met in any individual course. Additionally, it is also envisioned that courses used for satisfying degree program requirements (such as major courses) may also be used to address these general education outcomes, with approval from the UNR Core Board. Implementation of this alternative would require 30 credits.

Goal I: Fundamental Practice
Students learn a wide range of fundamental skills that are broadly applicable in many disciplines including effective communication in a variety of media, quantitative reasoning and analytical skills, and the ability to collect, organize and evaluate data and information. These foundations are reinforced throughout the general education curriculum. Letters in parentheses (A) represent competencies gained through the general education and listed in the document “Competencies of a UNR Graduate.”

Outcome 1: Effective Composition and Communication. Students will be able to compose written, oral, visual, and other forms of discourse for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes. (A)

Outcome 2: Quantitative Reasoning. Students will be able to apply quantitative reasoning and statistical analysis methodologies to understand and solve problems. (B)

Outcome 3: Critical Analysis and Use of Information. Students will be critical consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information. These skills will include the ability to 1) employ systematic methods to search for, collect, organize, and evaluate information, 2) to critically evaluate the methods, context, findings or arguments that produced that information, and 3) formulate conclusions based on their own analysis of the information. (C, D)

Implementation: 6 credits

Courses that fall underneath Goal I will concentrate on Outcomes 1-3.

Writing: Introduced with 3 credits of English 102 in the first year, then reinforced throughout the curriculum. Prerequisites may be required.

Math: Introduced with an approved 3 credit lower division mathematics or statistics course in the first year, then reinforced throughout the curriculum. Prerequisites may be required.
Goal II: Focused Inquiry
Students learn about the processes and methods of inquiry, examining the principles underlying the making or discovery of knowledge, how those principles were developed, and how they are applied. Students learn to evaluate the soundness of arguments and appreciate how current ideas might change in response to new evidence. Students will engage in modes of analysis, attentive to considerations of constitutional principles, the role of science in society, ethics, diversity and equity, or globalization.

Outcome 4: **Physical and Natural Phenomena.** Students will be able to explain the processes by which the natural and physical worlds are investigated; articulate basic principles used to explain natural phenomena; and apply the scientific process to real problems using observational or experimental methods. (B, C, D, H)

Outcome 5: **History and Culture.** Students will be able to understand the processes by which past and present societies have been created and perpetuated through their history, ideas, and cultural products. Students will engage both historical and contemporary cultural texts through critical reading, analysis, and interpretation in the context of culture, society, and individual identity. (G, A, C, D)

Outcome 6: **Cultures, Societies, and Individuals.** Students will analyze social/human conditions by systematically studying individuals, groups, communities, and cultures. Students will interpret, model, observe, or experiment, as means of inquiring into human problems. (C, D, B, I, J, K)

Outcome 7: **Artistic Composition, Interpretation, and Expression.** Students will apply techniques of critical analysis to study and interpret works of art, dance, music, and theater in the context of culture, society, and individual identity. Students also may cast their interpretation in the form of creative expression. (F, A, D)

Outcome 8: **Constitution.** Students will become familiar with essential elements of the constitutions of the United States and Nevada, including historical origin and development, and application of constitutional principles in society. (M, A, L)

Outcome 9: **Science, Technology and Society.** Students will be able to connect science and technology to real-world problems by analyzing scientific data related to a problem of societal concern; be able to discriminate between sound and unsound interpretation of data; employ cogent reasoning methods in their own examinations of problems and issues; and evaluate the applications of science and technology in societal contexts. (H, B, C, D, L)

Outcome 10: **Diversity and Equity.** Students will develop a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of contexts. Students will engage in modes of analysis attentive to considerations of diversity and equity. (J, A, C, D, E)

Outcome 11: **Global Contexts.** Students will apply modes of academic inquiry, creative expression, or results of research to problems in historical and contemporary global contexts. Students will understand the connections among local, national, and international contexts, and evaluate the ways that historical and contemporary global influences affect their current local situations. (K, A, C, D, E)

Outcome 12: **Ethics.** Students will evaluate the ethical principles in application of specialized knowledge, results of research, creative expression, or design processes. Students will demonstrate an ability to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, consider how ethical principles might be applied to ethical dilemmas and consider the ramifications of various actions. (L, A, D, E)
Implementation: 21 credits

Courses taken to meet these requirements may be taken at any level, and are selected from a list approved by the Core Board. Courses that fall underneath Goal II will concentrate on Outcomes 4-12 and reinforce Outcomes 1-3.

Sciences & Technology: 6 credits in the natural sciences, engineering, or related topics. Courses should cover both scientific principles and their application. A minimum of 1 credit hour of laboratory experiences must be included in the 6 credits.

Humanities: 6 credits in the humanities. Courses should cover both fundamental knowledge and its application.

Social Sciences: 3 credits in human or social sciences. Courses should cover both fundamental knowledge and its application.

Fine Arts: 3 credits in one or more of the arts (art, dance, music, or theater). Courses should cover fundamental knowledge of history, critical interpretation, and/or creative expression.

Enhancement: The remaining 3 “enhancement” credits are intended to be selected by the student to help assure coverage of Outcomes 8-12, which may be interdisciplinary in nature. To meet Outcomes 8-12, a course must contain substantial content in the respective area and have been approved as meeting that outcome by the Core Board.

Goal III: Integrative Experience

Students learn to apply their knowledge and fundamental skills through intense engagement of a problem. These experiences consist of cross-disciplinary approaches to a subject that draw upon ideas and practices introduced through general education and refined in major and minor preparation (Goals I and II).

Outcome 13: Integration & Synthesis. Students will be able to synthesize and transfer learning to new complex situations. (E, A, C, D)

Outcome 14: Application. Students will be able to apply knowledge in both focused and broad interdisciplinary contexts. (E – L)

Implementation: 3 credits

Courses that fall underneath Goal III will concentrate on Outcomes 13-14 and reinforce Outcomes 4-12.

Integrative Capstone: The capstone course should be taken only after the student has taken all of the other general education requirements, and be of junior or senior standing.
In their general education, student learning is organized around three overarching goals intended to develop a suite of intellectual practices and cultivate modes of reasoning that cut across disciplinary boundaries. These goals – Fundamental Practice, Integrated Experience, and Focused Inquiry – each involve enhancing critical thinking abilities. In Fundamental Practice (Goal I), students develop practices and skills that are broadly applicable in many disciplines, including effective communication in a variety of media and quantitative and analytical reasoning skills. Integrative Experience (Goal II) follows Fundamental Practice, providing breadth along with integration outside conventional disciplinary boundaries. Integrative Experience, both at lower and upper division, enhances students’ ability to synthesize, encourages the transfer of learning to new complex situations, and develops communication skills. Focused Inquiry (Goal III) provides a measure of depth as students learn about, and put into practice, processes and methods of inquiry by examining principles underlying knowledge creation and use. It is envisioned that courses used for satisfying degree program requirements (such as major courses) may also be used to address these general education outcomes, with approval from the UNR Core Board. Implementation of this alternative would require 30 credits.

**GOAL 1: Fundamental Practice**

Fundamental Practice is designed to develop and enhance practices in fundamentals which students will use during their studies at the university and throughout their personal and professional lives. Letters in parentheses (A) represent competencies gained through the general education and listed in the document “Competencies of a UNR Graduate.”

Outcome 1: **Writing.** Students are able to use written forms of discourse for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes. As part of this they will explore academic genres with particular attention to interpretation and argument. (A)

Outcome 2: **Mathematics.** Students are able to apply quantitative reasoning and statistical analysis methods to understand and solve problems. As part of this they will solve quantitative problems using computational strategies; apply college-level mathematical techniques to real world situations; and interpret data and draw inferences from mathematical representations. (B)

**Implementation:** 6 credits

**Writing:** Introduced in the freshman year with a minimum of 3 credits of ENG 102 or other approved Writing course (and, as necessary, preceded by ENG 101 or other writing pre-requisites). Reinforced throughout the Core Curriculum.

**Mathematics:** Introduced in the freshman year with a minimum of 3 credits from a list of approved Mathematics or Statistics courses. Reinforced throughout the Core Curriculum.
GOAL II: Integrative Experience

Integrative Experience is designed to develop an integrative foundation upon which students build to become a generally well educated person. Students learn to apply their knowledge and fundamental skills through intense engagement of a problem. These experiences involve cross-disciplinary approaches in ways that draw upon ideas and practices introduced throughout general education and are refined in studies in their major and minor. Each of these outcomes is aimed at enhancing students’ ability to synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations as well as developing a suite of communications skills.

Outcome 3: Natural Sciences & Quantitative Reasoning. Students evaluate the evolution of fundamental principles in one or more scientific areas as they learn about scientific techniques to explore the natural world. Students are able to critically analyze quantitative information or apply statistical analysis to form reasoned conclusions based on such information. Students are able to explain societal, philosophical or technological implications of natural science knowledge or quantitative reasoning. Communication skills develop through studying the representation of data and use of graphical or spatial forms. (B, C, D, E, H)

Outcome 4: Social Sciences & Globalization. Students are able to engage in social science analysis with respect to evaluating perceptions, behaviors, institutions, and/or social structures among/between individuals, communities and/or societies. Students evaluate global interconnections and their implications. Communication skills develop through evaluating information from digital sources. (A, C, D, E, I, K)

Outcome 5: Humanities & Ethics. Students are able to interpret historical and contemporary texts and creative products in context. Students develop an understanding of how the past has given rise to the present through critically analyzing cultural texts of all kinds and developing interpretive syntheses. Students are able to recognize and evaluate ways that ethical standards have evolved over time and vary across cultures. Communication skills develop through critical reading of historical and/or contemporary texts and through analytic writing. (A, D, E, G, L)

Outcome 6: Diversity & Constitutional Analysis. Students are able to analyze how people, groups, and cultures interact and differ and explain how these interactions and differences position them with respect to cultural, economic or political institutions and social structures. Students are able to examine the philosophical, political, social, and institutional implications reflected in the US and Nevada constitutions so as to promote deeper knowledge of, debate about, and practice of democracy. Communication skills develop through critical reading of historic or contemporary texts and evaluating information from digital sources. (A, C, D, E, J)

Outcome 7: Capstone. Students are able to apply specialized modes of reasoning, knowledge or creative processes in multi-disciplinary and/or cross-cultural settings. Learning is designed to cultivate comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, evidence, and/or events before students accept or formulate opinions or conclusions. Students are able to grasp new understandings about ethical or substantive issues and themes that influence the world or broad cross-sections of humanity. Communication skills develop through critical reading, writing, and oral communications (A-L)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation: 15 credits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science &amp; Quantitative Reasoning: A minimum of 3 credits at the freshman or sophomore level from a list of approved Natural Science &amp; Quantitative Reasoning IE courses. Completion or co-enrollment in Core Mathematics course required (co-requisite).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science &amp; Globalization: A minimum of 3 credits at the freshman or sophomore level from a list of approved Social Science &amp; Globalization IE courses. No pre- or co-requisites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities &amp; Ethics: A minimum of 3 credits at the freshman or sophomore level from a list of approved Humanities &amp; Ethics IE courses. Completion of core writing required, ENG 102 or equivalent, is required (prerequisite).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity &amp; Constitutional Analysis: A minimum of 3 credits from a list of approved Diversity &amp; Constitutional Analysis IE courses. No pre- or co-requisites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone: A minimum of 3 credits at the senior level from a list of approved Capstone IE courses. Completion of all other Core courses is required (prerequisite) as is senior standing.</td>
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**GOAL III: Focused Inquiry**

Focused Inquiry is designed to enhance students' ability to critically think in a particular area of knowledge. Students will learn about processes and methods of inquiry, examining principles underlying the making or discovery of knowledge, how those principles developed, and their applications. Analytical techniques and methodologies are employed to illuminate specific topics. Students also learn to evaluate the soundness of argument and appreciate how change happens in response to new ideas, theories, and evidence.

Outcome 8: **Arts.** Students identify, evaluate, and interpret creative techniques, design principles, and media in various disciplines and genres and/or engage in creative expression at the college level (in art, dance, music or theatre). (D, F)

Outcome 9: **Sciences and Technology.** Students examine and apply scientific fundamental principles underlying a body of scientific knowledge or technological development and are able to explain how such principles were developed. As part of this they will gather and analyze data, draw conclusions, and make inferences. (B, C, H)

Outcome 10: **Humanities.** Students evaluate the values, practices, ideas, and/or achievements that characterize (as well as those that differentiate) selected cultures, including tracing sources and development of modern intellectual traditions and cultural institutions. (C, D, G)
Implementation: 9 credits

Courses taken to meet these requirements may be taken at any level (lower or upper division). Courses should be selected that best position students in their majors and minors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>A minimum of 3 credits from a list of approved Art courses that focus on history, criticism, or performance in the fine arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science &amp; Technology</td>
<td>A minimum of 3 credits from a list of approved Natural Science &amp; Technology courses. Each course must incorporate a minimum of 1 credit of laboratory experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>A minimum of 3 credits from a list of approved Humanities courses that examine a body of knowledge in the humanities and how it developed.</td>
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Meeting of the CABNR chairs - 4/11/12

After an introduction by Chris Pritsos, Scott Mensing presented the Silver and Blue plans and led the discussion. Other GETF members attending included Rosemary McCarthy and Elizabeth Raymond.

Chairs’ responses particularly addressed issues of science and mathematics education. Their comments on those subjects follow:

- The most important thing students will learn in science is to conduct a controlled experiment. This experience should be provided in whatever science they undertake.
- Interpreting data and critical thinking are also important elements of general science education.
- Perhaps the lab-based course should not be the general education introduction to the discipline, but instead a discipline-specific opportunity to learn how a particular science works in a close setting.
- CABNR students already receive a science-intensive education. The Blue Plan proposes a much more generalized introduction, which doesn’t seem appropriate for science-intensive majors. Would waivers be possible?
- Would the existing general science courses all have to be scrapped and new courses created under the Blue Plan?
- At what level have you been thinking about quantitative reasoning? A university-educated student should be able to take university-level mathematics (i.e., calculus), even if they never do so. The current requirement certainly doesn’t insure this.
- Mathematics should be taught differently. Why learn trigonometry, other than navigating in the 17th century, perhaps? General education should aim to produce only that level of expertise required for an educated citizen in everyday life. Majors can provide any mathematics more advanced than that.
- Both plans have good objectives, very nicely articulated, and the desired outcomes are excellent; but the section on the goals of general science education is more convincing than the goals for mathematics.

Another set of observations and questions related to non-science/math core content:

- The chairs complimented the innovative thinking that’s evident in the Blue Plan particularly, and inquired about opportunities to participate in making general education courses outside of science more responsive to the particular needs of their students. They were especially
enthusiastic about conferring across campus about the ideal content of these courses.

• Why can’t students write when they come to us? We want them to be better trained before they come to us.

• Both plans state ambitious goals in terms of outcomes. How will we insure that these things actually happen in general education classes?

• The Core Curriculum classes that we have now may not prepare students for what they need when they get out.

• What’s the role of Core Humanities in these plans? Could we have a dialogue about what’s included in a Core Humanities class? We would like these courses to be better integrated with what we want them to learn in our own courses.

• Will there be more options to specify what should be part of the core for an individual major?

Questions/comments regarding philosophy and implementation included:

• Who will be teaching these new courses? There aren’t any extra faculty available to be developing new courses. Will resources be forthcoming to accomplish this?

• Were these plans based on existing models, or have they been produced entirely in-house?

• On one side of the coin, the Blue Plan sounds like chaos. On the other hand it potentially engages those who currently only complain about the core in some “constructive dialogue” about content.

• Are there reasons to provide two plans rather than just one alternative?

• Have you considered not having any core curriculum at all?
GETF Presentation to College of Business chairs 4/10/12

One expressed support for Silver plan as including useful changes, and asked a series of questions about the Blue plan related to implementation: who’s going to teach all the new courses in the Blue plan, what resources will available to develop and run them? How are departments supposed to staff them, whether or not they are team-taught? Who is going to coordinate all that? Do departments take faculty off their other courses to teach these new ones? Departments have their lower-division major courses, too. Supposed to staff these too? If these are team-taught, who gets FTE? Who’s going to do the development and how?

Another question: How will these courses articulate? How will we handle transfer credit? Lots of problems there already with existing more-traditional courses. Attention to community colleges in particular? The CC are already drastically simplifying their Core requirements and don’t plan around our Core because of the AA degree transfer agreement.

Another speaker: Are there any major studies of results of this (Blue plan) “integrative” approach? What are the research findings about effectiveness of taking this approach? Need justification for taking such a drastic move in the curriculum, or we might regret it and find ourselves coming back in ten years to revise toward what we had in the first place.

This speaker also says that he would actually prefer adding to the existing Core, but knows that this view might not be very widely shared.

Presenter explained in some careful detail that consulting team provided GETF some ideas/research about what other institutions are doing with their gen ed revisions—that some are taking the direction suggested by the Blue plan.

Comment that CH already does integration, this might explain effort to retain it in Silver. Question about how the CH courses were developed in the first place. Some explanation of how different disciplines collaborated and had to give up specific gen ed courses in their field to create CH.

Comment that the Blue plan “terrifies me...couldn’t we maybe evolve toward it?”

Commenter provides example: Could someone start with the natural science integrative course, do one course, then build? Keep something like what we have or the Silver plan, try smaller numbers of these new courses at first, go really slowly, figure out FTE allocation, because we can’t just move people around that easily? Prefers a careful piecemeal effort, in which we measure results and would need to be willing to back off if what we do doesn’t appear to be working.

Another speaker: “Maybe there’s no need to do this, like Dilbert I fear this.” Would want to know whether those revising their gen ed (as in Blue plan) aren’t now wishing they hadn’t result-oriented discussion before making changes.

In response to a follow-up question about what it is, exactly, this speaker is concerned would be lost or would not get covered: students don’t write well, don’t reason well—don’t we actually need more attention to history? Critical thinking, pay attention to social problems, and what solutions were tried
and what was effective. Students need to have a sense that some problems arise again and again, and some solutions have already been tried.

Another speaker raised the articulation/transfer problem again—noting that so many students don’t take the Core at UNR, avoid taking CH by taking so much of the Core at community colleges.

Discussion of how CCs have simply gone for Regents’ Minimum—21 credits—transferring AAs viewed as “having completed Core” and move right into their major study.

Speaker returns to earlier idea of Silver plan as short run approach—Blue is perhaps “Blue vision,” where we’d like to head—maybe this is not an either/or question? Think of it as “cross the river slowly by feeling the stones.”

Another speaker returns to discussion of need for much more rationale: For even this “evolution” to work (Blue as “vision for future”), need research support for all that effort, time-intensive, crossing of the river by feeling the stones.

Blue plan is scary—especially if we have not much evidence here or elsewhere that we could pull it off.

Another speaker: didn’t think Blue plan was workable even as an aspiration—what about instead come up with “integrative” course to add to the Silver plan (would be better use of existing FYE classes all around the colleges/departments, peel away from student services function and make these real academic courses again)

Follow up question for clarification→like a First Year Seminar? Yes—observes that there seems to have been for a long time perceived need for additional intro to college, to show Core makes sense, shows up in lots of struggle with how to do all the student orientations, and there was the common book reading and discussion, but difficulty getting faculty involvement. If we see the need and want to help students integrate themselves, see education itself as integrative, ought to create academic courses to do that, see this again as academic effort not student services—need to exert more control over that as academic side.

Another speaker: “Interdisciplinary” approach is nice on paper, but hard to implement. This is not just about who gets FTE, but how do students really benefit from a “modular, cross-disciplinary” approach. This in Blue plan is implementation-wise a nightmare and hard to assess. What about the “no action alternative”?

Another speaker: Makes sense to give departments back their capstones (as in Silver plan), remove need for Core oversight there. Less hassle, allows departments to just do their senior capstones more effectively.

Another speaker: Is Blue plan structured so that students can take any course at any time in first two years?

Presenter answers yes, explains how this is supposed to work in Blue plan and expected advantages.

Some discussion about ENG101 still assumed in both plans. Integrative courses before 102, so at the same time as 101. Support for that.
Speaker notes that some big problems COB is already having—lack of prerequisite knowledge and retention—would be exacerbated by Blue plan flexibility.

Another speaker adds to that observation about problems with increased flexibility: schedule in junior and senior years already gets constrained by amount and sequence of major courses that can be offered—practical implication of Blue might be that it makes that problem worse.

Comments solicited from some in meeting who have not yet spoken. One speaker defers to others closer to issue: “not his bailiwick.” Another new speaker comments that he just thinks the Core needs to be cut down in credits.
Minutes: College of Education

May 16, 2012

Attending: Chris Cheney, MaryAnn Demchak, Thomas Harrison, Melissa Burnham, Rod Case, Margaret Ferrara

Rod Case gave a brief review of the committee and its charge to revisit and revise the general education requirements for the university. Next, Rod provided an overview of the Blue and Silver plans, highlighting ways in which they differ from the current requirements as well how they differ from each other.

Rod opened a discussion on the two plans. Margaret Ferrara suggested that the College of Education could play a role in the general education requirements. Other faculty members agreed and discussed their familiarity with the curricular organization of the Blue plan in particular.

Melissa Burnham commented that she like the Blue plan, as it is not as prescriptive. Margaret Ferrara talked about the values of both and asked if they could be combined.

A discussion on how the plans would be implemented opened. Chris Cheney talked about the possibility of phasing in one strand at a time, noting that some departments will not be as impacted as others and could possibly implement their strand early on. Chris added that the Blue plan would require faculty from multiple disciplines to collaborate closely. Chris then asked about the possibility of the requirements within the ‘focused inquiry’ being selected by different majors. Education majors, for instance, might be required to take different basic writing courses than journalism majors or business majors.
College of Engineering, 5/1/12
Presenters from the GETF: Jeff Lacombe, Rosemary McCarthy, Chris Herald

In general, the dean and several others favored the Blue proposal and suggested additional emphasis on technology, entrepreneurship and business/econ as fundamental competencies/knowledge base.

Comments and questions:
ABET accrediting question regarding the number of capstones and whether one resides in the major.

Engineering should be included in science and technology outcomes. As essential for students to gain understanding of how things work as is knowledge of humanities, science, etc. (The Silver Plan includes Technology in Goal II but the word Technology is missing from the Blue Plan. This is not necessarily a deliberate linguistic distinction between the plans, in CH's view.)

Entrepreneurship and financial/econ understanding, business sense, are equally important.

One attendee urges specific Computer Science classes as a requirement...possible customized versions of it for different disciplines. Computing skills must be taught. (Cited Georgia Tech as an example where CS is a requirement, even for social science majors.)

See Blue as a welcome difference... will modernize the curriculum. The integrative approach is similar to a 'systems' approach as used in engineering and some other disciplines and can be adopted elsewhere too.

If the implementation takes some time and some work, that's fine if it causes a change in thinking about how we approach general ed.

Will be less compartmentalized than we are now. This could promote a new way of thinking that will go beyond the core eventually.

Are Vice Provost candidates aware of this effort? He or she will have to play a role in implementation.

Suggest a deliberate inclusion of sustainability in goals or outcomes. (The interface of energy, environment, water.)

Name technology specifically in both plans. Is as important as writing or math. Must be explicit here.

Entrepreneurship reiterated plus innovation and leadership as outcomes. (Some discussion of what it means to teach leadership to everyone, vs providing opportunities for students.)

Concept of design... can it fit into a general outcome? Seen very differently by different disciplines. Is it a fundamental competency?

Current core seems to be protected, FTE driven. Should be more open and integrative.

Will we still be able to pinpoint certain courses in the core as required for certain majors? If certain math and science courses are dropped from the core, we'd have to add them to the major and that's a problem.
College of Liberal Arts

On March 27, Jane Detweiler and Larry Engstrom presented the GETF’s silver and blue alternatives to a meeting of the chairs and directors of the College of Liberal Arts. Following a description and contextualization of the two plans, there were numerous questions and comments.

Some of these related to procedural matters:

- The path to decision and implementation seems unclear to many. A time table for changing to the blue plan, especially, would seem to require years to accomplish.
- Transition to any new core curriculum will be tricky, but especially for the blue plan, where equivalent courses don’t exist at other system institutions. This simply replicates the current Core Humanities problem, but now with 4 courses instead of 3.
- Re-certifying all existing core courses will be a logistical nightmare.
- Significant changes in the core curriculum, as soon as they are known, will lead to students “gaming the system,” and betting on the ultimate elimination of courses they don’t like. We will need to think carefully about any plans for implementation. The process can’t be gradual.
- There was uncertainty about the proposed blog: Will comments appear with or without identifying elements? Will the comments remain there? Will the GETF respond, or simply receive the postings?

Others were general curricular observations:

- Why are we undertaking this exercise? What is wrong with the existing Core Curriculum, that we are considering such a radical and disruptive overhaul?
- If 50% of current students don’t take Core Humanities, it’s because the Board of Regents hasn’t held to agreements that Core Humanities can’t be substituted at community colleges. This is not a reason to lower university standards.
- A diversity course should remain a specific requirement, even if the concept is embedded across the curriculum.
- Diversity shouldn’t be assigned to either social sciences or humanities. It is incorporated into both areas, and in many arts courses, also.
- Whatever the nature of the diversity expectation, some “enforcement mechanism” will be required to insure that diversity is actually adequately covered.
- Many areas and methods of investigation characterized in these plans as belonging to “physical” or “natural” science are also deployed in the social sciences. If our goals are to introduce students to the methods and practices of scientific reasoning, then social science courses can accomplish these as well as natural or physical sciences.

Blue Plan questions/comments:

- If integrative learning is the goal, then why are we abandoning the one course sequence (Core Humanities), where effective integration has actually been achieved?
- The Blue Plan is “redundant, and not very well thought out.” The objectives in each of the integrative courses seem to be essentially the same. This doesn’t seem a serious effort to create a meaningful lower-division core.
Meeting the constitution requirement with a 1-credit course is logistically challenging and intellectually indefensible.

The relationship of the focused inquiry courses to the basic, integrative courses seemed opaque.

Integrative courses seem ill-defined, a “non-starter.” The de novo approach in the midst of severe resource limitations is problematic. How could such courses possibly be created in sufficient numbers to serve the entire university population?

How would the university insure that the integrative courses were substantive? The broad generalities in this plan would make it impossible to determine that anything didn’t meet the objectives. It would be an “assessment nightmare.”

A number of goals are articulated for the integrative foundation, but these aren’t attached to specific credits or courses. How will we insure that these things are actually taught in the actual courses offered?

The integrative courses would need to be preceded by English 102 if they are to accomplish the broad goals enumerated for them.

If departments outside the discipline offered these integrative courses, how would academic integrity be assured? Quality control looms as a potential problem.

If the courses are taught collaboratively, how would the teaching resources be recognized in a climate where generating student FTE is crucial to departments?

Creating the focused inquiry courses, on top of existing 100-level courses that already serve the needs of entering students, seems redundant, and involves a lot of work. What justifies it?

A single class that involves arts and humanities is difficult to conceive, either at the integrative or the focused inquiry levels. These are fundamentally distinct disciplines and can’t be combined.

Social sciences are sufficiently important to warrant an “integrative foundation” course, but don’t show up as an area for additional, focused inquiry by students. This should be rectified.

Silver Plan questions/comments:

How much CH is “lost”? The reduction of Core Humanities credits is dismaying. The skills of reading, understanding, interpreting, and analyzing texts in cultural context require the full 9 credits. Students need all three courses in order to acquire these skills.

The connection between required credits, and intellectual outcomes for students, seems much better thought out in the Silver Plan.

Mixing arts, social sciences, and humanities into a single category, while natural sciences are distinct, poses an intellectual problem. These three are each distinct ways of knowing the world, with their own methods and subject matter, just as the sciences are.

The Silver Plan articulates many things as outcomes (ethics, diversity and equity, globalization), but they’re not attached directly to required credits. How will these goals be implemented?

It’s possible to see how one might assess the outcome of the Silver Plan, much more so than the Blue.

Silver seems preferable because it is doable. The Blue Plan relies on creation of an entirely new structure, requiring substantial faculty effort without any apparent intellectual justification.
This meeting of COS chairs was devoted entirely to the General Education Task Force proposals. Joe Cline presided. Other GETF members present included Jeff Lacombe, Elizabeth Raymond, and Robert del Carlo.

After a presentation of the GETF charge and its work to date, Joe Cline reviewed the Silver and Blue alternatives and distributed a document comparing the credit requirements for the current core curriculum and the two alternative plans. This immediately raised the question of whether it was disingenuous not to include six credits for core writing, since the great majority of entering students did not place directly into English 102. Neither alternative currently does this. Considerable discussion of mathematics education followed, with a range of opinions expressed:

- Several expressed the view that there is an inequity between placement levels for math and English.
- Should the level of expectation for core math instruction be raised?
- Thirty percent of students are already failing math at the current placement level. Fully one quarter of incoming early admits, our best students, don't even qualify for entry-level math. The majority of our students simply aren't prepared for university-level math, even at the most basic level.
- General-education math is different from mathematics preparation for science majors, and this will be an ongoing issue in an open-enrollment institution that wants to raise its graduation rates.
- The current requirement for general-education math is appropriate. Science majors will enforce their own, higher standards.
- Math would love to differentiate calculus classes for science from calculus for general education, but implementation would be very difficult.

Joe then turned the discussion to the separate plans, presenting the Silver alternative and observing also that retaining the current Core Curriculum is also an option. Jeff emphasized that the GETF is particularly interested in knowing about the structural aspects of the plans (the desired outcome for a university student's general education) as opposed to the implementation, because specific courses aren't associated with the plans as yet. Not every outcome has a specific course attached to it.

- The current diversity requirement wasn't in the original Core Curriculum. Engineering agreed to add it only with the understanding that no extra credits would be entailed. Thus the diversity requirement can be a “double dip,” met by a course that also fulfills another core requirement. This model for meeting the diversity requirement is acceptable.
- How will we assess that diversity is really incorporated into student learning if it's not a specific goal?
• I’m in favor of any plan that scraps CH 201 and 202. Those courses have got to go because they have the most complaints. Students don’t like having to focus on just western cultures.

• Would there be a special course for oral communication? Students have poor communication skills and are frightened to speak up in class. Should oral communication be a dedicated course, even at the risk of adding additional credits? No, we could add it on to existing courses.

• If outcomes are specified, they should be linked to courses.

There was much more, and more enthusiastic, discussion of the Blue Plan, which Joe introduced as a major modification of how we deliver general education, although the outcomes are fairly close to the Silver Alternative. The chairs especially welcomed the integrative foundation (IF) courses in the sciences:

• Existing general science courses—with some exceptions—wouldn’t exist in this model, though some existing courses could be modified to fit this model. Several chairs saw that IF science courses would appeal to non-science majors and be fun to teach.

• For science majors, though, this is a different matter. If the university forces us to fit into this model, would we want exemption from the Integrative Foundation (IF) science course for majors? Could the current freshman experience courses be morphed into IF classes for majors?

• The Blue Alternative is a good concept, but has the highest implementation cost of the plans.

• Maybe you need entry-level math and writing before taking IF courses. Otherwise the students will be even less well prepared than they currently are when coming into entry-level courses.

• I love the Blue Plan in concept; but this would involve a whole host of new classes. Implementation will still be a huge problem.

• This plan would require keeping “two sets of books,” with courses for majors that are different from courses for general education; but this happens now. Overall this would be an improvement so that the 100-level courses for majors could be taught to a higher level.

• Several people commented that they liked the idea of separate track for science majors. IF courses would be good for majors too, but no one currently has room for it in the curriculum—so effectively, science has to get some kind of exemption from IF courses for its majors. Ideally, though, both scientists and non-scientists would take these classes.

• Students need to be able to think about what they read regarding scientific and policy claims. The IF courses only work if they are “taught right,” and don’t just depend on having students read and memorize a textbook. This would require continuous monitoring and enforcement to insure that they retain the imaginative structure envisioned for them.
• One of the problems of the Blue Plan is that writing is specified as being 25% of the IF courses, but science faculty aren’t necessarily prepared to do that.

• Articulation agreements will be incredibly difficult with the Blue Alternative. How will transfer students demonstrate equivalency with these one-of-a-kind courses?

Several questions and comments related to **general implementation** issues:

• If we want it as an outcome, how do we make sure it happens in the curriculum?

• How much of the core must be delivered in the core? How do you assess that the specific curricular goals are being achieved, even if it’s outside the core?

• Assessment of what’s being done is important, even if we don’t modify the current Core Curriculum.

• English 102 needs to be assessed because clearly it’s not working.

• The constitution requirement comes from state law. It isn’t being met honestly in the current Core Humanities structure, but is a huge requirement for the entire university. It can be streamlined, but should it be?

• The Blue Plan is admirable, but also very high cost. It is just too expensive in terms of implementation.

Joe also raised several **specific questions** with the chairs:

• Do these plans meet the needs of science majors? blue certainly does

• Is the science requirement of 6 credits acceptable? yes, so long as it still incorporates the current level of lab experience

• Can the scientific method be adequately taught by the social sciences? Consensus: yes.

• Is there content in the sciences that we expect our students to know, that they wouldn’t get in social sciences? We’re not teaching science courses about data analysis; so statistical analysis should be part of the IF courses. Students should be prepared to assess critically claims about science that are part of public policy debates, like climate change.

• Are we providing adequate science education to non-science majors at UNR? Consensus: no.

• Straw poll: What plan do you prefer? Keep current core structure: 0 votes. Silver plan: 1 vote. Blue plan: 6 votes. The Silver advocate indicated he prefers the Blue concept, but it is likely impractical to implement.
Notes from Journalism faculty meeting re: Silver/Blue plans – 4/13/12

Generally – favored Blue for integrative approach. This support was voiced more than once by different members.

Comments:
Blue option seems more compatible with how Journalism operates, what we do.

It would require more re-imagining of courses and curriculum outside the core. More work in other words.

Silver might be a reasonable step toward Blue... a dramatic revision would be hard to execute, so a stepped process could work better.

Both plans recognize communication skills in multiple modes—journalism would be able to contribute more to the core in either iteration.

Because the core is now in part ‘owned’ by certain departments who have big investments in the courses, there will be resistance...they will fight to retain the benefit they now have.

Will definitions of outcomes and goals be written to truly ‘open up’ the core so that other units can really be involved? Or, will the same parties continue to carry most of the responsibility for core education? The language is important in what it allows in terms of who can be active in the core.

Students are likely to see the relevance of core courses in a more integrative approach.

Does the task force have a communication plan for campus dialogue to vigorously present the benefits of change ... to outline the gains to be made for each proposal equally?

For this to be a productive conversation, it can’t be left to just the loud voices. All the relevant points have to be made equally in a deliberate manner. Formal debates?

Chris H. agrees with above and encourages J-faculty to be active on the blog and around campus in order to make their support for Blue known. citing blog posts, so, far as favoring Silver.
Meeting with the Core Board

IV. General Education Task Force Update (Scott Mensing)

Scott began the discussion of the two Core Curriculum alternatives that have been drafted by the Task Force (see attachments). The Task Force will present the two plans to various campus bodies this spring and gather feedback.

The Silver plan is the one that is more similar to the current Core, and begins with the foundational courses of English and math, builds on these with “ways of understanding the physical and human world” and culminates in an integrative Capstone experience. Natural and social science courses focus less on introduction to disciplines and more on investigative methods, as well as a focus on science and society. Emphasis is placed on ways of thinking that students do not get in their specific major.

The Blue plan would require more course design/redesign. Foundational skills of communication, reasoning, etc. are integrated broadly across competency areas. Integrative courses are to be followed by “focused inquiry” courses.

Questions and issues raised:

- Does the Task Force favor one approach over the other? Scott indicated that there was not a consensus among the group about this, but that general education programs across the country are moving toward more integrative approaches. General education approaches represent a spectrum from integrative to discipline based, and the Task Force has attempted to illustrate the range of options.

- What are the expectations for common student outcomes? Scott highlighted writing and expressive ability, quantitative literacy, integrative problem-solving, etc.

- How do the proposed plans prepare students as citizens in a democracy, as opposed to simply preparing them for jobs? Scott stated that the plans attempt to do both. Outcomes related to citizenship, diversity, globalization, etc. are integrated into the various areas of competency in the plans.

- How do the proposed plans relate to the mandate for 120-credit programs? Proposed plans are to be implemented in 27-28 credits, a reduction from the current Core.

- How is foundational instruction in English incorporated into the Blue plan? Will ENG 102 be part of this plan, or will other courses be used to build writing competency? It was noted that writing is part of the focused inquiry curriculum, but Scott indicated that this level of detail has not yet been determined. Kate stated that integrative classes in the Blue plan will build writing skills for students entering at various levels.

- Concern was expressed over the difficulty of change, the effort involved, and whether there will be buy-in that such effort will result in significant improvement of the Core Curriculum.

- How will writing skill be developed throughout the curriculum?
• An outcomes-based Core will necessitate assessment focused on the specific outcomes identified.

• Will the Task Force produce a contextual report on issues addressed through Core revision, the national context, pros and cons of revision, etc.?

• Will feedback provided by campus entities be incorporated into the Task Force’s recommendations? Will the Task Force be making specific recommendations for Core revision?

• How will the Task Force deal with faculty concerns regarding how Core revisions will affect their departments and positions?

• Is there a document that delineates the specific criticisms of the external review team, so that the recommended plans may be judged as to how they address the criticisms?

Kate reminded the Board of the Task Force presence on the Provost’s Office website and the Task Force blog, and encouraged further input from the Board.

Meeting adjourned at 5:05 pm.
Core Board Subcommittee

3 May 2012
Kate Berry called the meeting to order @ 4:10, thanking all present for their hard work.

KB: Passed out the two plans. Discussed the original review and charge from provost. The GETF developed a survey last year and are now bringing two different approaches to the core curriculum.

Silver is closer to what we have now and the Blue is a bigger leap.

Joe Cline: another option from the Provost is that we maintain our current core – one other alternative to Blue and Silver are to keep things as they are now.

KB: We are going out to campus leadership to solicit input and feedback on these plans. We also have a blog and go there as well “UNR” google GETF and it will come up for you to provide feedback. The GETF anticipates a vote in the fall.

Joe Cline: Silver description: This attaches clear outcomes to goals. Joe describes the goals of the plan. A major departure from the current core (still maintaining a natural science with a lab) is technology is explicitly stated and addressed in this plan. For goal four: there is integration diversity in the entire third goal. Another significant change is that core humanity courses decrease. When you look at both plans, it was about becoming efficient. Both committees came to the same decision about diversity. Both have it woven throughout.

Chris: if you look at the survey, exposure to different disciplines is important. How it is accomplished is very college dependent. The purpose of the core is to get something out of the class.

Blue plan: build into the integration, describes integrative foundation. Allow students to apply competencies.

Joe: example is Bio 125 How Science Works. The focused inquiry is an area of focus that is of interest to the student. E. g., Chemistry of Art: how dyes work, how we restore old paintings, etc. He describes an anthropology course he took as an undergraduate that he still remembers things from, but cannot remember anything from a survey course such as Psychology 101.

Anthro faculty: Are the social sciences lessened
KB: No, NSHE only requires one social science.

Challenge to the blue plan is transfer students.

There was discussion if a natural science major can move majors into the discipline. COS reported that they are not doing as well as they would like for the science for the non-major students. COS liked the blue.
Lots of discussion about sciences.

Victoria Follette: We need to lead, not follow. She is not sure that examples are really at the Fr/So level, they seem more like a capstone level course. She asked if we should reevaluate survey courses.
No one talked to Psychology, they are more in the natural rather than the social sciences.

KB: We cannot include all units in the early discussion. This is why we are here now.

Neal Ferguson: He likes the Blue plan. The external review was most pointed about the lack of assessment. We need to fundamentally do assessment, building an assessment structure. For the Blue, are the general education courses at the 100 & 200 level? If we do this, we will still have underprepared students that transfer into UNR. Other institutions often copy the name and number only. We would probably be able to better protect it with Math 18, Soc 101, etc.

Joe: the focused inquiry will have no text, making it harder to copy.

KB: Do we need to build more upper division courses here on campus as a whole? Majors are so packed at upper division.

Swattee: if they transfer in with their AA, lower division core is waived except for diversity and capstone.

Marsha asked for elucidation between integrated foundation and focused inquiry courses.

Marc from Econ: GETF has done a conscientious job. Neal’s idea of building assessment into it is a good one. The goals from the current core are too vague, this is tighter. Could the two natural sciences change to just science and quantitative reasoning? Maybe move social science so it is more generic too. Econ could move into the natural sciences.

Astronomy faculty: 1 – 2% of students did become physics majors after taking his course. The Blue alternative would be very difficult to implement. He sees it a wishful thinking. Silver is better than what we have now....

Math across the curriculum would be taught in the Blue plan. Digital information skills can be found in the plans, but you have to filter to find them...

Swattee: Math 120 would satisfy both the foundations and the focus inquiry courses in the blue plan.
The first half of the meeting was devoted to discussion about whether ENG 101 is Core or Pre-Core proficiencies.

Segue from that discussion to presentation of the two plans.

Commenter cites from outside reviewer report about need to revisit and rearticulate the proficiencies, to re-examine the goals of general education, asks whether this motivated the specific ways the plans are being developed.

Presentation of Silver—presenter emphasizes that this alternative aimed at articulation of over-arching goal and how do the requirements relate to that—spell out the objectives or outcomes.

Question—Blue would require creating all these new courses?

Response yes, this was in response to outside reviewers’ comments about refocusing on outcomes or objectives (rather than distribution model—take a class here, take a class there, with no alignment).

Presenter: for example, focus on one sample class (natural science)—explains how it works have something deliberate to meet expectations implied in current Core, along with new integration of communication skills.

More explanation of communications skills spread out across the integrative foundation.

Several questions and discussion about how this would fit together with existing Core courses in writing, would students be adequately prepared?

Comment that faculty who prepare students in writing might be better positioned to know what students come in already prepared to do.

Presenter: Blue “focused inquiry,” assumes ENG 102, as Regents minimum; whether ENG 101 is still involved is part of implementation.

Comment—Blue integrative courses have no co-requisites or prerequisites, and no way to assure that they’re all taken in first/second year, so if “focused inquiry” courses designed to be AFTER this, then no way to assure that students will have 102 in a timely fashion.

Responses explaining that integrative in 1st and 2nd year will be implemented in a way to create pressure for students to take them in a timely fashion.

Several questions about how the various integrative courses map together, presenter explanation.

Hypothetical about “integrative” humanities course—would that replace 101?

Presenter explanation that we already have WAC, and that there is lots of teaching of writing all across campus, she teaches it in her classes.
Comment that there is no mechanism for assuring that students get the prerequisite for 102; presenter explains that there is no way at present to enforce that students have the competencies—transfer credits, so many transfer students, come in with courses and don’t take the courses in order anyway

Comment that 102 is the prerequisite for CH, which Blue gets rid of—swaps out these integrative courses for CH, removes alignment and enforcement that exist in current Core

Comment that CWP ceases to be Core Writing as we know it

Comment that Blue plan reads as: 4 integrative courses—taken before focused inquiries, capstones

Question: so, these integrative courses replace CH?

Presenter says no—emphasizes integration at center of CH, takes integration to new level

Question as follow-up to that: Would CH 201, 202, 203 be eliminated? If so why?

Presenter: The CH courses could be revamped to work as these integrative courses, further explanation—want to look broadly at what the CH courses do, and see if there aren’t better ways to provide that experience

Presenter: For good or ill, CH has had a number of student and faculty issues—it has not changed with the times; that it doesn’t include real breadth of the humanities.

Interjected question: who says it isn’t inclusive of the humanities?

Presenter: ...And there has long been a sense that there is “too much of it” at 9 credits when the sciences have 6 credits

Interjection: the Silver plan even takes CH down to 6 credits

Presenter: these revisions are really focused on: what do our students need in the future?

Presenter: Take general competencies that are needed across the disciplines in general education curriculum, and make sure that the integrative starts those early and links them in the freshman/sophomore years.

Comment: Hesitant about Blue plan—concern about inverting the years (1st and 2nd) by placing ENG 102 after all those integrative courses and how that changes and perhaps damages competencies now sequenced over the first years

Question about how globalization fits with social science, exactly—Presenter explanation

Comment: Having very hard time imagining how existing courses will fit into the Blue plan, implementation will be difficult if not impossible
Presenter: explanation that we took into account how other institutions are doing it

Comment and presenter: different sources said that globalization needed to be addressed (outside reviewers, survey)

Presenter: It may well take team-teaching to accomplish courses like these

Several commenters express concern about how to staff the courses

Comment: Still not clear about all the reasons that the existing structure has to be so radically changed: If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it

Question: What are the arguments for all this reshuffling?

Questioner comments that theoretically, agrees with it; came from an interdisciplinary program himself; practically, not really possible

Presenter: Explanation that there are various points of view on the brokenness of Core

Presenter emphasizes that suggestions are currently being solicited from across the Core

Presenter: Whether the Core is broken or not may not be the right question

Presenter offers explanation that we’re open to revision on details—

Comment that the practical angle is precisely where the problems arise—if we’re going to fundamentally change what we ask students to do, having them in a single interdisciplinary course is way to go, not team courses or linked or whatever

Presenter: Implementation is a discussion for later

Comment that biggest concern: unspoken assumption that critical analytical thinking and writing can be taught by any faculty member on campus→concern about their competencies, prerequisite knowledge or competencies→in Core Writing at least we have things centralized and can assure quality of instruction and some oversight, assurance that the competencies are addressed systematically

Commenter continues that in the integrative model, with teaching of communication or writing dispersed: Not sure that all faculty could do it, motivated to do it...not sure there’s knowledge base there to do it

Commenter suggests that if you had 101/102 before the integrative courses, maybe the integrative courses could work

Comment that expresses support for idea of integrative courses in early part of core

Question: When do they take placement for ENG 102 in Blue model? After the integrative courses? What if they arrive at focused inquiry/writing course and find that they need remediation, based on
whatever we use for placement at that point (their college entrance scores?)

Presenter: There are a number of institutions that are doing this, including UNLV—writing course at sophomore year

Interjection that UNLV still has Core Writing courses scheduled.

Encouragement to add comments to the blog

Question about number of credits, where did the apparent impulse to reduce come from

Comment—about losing writing emphasis (concern about student level of preparation) with all the effort to integrate other modes of communication

Presenter: Writing and math are practices, importance of other communication skills—what do they need now and what they need in the future? Blue plan tries to emphasize with integrative courses
Faculty Senate - Academic Standards Committee, 4/25/12

Presenters: Scott Mensing, Chris Herald, Rosemary McCarthy

The committee had spent time studying the proposals and was prepared with questions. Sequencing of courses, overall number of credits, and specific course requirements for some goals were discussed.

- Re: the number of credits in the core. Both proposals have fewer credits than current core, a smaller proportion even when accounting for the 120 credit degrees.
- Is this a deliberate decision for a specific reason?
- General musing… what is the optimal balance?
- Re: assessment. Are all of the goals assessable? Where is the assessment plan? Who does the assessment?
- Re: capstones. Confirming that both proposals call for one major capstone with the suggestion or expectation that majors could establish own requirements for second capstone.
- Noted that prereqs for capstones currently allow students to take them too early, so the courses don’t really provide an integrative experience at the senior level for many students.
- Re: integration with majors. Is this task force just working on the lower division core as an isolated matter or working on a 4-year integrated track? Does the core stop where the major begins or is it threaded into the whole curriculum?
- Re: number of credits and placement of credits. Given the critical nature of the core, are there enough credits and are they in the right places?
- Re: Diversity and ethics. While they are stated as desirable outcomes, there are no courses associated with the goal. Both probably need to be emphasized more by identifying courses.
- If diversity credits can be achieved now through ‘double-dipping’ perhaps that is enough.
- Re: placement of ethics requirements. Should ethics be a core requirement or a major requirement? If in the core, then we risk a one-size-fits-all approach with less chance for applied thinking. If in the disciplines, there would be less accountability or less assurance that all students are getting enough ethics.
- Isn’t the goal of the core is to provide what majors can’t?
- Re: clarity. Whatever the final plan is, it must be clearly spelled out so that we don’t have hidden prerequisites. To many, Eng. 101 is a hidden prerequisite now. Eng 201 is listed as the core requirement, but most students have to take 101 or other English courses first.
- Re: more emphasis on technology compared to writing and humanities. Technology is a goal but is not addressed enough in courses. This includes communication issues such as information overload, evaluating information.
• Re: interdisciplinary courses. Would interdisciplinary courses work, be part of the core? Managing the issues around shared FTE’s and building the courses would be a lot of work but could be worth it.

• Re: sequence of courses, especially in Blue. Doesn’t seem logical that focus courses would come after integrative experience. More advantageous, or essential, for some specific skills to be established before an integrative class. Likely that negative outcomes can result if basic writing and math skills are pushed back and are not first in the sequence.

• Re: sequencing and timing. Students who are taking developmental courses or transferring an incomplete array of lower division courses will be additionally hampered if sequencing isn’t logical. Since this applies to many students, retention and completion rates will suffer.

• Re: community colleges and transfers. How will TMCC and others respond to these changes?

• Re: outcomes approach and knowledge set approach. One can argue that students must know some ‘things, content’, as well as knowing ways of thinking. A university education implies some specific factual knowledge along with skills and competencies. Shouldn’t we be clear about both?

• Re: goal of task force. What is the final product? When?
Faculty Senate - Commission for the Future of UNR, Mon., 5/8/12

Presenters: Scott Mensing, Kate Berry, Rosemary McCarthy

Description of Task Force process and of the two plans by Scott and Kate.

Q: Do proposals intend any change in requirements for getting into Eng 102?
A: no students still have to place there.

Q: What is philosophical difference between Silver and current core?
A: Focus on outcomes rather than named required courses and the intention to provide deeper study rather than survey type courses.

Q: Is the plan to assess the entire core program or just the component parts?
Comment: Silver... this is a more intentionally shaped curriculum.

Q: Why the reduction in CH from 9 to 6 credits?
Q: Would the CH courses themselves be revised?
Q: Blue. Focused Inquiry.. diversity OR ethics? Blue is more ambitious than Silver, but in any case need both diversity and ethics.

Comment: regarding written and visual literacies it's important to remember that not all students enjoy multi-media access. Those with impairments require assistive technologies. They are available, but can be expensive which may cause the development of some courses to be difficult and perhaps then avoided.

Comment: Silver's Goal 3, Human World, seems not very different from current core. How can this become a deeper experience if that's what we're trying to do?
We need a baseline here in order to assess but the description is too ambiguous for that. Each student will have his/her point of entry to the content... they are coming in with different levels of preparation and we need to establish their starting points to be able to learn if they've progressed.

Comment: Silver Goal 3, outcome 3... does this refer to institutions and ideals in both the U.S. and the Nevada constitutions? That's an enormous amount of information and some of it is very likely to conflict with what we encourage in outcome 1.

Comment: Would like to see statement and intention about students' personal development... sense of a 'role in the world', of responsible citizenship, etc.

Comment: many of the students are not ready to think this way as they lack fundamental knowledge about the world, a baseline of information. For a core education we have be able to measure their baseline or suppose what it is.
Q: from Scott...does this mean we should increase the core?
A: no

Q: What about delivering either of these plans? In a situation of scarce resources, how are we able to compete in the region for students?

Q: Is there room for various delivery models?

Q: Which plan, S or B, would more likely to distinguish us? Which is more likely to gain acceptance here?

Comment: Faculty role is to devise best curriculum possible and then approach administration on resources and actions to implement it.

Comment: current model has two colleges more heavily invested in the core than others... both a burden and a boon to them.

Q: Why is writing in Focused Inquiry and not in Foundational array? Taking writing out of English Dept. seems a waste of resources and talent.

Comment: would really like to see a sample course plan for Blue... want to see what it would look like.

Comment: We have complicated, different students of many types with different needs. President Johnson suggests UNR should grow as a classic residential university to distinguish ourselves in the marketplace. Creating this kind of campus will require considerable resources.

Comment: the difference in how S and B plans are presented creates a bias to Silver because the S is more concrete. Blue needs equal treatment.

Comment: perhaps provide scenarios of how a few sample students might each proceed through each plan.

Comment: Building the plans around competencies is the way to go...good work. but, not all faculty are accustomed to this approach. Examples of courses will help.

Comment: Include assessment scenarios.
Comments from the International Activities Committee
May 9, 2012
Chair: Dave Croasdell

The current core doesn’t have an explicit outcome related to international concepts/activities. The committee would really like the new core—both Silver and Blue alternatives—to include an explicit international/globally-related outcome.

In crafting an outcome related to international concepts, some faculty thought globalization was a better term than internationalism, which has a political connotation. It was noted that language has moved from bilateral to multilateral, from multinational to transnational, from international to global. The term ‘international’ is useful in considering organizations but not a concept on its own. “Cross cultural” is not that in vogue any more—like internationalism it is an older term little used today.

Concepts the committee did like:
Global perspective
International organizations
Global understanding
Cultural awareness

One faculty member suggested that we acknowledge the fact that global conflicts are expected to increase in the near future, given the increase in natural disasters, economic instability and other resource and cultural conflicts. It might be possible to fold this idea into an outcome related to globalization.
Silver and Blue Alternatives

The two alternative proposals, named the Silver proposal and the Blue proposal are our initial effort to provide general education plans that respond to the committee’s charge. Our goal over the next two months is to get responses from a broad spectrum of groups across campus that will allow us to revise these alternatives before presenting them to the campus at large in fall semester, 2012. We are planning a series of meetings where two members of the task force will meet with groups to explain the proposals, respond to comments, and record feedback.

You can review the Silver and Blue Alternatives, which includes the General Education Task Force background information.

We appreciate your willingness to review these two proposed alternatives and provide feedback and questions to the task force by using the below reply.

The only personal information that will be viewable to others on this blog site is your name, if you wish to remain anonymous use the word ‘anonymous’ in place of your name on the below reply form.

29 comments

1. Anonymous on April 3, 2012 at 10:56 pm

1. I greatly appreciate the thought the General Education Task Force has put into the two proposals. Clearly, there has been an effort to seek what others around the country are doing and look at how we might make some useful changes.
2. I strongly favor the silver proposal over the blue, primarily because the blue represents significant change without any obvious value added. For someone to convince me we should go with the blue proposal, they would need to explain why it would be significantly better than what we have now. I do not see the value added at present.
3. In the blue proposal, am concerned about the distinction between natural science and social science that is offered, in that it almost suggests social science is not science, and that there should not be a focus on quantitative reasoning in social science. Of course, I can only speak for my discipline, economics, but EVERYTHING that is listed under the natural science and quantitative reasoning bullet describes economics, even at the principles level. Associating social science with globalization and natural science with quantitative reasoning, I think, sends a message I do not want sent. What I often tell students is that you might want to study economics if you like math but want to study people rather than things. Thus, I would say what separates natural science from social science is the topics of study more so than the methods, though methods do vary much more in the social science than natural sciences.

4. While the blue proposal is obviously an attempt to change the core curriculum so the curriculum fits a set of outcomes rather than tailoring the outcomes to the set of courses we presume must be in the core, it is also clear that the blue proposal is tainted by the fact that it is known that the core curriculum must include particular courses, two natural science courses, for example. The reason I say this is that Social Science is conspicuously missing in the focused inquiry section. Why, in a society where our national debt, health care provision, and other such social issue will much more likely impact our students in the future than topics that might be covered in natural science or arts or humanities, would we not want students to have some focused study in social science? The answer probably is, we would like some focused study in social science, but given the parameters laid down by the regents, and issues like common course numbering and transfer agreements, we do not have room to put focused social science study in the blue alternative.

5. Because the blue alternative is obviously being tweaked by the knowledge that we cannot deviate too far from what we have now, I believe it is better to toss out the blue alternative, and take many of the good intentions in the blue alternative and work them into the silver alternative as much as possible.

2.

Anonymous on April 6, 2012 at 11:20 pm

While I appreciate the innovative impulse behind the Blue proposal, I do not see this as a well-conceived plan.

The scope and sequence of this Blue curriculum are neither clear nor coherent. I can find little in the learning outcomes that clearly distinguishes “integrative foundation” courses from “focused inquiry.” The chief difference seems to be that the first group is a set of “freshman experience” courses that are supposed to “touch” on just about everything, and the second is a set of courses that will be “major” oriented. I am concerned about the impact of cramming all these “integrative foundation” courses into the freshman year (might it be better to take one of these EACH year?) and then following up with a math course and a writing course … whenever! I do not think this sequence will serve our student body well.
The first three courses listed (“freshman/sophomore experience”) are meant to provide an Integrative Foundation,” but they appear to “throw together” rather than “integrate.” What is the reason for putting “social science reasoning,” “globalization,” and “oral communications skills” together in the same course? Is this simply a way to accommodate the items that got high scores on last year’s survey? Why is the development of “written and visual communications skills” a part of the “humanistic reasoning and creative arts” course but not a part of the others? (What is “humanistic reasoning,” anyway, and why is it paired with “creative arts”?)

Likewise, throughout this plan, diversity appears everywhere…and nowhere. It is combined with Humanities in the second set of courses, but an “ethics” course may be taken instead. Why are diversity and ethics combined with the humanities but not with the courses in arts, natural science, or math?

The student learning objectives (henceforth SLOs), especially of the Integrative Foundation courses, are sloppy. I understand that these things are hard to write, and I know that these plans are only drafts. But how can we (and our students) understand this curriculum if the SLOs are overly general, repetitive, or impossible to achieve in a 3-credit course?

“Ability to synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations” appears as a SLO in all three courses, while “develop written and visual communications skills” appears in only one. Why? Should both (or rather all four) of these SLOs appear as goals of the three-course series?

“Learn about global studies.” Learn what about global studies?

“Ability to interpret texts, creative works, compositions, productions and/or performances in their historical and cultural contexts.” Now, that’s a tall order for a freshman experience course. But wait. Freshmen will also need to “demonstrate knowledge of art’s role in shaping the history and diversity of the world’s cultures as well as its effect on cross-cultural issues and interactions.”

As I said, these things are hard to write and may be refined. But I worry that the result (or perhaps the intent) of these vague SLOs will be that just about any lower-division course will qualify as an integrative foundation “core” class if it can fit in with a couple of these goals. “Ability to read critically and understand historic or contemporary text.” Wouldn’t just about any course that required reading fit this goal?

The USC general education curriculum looks much like the Blue alternative, and it has its own problems. But the three introductory courses are much better conceived than these. Have a look if you are still interested in the Blue plan.
I strongly prefer the Silver Plan. It presents a clear curriculum that begins with fundamental skills in mathematics and English, and complements specialized learning in the major by teaching students key elements of the different disciplines. An interdisciplinary capstone course allow students to synthesize critical strategies they’ve learned in the major with those they’ve learned through general education. The Blue Plan has four “foundation” courses that may not have pre- or co-requisites. Thus faculty teaching any of these courses must assume that students have no university-level preparation in math or writing. That seriously limits what can be done in these courses. This plan also seems to prefer interdisciplinary themes courses to courses in disciplines. I am concerned that this will result in watered-down results: students will not really learn about disciplinary thinking.

The distinction between “integrative foundation” and “focused inquiry” is unclear: some of the outcomes listed for “focused inquiry” are things that students need to learn before they’re prepared to learn some of the things listed under “integrative foundation.”

Lynda Walsh on April 11, 2012 at 4:58 pm

I would like to thank the Gen Ed Task Force for their truly Herculean labor on this project. I can appreciate the logic behind both proposals, but speaking as someone who has administered a Gen Ed program before, the Blue plan is simply not feasible. It removes too many core competencies from formal curricular oversight, making them hard to track and assess. It also places an unfair burden on faculty to teach competencies outside their fields of expertise, particularly in the area of writing instruction. If we follow the Blue plan, we will have no idea if it’s working or not because it will be impractical to track the fragmented competencies through all the different departments and courses in which they are supposedly covered.

In both the silver and blue plan, I am concerned about the apparent attempt to cut down the number of hours of writing practice new students will have as part of the Core. We have done studies here that indicate students who take ENG 101 do better in 102 than those who just test into 102. Writing is not content—it’s process and practice. Students simply need more time to develop mastery in core writing competencies than they do in other Core courses. Mission statements and self-studies at *all levels* of this university suggest that students need *better* writing skills than they currently have; I can’t imagine how *cutting* writing instruction from the Core will work toward that goal.
On Mar 29, 2012, at 5:04 PM, Eric B Herzik wrote:

I was going to limit this to just Larry, as we talked briefly at the Chairs meeting, but will pass along some observations to all of you.

At the CLA chairs meeting there was vocal dismay about truncating CH and perhaps other parts of the more humanities and arts aspects of the core. I don’t know that my department faculty would necessarily share that sentiment. We (PSC) have had an uneven relationship with CH and at least half of the faculty would not be bothered if the whole sequence went away (mostly on substantive grounds.) Except for perhaps Leah Wilds, who is the only faculty member from PSC who teaches in CH, if CH shrinks from 3 to 2 courses, such a reduction would not draw the dismay which was being solicited at the meeting. Thus, to say there is a united or more accurately unanimous feeling on this issue in CLA would not be accurate. (And I can imagine that Psychology would be similarly predisposed or more likely just ambivalent.)

As chair of a department that would most likely be most affected by any movement concerning the US and Nevada Constitution requirement (although History could be equally affected) I have some split feelings. How CH 203 covers the US and especially the Nevada Constitution is a joke. While I haven’t checked syllabi in two years, in the past the Nevada Constitution was not made available. If covered (and that is an IF) there might be part of one lecture devoted to Nevada. In talking with both an instructor and a few students (so not a great sample) coverage of the US Constitution was also very limited. Perhaps Neal has instituted changes, but if not, then I would offer up the following analogy. Would you be satisfied if PSC had a course claiming to be diverse – say on the basis of gender – because a part of a couple of lectures touched on the topic? If CH gets redone, CH 203 could disappear and the US and Nevada Constitution requirement would have to be picked up in some other way. However, and this is a my dilemma as chair, while I don’t think CH 203 effectively meets the spirit or perhaps even letter of the constitution requirements, I don’t know that PSC and/or History are prepared to take on this load. In the pre-Core era the US and Nevada Constitutions were covered by PSC 103 (which then changed to PSC 101) and a similar History class (105?) Given a smaller student body and a MUCH smaller number of majors, PSC handled the load. I don’t know that we could now. OK, we could, but we would be running CH sized classes of 103/101 with a need for GTA support for sections. An alternative, one discussed by Marc, would be to do these requirements through some sort of computerized class system. I never got the details but have grave suspicions of how valuable and truly reflective of the substantive points such an approach would embrace. (Again, would you accept this for a gender class requirement or for anything in the humanities and arts?) Online options are available, but I think many in administration think this is a no-cost, run as many students through as you can approach. I am currently teaching online PSC 100 (Nevada Constitution) sections and they are not so easily done – if done in the true spirit of honoring the content. (And I have streamlined this course.)

I am less concerned that social sciences gets X number of courses in the Core. This seemed to be a concern from the humanities folks (and I may be wrong in that impression) but
start saying X area must have a course kind of mocks the idea that drove this effort. I don’t see where Engineering (technology) necessarily has a course or even Business. As Marc (and we rarely agree on anything) noted “is this about core competencies or 36 credits?”

David Fenimore on April 23, 2012 at 4:00 pm

Although the Silver plan is preferable to the Blue for many reasons outlined elsewhere in this blog, I want to address what I see as a foundational flaw in Silver (even more pronounced though not as explicit in Blue): the well-meaning but vague and all-but-impracticable assertion that writing and computational skills will be “reinforced throughout the curriculum,” as Silver puts it, after a single three-credit course each.

Having taught Core Humanities in large-lecture, small-class, and Honors section for two decades and worked with thousands of sophomores, juniors and even seniors from all colleges and majors, I would conservatively estimate that 35-50% of them have not yet developed the skills to reliably generate 250-500 words of coherent, typo-free prose in something approaching standard English. As Lynda Walsh has pointed out here, first-year students need more, not less, practice to consistently acquire this ability. (And Core Writing as well as Core Humanities have some hard assessment data to support my estimates.) It’s process, as she points out, not content. For many of them it is literally learning a new language and the corresponding neuromuscular conditioning. It’s not a “download.”

More times than I can remember, students with whom I work personally have protested that this kind of writing, so essential in the workplace and the public forum, is not valued or practiced in the other courses they’re taking. Too many undergraduates tell me they mainly write short answers and fill out Scantron sheets, or else write 10-15-page research papers that come back with a grade and few if any comments and certainly no specific editing feedback. I wonder if my colleagues in math are any more confident that the core competencies in their area will be “reinforced throughout the curriculum”? Say what you will about CH (and after 20 years I would welcome a fresh look at these courses) — it is the last place where many — if not most — of our undergraduates are asked to compare, contrast, and synthesize a variety of textual sources into a sustained and readable piece of argumentative discourse.

Now a pitch for my team, and a point for the Silver: besides this basic learning outcome, courses like CH give added value in that these writing assignments often center on informed debates about the role of religion in politics, the roots of representative government and human rights, the validity of the scientific method, war and nationalism, and other ongoing issues a familiarity with which is essential to any educated citizen who must make meaning out of a bewildering deluge of information and opinion. I am glad that the Silver alternative preserves at least a few of these irreplaceable learning opportunities.
will concede that 6 credits of broad, integrative CH-type courses are preferable to none, before undergraduates settle into the well-worn paths of their major specializations.

7.

James Mardock on April 25, 2012 at 7:41 pm

Thanks to the task force, and thanks also to all the people who have responded so thoughtfully in this comment section. I may have more to say later, but here are my preliminary reactions.

Both of these plans have serious flaws. First of all, I’m not sure how the proposals follow from what our external review of the core actually said. Neither proposal makes a cogent enough case that the existing core curriculum cannot simply be retooled, or provides any evidence that the versions of the overhaul they propose will accomplish the goals that we want to accomplish in a better way. The plans contain explicit mentions of certain buzzwords from the external review, to be sure — “ethics” and “diversity” and “globalization” — but neither plan gives any sense of what those things mean, and how the general education plan can possibly address them in a way that will be meaningful across the curriculum. Ethics means something radically different to an engineer than it does to a chemist, a sociologist, a historian, etc.

A major problem that will be more apparent when it comes time to vote on these plans is the lack of any plan of implementation. We can’t vote for or against the plans until we know how their oversimplified abstractions translate into actual course content and implementable goals. If we can’t actually retool existing courses, who is going to oversee the development of new ones? Where will the money come from? What is the schedule for rolling out new courses and curricular plans? How do we go from bullet-pointed lists of undefined abstract nouns to course numbers? What are the larger implications for other NSHE schools and transfer credits look like?

Both Silver and Blue plans are inadequate in this regard, but the Blue plan in particular is disastrously under-thought. Some of my colleagues have pointed out that it seems not to acknowledge the skills our students enter the university having, and that it seems to be proposing a “Freshman/Sophomore experience” that consists entirely of abstract “Competencies” to be acquired before students have taken the courses that will give them the practical foundational skills needed to acquire those competencies. Math and Writing are simply not “Focused Inquiries;” they are sets of skills and reasoning methods that form a basis for focused inquiry. They are analogous to muscles that need to be worked repeatedly and consistently in a variety of contexts, over the four years a student attends the university. Our current core curriculum is not always implemented in the way it is intended, but it is meant — with the CH sequence leading to the capstone course — to give students exercise in writing throughout their education. The new plans seem to suggest that a little three-credit dip into writing in the first year will be sufficient preparation for a
senior thesis project four years later. This just won’t fly in practice.

Like David Fenimore, I’ll welcome a thoughtful reexamination of the core humanities program, but it has to proceed from an examination of the current objectives for all three courses, a proposal of what the objectives for our ideal humanities requirements will be, and specific definitions of such vague abstractions as “ethics” and “critical thinking”. The proposals seem rather to be conceiving of the humanities requirements as a kitchen sink: any objectives or skills or competencies that the colleges don’t want to take responsibility for and address themselves will be offloaded onto the General Education humanities requirement, so long as it can be done with no specific direction and in fewer credits than the university currently requires. This is a hear-no-requirements, see-no-requirements strategy, not a workable plan.

The CH director and interested faculty, incidentally, will be meeting soon to discuss possible strategies for practical implementation of change to the humanities requirements that might be accommodated into these plans, but until the plans themselves are revised to give more concrete, practicable guidelines for change, our discussion will contain a large degree of speculation.

8. Bill Macauley on April 25, 2012 at 9:38 pm

I am concerned that in both plans, at least in terms of writing, there is a wide gap between the outcomes of the first/second-year core courses and the expectations included in the capstone courses (the final step in Core), with no articulated process, scaffolding, or plan for getting students from one to the other.

9. Anonymous on May 1, 2012 at 10:29 pm

As regards student writing, the Blue Plan is ill-conceived and unsupported. An example of its lack of rigorous conceptualization is that it dismantles our current “writing across the curriculum” efforts as embodied in our Core Curriculum. Now students take English 101 and/or 102; then they take CH 201, 202, and 203. These five courses taken at the freshman, sophomore, and junior levels reinforce writing in a variety of ways and all are the subject of systematic assessment. Finally, students take more writing in their two Capstones. Obviously, students need more writing than can be accomplished in these seven courses, but they form a solid foundation. And, admittedly, the Capstones would benefit from better assessments. The Blue Plan destroys this systematic approach in favor of freshman experiences and follow-on courses that do not ensure regular, progressive, re-enforced
writing skills. The Blue Plan offers no justification, either logically or empirically, to suggest that the various “competencies” are adequate, systematic, or can be defended by empirical studies based on other universities’ experiences.

Neal Ferguson on May 2, 2012 at 8:07 pm

The major segment of the present Core Curriculum that is truly interdisciplinary is Core Humanities. The courses have been put together (and are continually modified) by faculty from five different disciplines. Not carved into tablets the courses continue to change. The CH courses have been recognized nationally. CH faculty have received national awards. The CH project was the object of a major challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Internal and external data clearly suggest that the courses are successful and that they attain their educational objectives.

Occasionally the courses are the subject of criticism. Why? Is it because they combine for a nine credit requirement? Perhaps that’s part of it. To set the record straight: when deliberations began to create what became the Core Curriculum c. 1990, the then Western Traditions requirement was intended to be six credits. The idea for a two-course, multi-disciplinary requirement that would satisfy the Humanities part of the distribution requirements arose from a faculty committee appointed in 1983 by then Vice President for Academic Affairs, Richard Davies. The committee, chaired by me when I was Dean of Continuing Education, originated two pilot courses under the rubric: “Ideas, Values, and Cultures.” IVC became the core of Western Traditions. Some years later, when creating a new Core Curriculum was underway, the upper administration decided to add a third course that would also include the legislatively required constitution requirement—the American Experience. That’s why the present requirement stands at nine credits. Humanities’ imperialism was not part of the equation. The decision, however, was a controversial one at the time and remains so.

Or does the criticism arise from the mandatory nature of the requirement and the student resentment thereby engendered? Perhaps. I make no apologies to students for its being mandatory. Faculty from five departments got together to design the package of courses. That’s what faculty do. True enough: the trend at American universities has been to allow student to pick from a bewildering array of courses to satisfy general education requirements. In a major reform the University of Nebraska reduced its cornucopia of general education courses from 3,000 to something under 2,000! Some faculty thought the you-pick trend to be ill-conceived in 1990 and still do. Still, humanities faculty have not demanded that other disciplinary faculty follow our lead, but we are proud of what we have created. Along with composition, CH is the core of the Core Curriculum. Having said this, I will readily acknowledge that various sections of each of the CH courses vary widely even though they are still recognizable as being roughly equivalent. Core Humanities should be preserved and will be defended as necessary.
Or does the criticism arise not with students but with faculty? More than one student has complained to me about the workload associated with CH and has added: and my adviser (or other faculty members) says that CH is “make work,” or some such epithet. Perhaps faculty have actually said the things that students report to me. If so, faculty solidarity may be jeopardized. In my experience some faculty think that intellectual effort outside their own disciplines is a contradiction in terms. And so we have discussions about the “hard sciences” or the perceived philistinism of various disciplines or the superior value of majors that “put people to work” or the lack of support for ____ (insert the discipline, program, college of choice).

Or does the criticism arise because not all of our students have to take CH? Those who transfer from other parts of the NSHE can transfer courses into UNR, or in the case of TMCC, transfer the CH courses they take there. About 35% of students transfer in their CH courses. That’s hardly a criticism that can be directed at CH alone. We are, I think, all part of the same higher education system.

I also hear criticism that the courses too difficult. They are challenging. They require students to bump-up against some fundamental texts in philosophy, science, political theory, literature, history, art, and jurisprudence. They require a substantial amount of writing, discussion, and oral presentation. But are they TOO difficult? Not from my perspective. The following data includes all sections of all classes, 2005-2010. The DFW rate for these courses is around twenty percent. Twenty percent! More than sixty percent of the students receive A’s and B’s. Of those students who finish the classes and do the assignments, more than seventy-five percent get A, B, or C grades. The average grade is somewhere between a B- and a B. CH instructors recognize that these courses are required and do not try either to flunk students or drive them out of their courses. I personally would like to see slightly lower grades in CH courses but have no fear: academic freedom prevails.

Set against these criticisms is recognition that the three courses have morphed over the years, that they have changed with the times, but make little effort to swing with the breeze. Each of them does contain “non-Western” curricular elements. Student assessments that ask the students to rate their improvement during the semester are quite positive. The basis of the assessment is a specific but different set of student learning outcomes for each course a. Alumni survey data is highly supportive. And, anecdotally, ex-students of all ages stop me in Raley’s to let me know that “now” — some years later — Core Humanities was one of the best courses they ever took.

Let’s have a discussion about Core Humanities in the context of the proposed plans.

James Mardock on May 4, 2012 at 10:49 pm
Here are some further general observations and ideas for the future of the humanities requirements.

It seems as though we have a desire across the university to have a humanities requirement that is seen to be more relevant to our undergraduates in each field than the current CH courses are — rightly or not — perceived to be. I, for one, would welcome more participation from Business, Journalism, Engineering, and the sciences (among others) in implementing and teaching courses that are, after all, designed to give students an awareness of the backgrounds and contexts for intellectual inquiry in ALL fields, including their own. None of our students, in any college, pursues a field whose primary questions arose in a vacuum. Engineering and business and empirical science are pursuits conducted by humans, and they are pursuits that draw on the traditions of intellectual inquiry that form both the content and the methodology of CH courses.

What’s more, all of our fields of study require spoken and written communication, as well as the ability to pursue logical argument, distinguish opinion from supportable assertion, understand the contexts and history of debatable issues, and understand counterarguments and alternative theories to one’s own hypothesis. These are the learning objectives and the bread and butter of the humanities requirements, and those courses, if implemented as they should be, form a crucial sequential experience in the middle two years of an undergraduate education that allows students to develop these skills, techniques, and habits of mind in a consistent and ongoing fashion between an early foundation in writing and the work that they do in their capstones, senior theses, and advanced major courses.

No one would expect a chemistry student to take a single course in laboratory techniques in the first year, then ignore those techniques and stay out of the lab for three years and emerge in the senior year as an expert titrator. No one should expect Core Writing 102 to make a student after one semester into the best writer she’ll be in her life. You get a foundation of skills, and then you practice those skills consistently.

I welcome ideas for revamping the General Education requirements in humanities that better address the needs of all the University’s colleges, while fulfilling the specific learning objectives that we can all agree on, implemented in a consistent way in the middle two years of the degree.

Currently CH is taught (with a few exceptions) as a three-course “greatest hits” humanities sequence. The goals listed above are certainly addressed, but while this model has definite virtues, perhaps teaching the important ideas of, say, Plato, Homer, Christianity, Islam, Marx, Freud, Darwin, etc. does not serve the needs of every undergraduate.

I can imagine an alternative requirement that pursues the goals of the humanities sequence by offering a menu of themed courses — perhaps team taught, certainly incorporating teaching from outside CLA and the usual suspect departments — from which students could choose six credits. I can think of a number of such course titles off the top of my head:
“Faith and Observation from Heraclitus to Dawkins”

“Free Will, Thermodynamics, and the Gods”

“Economics, Propaganda, and Architecture”

“The City as Idea and Material”

“The Philosophy and Psychology of Information Systems”

“What’s a Human? A Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Question”

We could all come up with any number of other ones specific to our disciplines and passions.

Such courses would have to be fairly rigorously assessed to ensure that they provided intensive practice in writing, an awareness of logical and fallacious thinking, and an ability to see multiple sides of the more complex issues in any discipline. But the benefit would be to share the ownership of General Education among the excellent educators across the disciplines of the University, and to expose all of our students to the imagination and skill of a wider range of teachers.

The alternative, which both plans seem to offer to some degree, is to require the faculty of some colleges to shunt responsibility for general education onto other colleges.

A related observation: FTE brings benefits, and it brings responsibilities. It may be a cynically played zero-sum game, but FTE is not the same as learning.

I believe that the general core requirements do not live up to the stated ideals of modern core programs. We still do not have a curriculum which is not diversified much more than it was 25 years ago, when I sat on the original Core Curriculum planning committee. We worked to include creative arts; we lobbied hard for courses that would not just seem white, male and European. We have not made enough progress in those last areas.
Although I am absolutely in favor of additional integration of core concepts and skills across the curriculum, I am strongly against the Blue plan. Not only is there no way to assess the implementation of this plan (as there are no clear courses linked to desired competencies), there is also no sequence built into the plan to assure that the development of competencies transfer between courses and built on one another. As of now, this plan demonstrates a range of desired competencies and no clear way of delivering them. If we wish to integrate the core, there needs to be a concrete articulation of what that would mean. As it currently stands, this plan seems like an empty gesture toward a general education curriculum while allowing discrete disciplinary programs to deliver material in isolation from any real shared educational foundations. While I appreciate the time and energy put into these plans, I very much caution against what appears to be a rather empty gesture at the integrated model.

Katharine DeBoer on May 8, 2012 at 11:48 pm

The Blue Option sounds like another unfortunate application of “No child left behind” – which caters to the lowest common denominator. The objectives sound more suitable for a high school application – generalized education – rather than college level. Such generalization would eviscerate the curriculum I teach (music), which depends on specificity right from the first semester freshman year. What is offered in the Blue option would actually put my majors seriously behind in their goals.

James Winn on May 9, 2012 at 12:09 am

I would greatly dislike to see the Blue plan adopted by this university. I can see no improvement or gain over the general education provided by either our core requirements as they currently are, or over the proposed silver plan, while the problems of execution and assessment connected with it would be enormous.

Justin Gifford on May 9, 2012 at 8:59 pm

As someone who has taught the large Core Humanities lecture course every spring for the past five years, I can say without hesitation that the Blue plan is not a desirable option for our students. I realize that I am going to echo what many others have said here, but I think
it is worth emphasizing that the Blue plan is so unspecific as to be very little use to our
students. I have taught 200 undergraduates per semester in Core Humanities, and this is
one of the few opportunities students can learn the essential critical thinking and writing
skills necessary for entering into a competitive job market and achieving a broad-based
liberal arts education. Students come in to Core Humanities with weak skills in reading
comprehension and critical writing, and most of them leave having gained the necessary
competencies for participating in public life and the job market. It would be a grave
mistake to take this away from our students, as many of them already struggle with the
basic reading and writing skills that many other students across the country learn in high
school. We need to acknowledge that Nevada does not have a strong public education
program at the K-12 level, and that courses like Core Humanities are created in part to
catch our students up to their peers across the nation. We do our students a disservice by
refusing to acknowledge this; we also do them a disservice to adopt the Silver plan, which
is loaded with buzzwords and vagaries, but contains very little in the way of useful content.
If you ask almost any student—in the Humanities, Sciences, Engineering, Business, etc.—
they will tell you that Core Humanities was one of the most memorable and useful courses
for preparing them for the real world. They will tell you that it is this kind of course that
exemplifies what college should offer people. They will tell you that, even though the may
have been resistant to the courses at the beginning of their college careers, that Core
Humanities is one of the few important classes that every undergraduate needs to take. If
we take Core Humanities away from students, then it is my opinion that this will weaken
our intellectual community and our national standing even further.

Cari Cunningham on May 9, 2012 at 9:40 pm

I feel almost embarrassed to admit how much the work of the General Education Task
Force has educated me on the core curriculum that is currently in place at UNR. Though I
do not advise majors, since UNR does not offer a major in dance, as an educator I should be
acutely aware of our general goals for our graduates. In this respect, I am grateful that the
Silver and Blue plans (and the incredibly undertaking of this task force) have really caused
me to think deeply about what general education can and should do for all students who
graduate from our institution. Certainly it is easier to identify the pitfalls, rather than
the strengths of these two plans, however I would like to first point out that even the charge to,
and process of, thinking about what defines a UNR graduate in terms of general education
student learning outcomes should get us all talking and serve to strengthen curriculum
campus-wide.

As much as I am in support of communication across disciplines, I must admit that as an
artist I am predominantly concerned about what these two plans seem to suggest about the
importance of the arts, and in particular the fine arts, within the general education
curriculum. I am grateful that both proposals devote at least three credits (in line with the
current core requirement) to the arts as I believe that leaving the sole artistic education of a
large percentage of our graduates to mass media would be a travesty. In addition I believe that study in the fine arts, whether in a music appreciation course or an introductory theatre class, greatly enhances students’ ability to see the cross disciplinary potential that we are always advocating for. For example, I am thrilled when I hear a Biology major compare a choreographer’s use of space to molecular structure or a musician and mathematician finding common ground in the realm of chance procedure and music composition. In addition, I think it is critical that this arts component of general education be a lecture course (ideally with an experiential component that exposes students to live performance and/or practice of an art form), taken in the Freshman or Sophomore year, in which practicing artists (dancers, painters, musicians, actors, sculptors, animators, and so on) sit side-by-side with those that have no experience with the focused study of an artistic discipline. In my experience, this “level playing field” interaction opens up cross-disciplinary pollination and fosters growth and understanding on both sides. For this reason, the Blue plan seems a bit more problematic to me than the Silver plan.

While I am nervous about the seemingly tacked on phrase “and related topics” under Arts in the Silver Plan, I suspect this vagueness will be clarified as student learning outcomes are solidified. In the Blue plan, however, the Arts fall under the heading of “Focused Inquiry” and are seemingly positioned for a Junior/Senior experience. In my opinion this is too late. In addition the “OR” in the Arts requirement is confusing to me. Are we suggesting that students will be allowed to fulfill this general education requirement by either taking a lecture-based course focused on analysis and interpretation in the arts OR through artistic practice? I’m reading the latter as studio based courses in art, theatre, dance, or music and offering this as an alternative scares me a bit. I suspect that those majoring in an artistic discipline would be thrilled that they could fulfill this requirement by staying well within their comfort zone and, though I would like to have more students enrolled in my modern dance classes, I am also an unwavering advocate of the side-by-side artist/non-artist interaction that I mentioned above. It’s a different experience watching Balanchine’s “Four Temperaments” or Martha Graham’s “Night Journey” when you are in a classroom with dancers who have a physical knowledge of what it takes to dance these works. It is also critical, in my opinion, that these dancers understand the academic side of their discipline and hear an English major analyze Graham’s choreographic take on the text of “Oedipus Rex” (sorry, I know this should be italicized, but I couldn’t get this blog to accept the italics!), which is the basis for “Night Journey”.

I am also a bit confused by the “Humanistic Reasoning & Creative Arts” component in the “Integrative Foundation” section of the Blue plan. This seems to be an earlier exposure to the arts, potentially. But this categorization seems so broad that I’m not even sure we can count on the students having any exposure to the arts (particularly from a faculty member versed in an artistic discipline) in this component of the general education.

Aside from my concerns directly related to the arts and how they are addressed within these plans, I also share my colleagues’ concerns that requiring less practice in writing throughout the core curriculum is a tremendous mistake. I’m certain that we can all agree that we’d like our graduates to be effective communicators regardless of their chosen majors. I do not want to hear from my students in upper division dance history courses that
they have not written a research paper since their Core Writing 102 class and I agree with David Fenimore that, like dance, writing takes continual practice. I also find myself perplexed by terms such as “globalization” and “equity issues” and find their integration into both plans a bit nebulous. What is meant by these terms and is this something that should be reinforced throughout the general education curriculum or made into a specific category (such as the current diversity requirement)?

Neither plan is perfect, but like many of my colleagues I find the Blue plan to be underdeveloped and very likely impossible to implement, let alone assess. And I’m also curious, as a relative newcomer to UNR, what has prompted this seemingly pointed attack on the Core Humanities sequence?

18.

Barbara Walker on May 10, 2012 at 8:15 am

Many of my colleagues have covered the most salient points with regard to the relative merits of the Silver and the Blue plans; I agree that the Silver is better than the Blue. However, upon carefully reviewing the Core program that we currently have in place, I have to say that I think it is better than either; despite its lack of perfection the degree of thought and care that clearly went into it is impressive. The Silver seems to be essentially a reduction of credits required in a similar plan, while the Blue is a real experiment. I like James Mardock’s ideas and course proposals. But what worries me most about both the Blue and the Mardock proposals is how much work it would take to turn such proposals into full programs that are pedagogically effective. Both would require an enormous investment of time and energy by faculty who could instead be improving the reputation of the university, as well as the quality of their teaching as fully engaged scholars, through research, writing, consulting, and creative activities.

19.

Anonymous on May 10, 2012 at 4:58 pm

Given a choice between Silver and Blue, I think Silver best serves multiple disciplines and will be more feasible to implement. In the Blue plan I am particularly concerned about the fact that social science is not included as a separate requirement. In general, I am hopeful that the final plan chosen will also give strong instruction in diversity, writing, and global issues.
Anonymous on May 10, 2012 at 10:46 pm

I too respect the efforts of the committee and there is no need to repeat what has been stated repeatedly above except that it really seems clear that the Silver Plan is a superior option. I do not like the Blue Plan’s distinction between the natural and social sciences, the Silver Plan is more clearly articulated, and the Silver Plan can conceivably be implemented with less obstacles or issues. Finally, we need to teach students strong writing skills earlier, rather than later, in their careers. Many juniors and seniors currently have very poor written communication skills and pushing that skill set back later than it is already offered is a mistake in my opinion. Please do not water-down efforts to make UNR students competent communicators.

Greta de Jong on May 11, 2012 at 4:02 am

I am often scheduled to teach CH 203 and a general capstone course in history in the same semester. Whenever this happens, I am struck by how much better our students are at the upper-division level compared to when they first start taking classes at UNR. Most of my capstone students have a solid understanding of the history of the United States and the rest of the world, regardless of their major fields of study. They are curious and engaged, seeking to broaden their understanding of past events and how they influence our lives today. They can find and synthesize information into coherent essays and presentations; clearly articulate their ideas both orally and in writing; and often demonstrate sophisticated analytical skills. In class discussions students listen respectfully to each other even when they disagree, and they frequently raise questions of their own or offer original insights into the material we are studying. All of this suggests to me that the existing core curriculum is doing something right. UNR is producing knowledgeable and thoughtful citizens who have the skills to succeed in their future endeavors, whatever those might be. The current system sets out a clear progression for achieving those skills, as does the slightly modified version under the Silver plan. The Blue plan seems vague by comparison, and it’s hard to see specifically how students would develop high-level writing, communication, and analytical skills under that system.

Anonymous on May 11, 2012 at 7:24 pm

The Silver option lays out a curriculum in which courses build upon prerequisite courses and thus help students to develop competencies with depth and rigor. The Blue option lists many desirable competencies but doesn’t propose a curriculum that will help students to develop them well. For instance, the “integrative” courses all have as a goal that students
would learn to “synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations.” This is one of the most difficult things for undergraduates to learn. For them to do it well, they must already have the mathematical and writing skills necessary to carry out that synthesis and transfer. Yet we would expect them to do it before they have focused courses in mathematics and writing? This really seems unwise from a pedagogical point of view.

Jen Hill on May 11, 2012 at 7:32 pm

Thanks to the taskforce for taking on such an enormous job. I think it is important that we evaluate our core frequently and make sure that it’s doing what we hope it will. I would have liked a bit more access to statistics and assessment data, however. One hears a great deal about students getting “hung up” and not able to proceed to graduation due to the core requirements but is this really a serious problem? One hears about students who grouse about “worthless” classes (not just core requirements!), but is there data to support claims that the core as we have it now is/is not effective? I know Core Writing and CH have done assessments; has core math and science? Do we have that data to look at? And where’s the evidence that a revised core will help with graduation rates? (These rates are dependent on several factors, including student preparation, student commitment to learning, etc.)

The survey was a start, but since it was voluntary and vague, I’m not sure that it yielded useful information. Weren’t almost all of those categories things that educators believe students should encounter?

I will echo what many others above have said: if one “must” change the core (if there is data to support that it doesn’t deliver what we need it to or that it could deliver it more efficiently), it seems the Silver plan better articulates goals/outcomes.

That said, even there I have doubts about its articulations: the grouping and “tasking” of so many desired exposures/knowledges makes them dilute; the defining of “science” as excluding social sciences is problematic; the vagueness of “global” and “diversity”… the absence of financial/economic literacy so essential to a citizen.

Yet all of these issues and more attend to the Blue plan. In addition to huge implementation questions (whether such a huge overhaul makes sense at this present moment, UNR’s present over-reliance on underpaid lecturers, etc), the Blue Plan doesn’t attend or articulate the value of exposure to varied modes of inquiry, or of critical thinking across and connecting various disciplines. Other issues include: where the desired creation of a local/global citizen occurs; the withering of political/cultural history so important to the development of an informed citizen; the assumption that diversity “happens” or “will happen” in our classes. Echoing Professor de Jong above, I have a very hard time seeing where high-level critical writing, communication, and analytical skills will be developed in the Blue plan.
One must applaud any examination of the Core Curriculum that is faculty-driven and motivated by a desire to strengthen foundational principles and broad general education. Most professional associations focused on general education or core studies agree that curricula such as ours should be evaluated and overhauled every ten to fifteen years. That said, I think it is fairly apparent that our Core Proposals—both Silver and Blue—have been impelled by twin forces: the mandate to cut graduation credits to 120 (putting pressure on credit-heavy major programs) and a long-standing desire on the part of some faculty and programs to extricate their students from what they see as a CLA monopoly on Core FTE (Core Writing, Core Humanities, fine arts, diversity, and social science required courses). Core Humanities has for years drawn particular fire because of its nine required credits, even though, as Neal Ferguson shows in his post, the CH 203 course was built out of legislatively mandated constitution courses previously offered by History and Political Science.

It is ironic that both proposals trumpet their innovative nature by turning to an already well-worn language of outcomes and criteria. It is ironic especially because it is the existing Core that is actually revolutionary and could provide the basis for a true enhancement. Take Core Humanities, for example. The program was designed by faculty from across the humanities, including two disciplines often grouped among the social sciences: history and political science. In addition to providing efficiently and on a grand scale introductory materials from traditional humanities, the courses also touch on the history and appreciation of science, art, and music. It is significant that humanities faculty were able to agree to give up departmental courses, many of them required, in favor of a truly interdisciplinary set of courses, taught by teaching teams from five departments. This has enlivened the whole pedagogical experience of faculty and grad students who have taught in the program. My own teaching teams over the years have included not only TAs, but also faculty members, some of them senior. I myself have served as a discussion leader for three other faculty members from three different departments. All of this is to say that in Core Humanities, beginning students can still come into contact with senior faculty, many of them award-winning teachers.

As Neal explained in his post, the Core Humanities program grew out of, actually, two different curricular experiments during the eighties. When the Core was being designed, in 1988 and 1989, the current Core Humanities sequence was offered in a year-long pilot run. The program was prepared for with a major two year NEH Educational grant that brought national speakers to campus and “trained” faculty with two summers of interdisciplinary Summer Seminars led by nationally-known experts in their fields. In 1994 the program was extended a $690,000 NEH Challenge Grant that seeded a $3m endowment that supports a program of Distinguished Professors and Distinguished TAs in the contributing departments. Those departments have also been strengthened with teaching and research Post-Docs, supported by the Endowment, in fields the departments choose to enhance. At the same time, the Core Humanities program has been assessed and evaluated at every
level, many times over, by national teams from the NEH and also by committees of faculty outside the program at UNR. I would venture to guess that CH has been the most evaluated program on campus.

A similar thing could be said about Core Writing, which pioneered program assessment on campus with major portfolio assessment projects undertaken in the nineties and again in the aughts. Core Writing provides probably the most intensive and productive teacher training workshops for TAs on campus. Both Core Writing and Core Humanities have published Student Learning Outcomes that are much more specific and more hierarchical than the extraordinarily vague and general SLOs touted in the two new plans under consideration. The Core Writing and Core Humanities outcomes, furthermore, were conceived in conjunction with the carefully crafted Core Curriculum outcomes as part of a process of curriculum mapping.

It is, then, very strange that both Silver and Blue plans actually seek to dismantle the most thought-through and successful parts of the existing Core. The plans also wreck what is a true strength of the existing structure, that it is a Vertical Core that haunts students “cradle to grave,” as it were, in favor of what is essentially a very old-fashioned freshman Core with a vague frosting of Capstone at the end. The upshot of the two Core proposals can be easily recognized by scanning the previous posts in this blog thread. All the responders are from CLA and nearly all from humanities and fine arts. These people recognize the immense cost in student achievement that these proposals entail. Eric Herzik alone from the social sciences (or math?) and nobody from the natural sciences have troubled themselves with this discussion. Why? Because they recognize that the proposals have virtually no effect upon those programs. The Learning Outcomes have been so skimpily drawn that virtually any course can be argued to meet the criteria, and thus almost no curricular work needs to be done in those programs. Both Silver and Blue plans virtually ensure a return to the very old-fashioned menus of introductory disciplinary courses—perhaps finally even in the humanities—in which students choose too early to track themselves based on word-of-mouth and preconceptions.

What would be a truly revolutionary Core has been broached by special committees a couple times in the last fifteen or so years, but to no avail. This would be for the social sciences and the natural sciences to develop, on the interdisciplinary (or predisciplinary) model of Core Humanities, true introductory Core courses in the social, physical, and biological sciences. Faculty in Core Humanities would delight, in fact, in crossing boundaries as they did several years ago under the aegis of Math Across the Curriculum. Since we teach, from a historical and intellectual perspective, about ancient Greek science, the scientific method, Roman engineering, Hobbes and Locke and Jefferson, Darwin, Freud, and myriad others, we could truly energize our students’ curiosities, accomplishments, and opportunities by working together to communicate an authentically general education. Many of us in the humanities have backgrounds in quite disparate fields (my minors were in math and physics), and I know many in the STEM disciplines who recognize the life-importance of the arts and humanities.

A few weeks ago, Norman Matloff (Computer Science, UC Davis), writing on Bloomberg.com, noted that computer science majors and software engineers were among the most-sought and highest-paid new college graduates. He warned of the danger in their future, quoting a former Intel CEO as saying “the half-life of an engineer, software or hardware, is only a few years.” Matloff concluded by saying, “If you choose a
software-engineering career, just keep in mind that you could end up working for one of those lowly humanities majors someday.” Surely, we can do better than reinforce this growing gulf between “the two cultures” by thoroughly immersing our students in a broad pre-disciplinary general education program that forestalls as much as possible their own tendency toward disciplinary thinking and, even after they have chosen majors, discourages their easy rejection of other, supposedly opposing, disciplines. This task, which I’ll call Appreciation Across the Curriculum, must begin with faculty, and it is vital at this university at this time.

25. Anonymous on May 11, 2012 at 10:46 pm

I do not feel that I can add much to the conversation beyond what has already been stated – most of my concerns regarding both plans have been echoed in earlier posts. I will however voice conservative support for the Silver Plan. I feel that it provides a better foundation to begin a restructuring if restructuring is indeed necessary. With that being said, I do not yet consider the Silver Alternative proposal to be fully developed or realized. I believe the Core has significant responsibility to writing across the curriculum in ways that are not fully addressed in the plan; I believe that the arts and humanities are given short shrift; and topics directly involving political/social history, diversity, and ethics are glaringly under-considered.

26. Anonymous on May 11, 2012 at 11:49 pm

I concur with much of the sentiment expressed above. In short, I support the Silver Plan, which seems, at least in theory, to better emphasize the importance of the Arts and Humanities. A core curriculum at its best offers breadth, encouraging students to have early exposure to a wide variety of fields and methodological approaches. However, it is imperative that critical thinking and writing skills are emphasized, and that these skills do not come at the cost of breadth of coverage. In my opinion, maintaining courses that engage diversity issues and multi-disciplinary perspectives is also extremely important. Additionally, the role of the Arts, in particular, is underplayed in both of the proposals. Indeed, the Arts are an arena in which students engage in discussions of political/cultural history, diversity, ethics, and socio-economic developments. Sincere thanks to the Gen Ed Task Force for their time and efforts.

27.
I echo many of the comments already posted here. These sort of changes to our general education core should not be made without the benefit of a better supported process which includes broader participation from the full range of our academic faculty. If we are forced into a quick change, then the silver plan is far preferable to the blue plan, in part because the latter relocates instructional design outside of disciplines and according to categories that are not informed by rigorous broad-based discussion among academic faculty. It looks like a program more appropriate to high school than to a flagship university. The lack of focused inquiry in social science in the blue plan is also a glaring deficiency. Rethinking core curriculum could be excellent for UNR if it is done with more consideration, developed over more time and with greater participation from social science disciplines, who are clearly relevant to the stated goals but underrepresented in the plans.

Like colleagues who have already posted, I appreciate the dedicated work of the committee as they carry out the important task of designing the core curriculum.

While I support the endeavor of interdisciplinary inquiry, the Blue plan seems underdeveloped and unlikely to result in its stated goals. As others have pointed out, the Blue alternative collapses or confuses fields of study and topics—for example, not all social sciences explore globalization nor can the humanities be equated with the study of diversity or ethics—and does not prioritize multiple modes of inquiry; I am especially concerned that there is no social science requirement among the focused inquiry courses. It is difficult to imagine the implementation of this plan, particularly given tight budgets and the uncommitted resources that would be required to develop and teach successful interdisciplinary, integrative courses.

Of the two options, the Silver plan better addresses the needs of our students. It provides math and writing preparation early on in the curriculum and ensures that students will take courses from a range of disciplines. Still, I have concerns that in scaling back the current core as proposed in either plan we will not adequately educate students in critical thinking and writing, explore issues related to diversity, or foster student engagement in local/global communities. I hope that the final plan, however it may be structured, will emphasize a broad and rigorous education that will serve our students in their many diverse endeavors, during their time at UNR and after graduation.
The comments that are above mine here do a wonderful job of outlining many problems associated with the Blue Plan and the Silver Plan. I will only echo a couple of these thoughts. More generally, what is wrong with the current core? Are we looking to improve the current core or dismantle it? If the former is the goal, then decreasing the number of courses and reducing the demands of the core seems silly. If the latter is the goal, then these plans should not be presented in the guise of improvement. An improved core should be more carefully assessed.

How are these plans even comparable? The Silver Plan is a watered down version of the current core and the Blue Plan is a total overhaul filled with imprecise language, and implausible connections. To put the two plans to some kind of vote without clearer indications of just how they will be improvements seems hasty and ill-considered at best.

The Blue Plan seems far too abstract to me to even consider as a viable option to replace the current core. How is it even an option? Has there been any kind of consideration of just how these ideas would be put into place? Would the faculty that currently teach the excellent core classes be forced to dismantle the current courses and develop new ones that undermine their own curriculum? Are these to be team-taught classes? How on earth would we even begin to revamp so many departmental offerings in such haste? Why is the administration looking to derail successful courses in place and taught by our excellent but overworked faculty now? Following the incredible turmoil we have seen in the past few years, is this the route that the administration wants to follow?

The Silver Plan seems implementable, but this is faint praise indeed. I do hope that the people who are evaluating these plans and the options for moving forward will take into consideration the very considerate input here from so many of UNR’s faculty. If nothing else, these comments attest to the quality and thoughtfulness of the faculty that teach our students.
Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science) introduced the General Education Task Force

Prior to Senator del Carlo’s involvement beginning in November, 2011, the GETF was charged with evaluating the efficiency and structure of the Core Curriculum at the University of Nevada as well as how the system compares to general education at other institutions. Senator del Carlo introduced two members from the GETF, Scott Mensing (Chair of GETF, Biogeographer/Paleoecologist, Professor) and Joe (Jeffrey LaCombe—Member, Materials Engineer, Professor).

Scott Mensing: In 2010, there was an external panel which reviewed our core curriculum which encouraged a campus-wide discussion of the purpose and intent of the core curriculum. The system which is in place was established roughly 20 years ago and is continually remodeled; however, as with a house that is continually remodeled, one begins to ask why some stairs lead where they do and why a closet is where it is. The committee was asked to look at the core curriculum as a whole; the Provost asked that the focus be on the competencies and skills set (outcomes of core curriculum) found in each University of Nevada graduate. A list of competencies was evaluated and placed in a hierarchy available on the website. The task since the results of these surveys has been to evaluate the elements of the Core which should be built upon, changed, or kept the same. There has been much consideration of how one can teach skills; consequently, it is not exactly a body of knowledge that will lead to success in graduates. The purpose of the general education is therefore meant to prevent any student from leaving the University of Nevada with a large gap in his or her education; the major is a specialization which affords specific opportunities. There are two plans presented here today, both of which deviate slightly from the current core, approaching an outcomes based model. I don’t know what our time is like and whether it’s worth going over each of these. Opening it up for questions...

Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science): Everyone has an email with these documents in them, however, for the sake of meaningful feedback, I suggest a quick overview each plan, particularly that which deviates most from the null option.

Jeffrey LaCombe: Implicit in this process is not only answering the question of “what skills, what outcomes” should be in each graduate, but is the question of how to address whether or not we are achieving that. Although we are not directly addressing it here, we are implementing as many specifics into the language of these outcomes in these plans as
possible so as to offer avenues of measurement and evaluation. It’s hard to measure something like, “Be a quality human being.”

There are three options to be considered here: 1) to leave the core unchanged, 2) Incremental Change (Silver Plan), and 3) the holistic, radical change (the Blue plan).

The first of three (four including capstone experience) goals is attempted to be achieved in 6 credits (2 courses). The Foundations of Intellectual Practice aims to implement critical analytical skills, reasoning and communication through to foci: one class focusing on English (102 is core, not 101), also a class in mathematics.

Scott Mensing: You will notice that there are some things on these plans which you are already required to take by your major. Depending where you are in the disciplines, you may feel you adequately suffice a part of the core. The goal is that the majors will be able to step in and provide proof to the Core Board that participants of that major need not be committed to senseless remediation of a topic.

Jeffrey LaCombe: It’s the lowest common denominator, we don’t like to use that word, but it’s the minimum requirement. You all, as senators, represent a certain constituency on campus; what you need in your major may be obvious, but if you were to put your “general citizen hat on,” you will be asked to decide whether or not these outcomes are too much, too little, or not right for graduates of the University of Nevada.

1) Foundations of intellectual practice (6 creds)
2) The ways of understanding the physical world – the physical sciences (6 cred)
   First outcome: students should have a solid understanding of natural phenomena. The World around us is becoming more and more technical, and for this engineering and technology will be encouraged to be represented in the core with the generation of this outcome.
   Second Outcome: Making a connection between science and technology.
3) Ways of understanding the Human World (12 credits in arts, social sciences)
   There has already been feedback about where social scientists fit into this. This is where one would fit the mandatory constitutional requirement which is mandated by the legislature.
4) An attempt to bring it all together—the Capstone Experience (3 creds)
   The spirit of the capstone course is to encourage an accumulation of knowledge from the core.
   Total of 27 credits, 30 if English 101 is included as a de facto requirement.

Senator Paul Herget (Liberal Arts): With respect to the silver plan and its diversity requirement. Is there an intent to remove it from the core? Replace it, maybe?
Jeffrey LaCombe: The intent is that it would be embedded into the Human world.

Scott Mensing: It becomes an outcome that needs to be met by one of these courses.

Jeffrey LaCombe: These are just ideas of philosophy, if you have ideas of how we might shuffle things around, we’re here for that.

Senator Erik Edgington (Engineering): Classes like history of dance which currently count toward diversity and arts are important to engineering classes. What happens to these?

Jeffrey LaCombe: The goal is that the outcomes are met, not necessarily with respect to by which classes. “Double dipping,” as we like to call it is something we’d like to minimize with these proposals, not by cutting material, but by cutting redundancy. But if they occur in the proposals as they move forward and evolve, we are open to that.

Senator Harley Travis Moore (Business): At the beginning of your presentation, you asked us to think about how the core represents all colleges. However, I feel that the College of Business is not represented here in these plans.

Scott Mensing: In the discussions early on, business and finance skills were not ranked as high as those found in these plans. So in the process of pruning, these got pruned.

Jeffrey LaCombe: I think we could expand upon that a bit more. There are many disciplines which won’t make an explicit appearance in these plans. Remember, the goal is an outcomes oriented way of delivering general education. These outcomes are broad and such topics of critical analysis and use of information. Conceivably, these outcomes could be met in any course on campus—perhaps not explicitly in a mathematics course, but in the application of said course. This applies not only to business, but to anyone else who feels their discipline doesn’t arise on these lists.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): Senator Moore, in your business classes, do you learn certain virtues or skills, mental models of applying statistics to the Business World that could be incorporated into the Ways of Understanding the Physical World?

Senator Harley Travis Moore (Business): Yes, we do see that actually. However, the reason I brought this up is because I noticed there isn’t any college of business representation on your committee.

Scott Mensing: Yes there is.
Jeffrey LaCombe: Ted Oleson.

Senator Harley Travis Moore (Business): One of the reasons that finances are required at other universities is that these skills contribute back to the economy.

Scott Mensing: We are searching for outcomes that are best for the graduates to have, it’s up to the College of Business to think up creative and economy-driving ways to deliver the education and achieve these outcomes.

Jeffrey LaCombe: It could also be interpreted that the lower division mathematics classes could be replaced with a business class. Like Scott said, our goal is to identify the outcomes, not the courses.

Senator Jasper Allen Jacobs (Business): One of the items I didn’t notice on this plan is student success, as the late President Glick was all about. Later today, we consider a piece of legislation which encourages the core to include the career center for student success purposes. I’d like to see that these skills be implemented not only for students who will graduate, but those who have graduated already; increasing the skill set that comes out of a graduate of the university from which I graduated builds an equity onto the diploma hanging from my wall.

Jeffrey LaCombe: I would like to point out that the goals of these plans are not implementation or metrics—evaluation will be on our list of things to do once we have a solid, ideal plan in place.

Scott Mensing: Measuring student success is a challenge; you can define it several different ways. If you can come up with an outcome that measures student success, please tell us; it would be very valuable.

Jeffrey LaCombe: It’s important, yes, but the core isn’t the entirety of the degree. A science student would have to be evaluated on how he or she succeeded in the field of their major. Same goes for every other discipline.

Senator Jasper Allen Jacobs (Business): I apologize, but I think part of the issue that Senator Moore was bringing up was that some of those skills that you would need because everyone is involved in business are still lacking from these plans.
Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): I’d like to take a moment to remind the Senators-Elect in the audience that we are still in public comment so if you’d like to voice your opinion, you are welcome to do so.

Senator Harley Travis Moore (Business): A number of my family members are involved in the curriculum board in Douglas County for the high school level and there was a discussion of implementing something of this caliber in the high school level.

Scott Mensing: We’ve had some discussion of this already.

Jeffrey LaCombe: Yes, some of our hardest discussions were raised when asking what is truly college level and what belongs in primary education.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): I’d like to announce the queue: Diaz...

Scott Mensing: Ya, we have another plan to go over.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): Do you have somewhere to be?

Scott Mensing: Oh, no, I’d like to be here all night.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): Perfect, the queue is: Diaz, del Carlo, Kobany, Herget, Snell. Fehr, you’ve had your hand up forever, you’ve bumped del Carlo in the queue.

Senator Shirley Diaz (Liberal Arts): With respect to the core humanities classes, they are very focused on the Western Civilization; I feel that this is too focused, and too narrow of an education. There are hundreds of cultures outside this quartersphere that aren’t represented in these nine credits. I don’t think that’s fair. I feel that this is a deficiency of the core curriculum.

Jeffrey LaCombe: We haven’t looked at specific course content; we have consulted Dr. Reginald Stewart and we realize many deficiencies in the current core; these outcomes are phrased in such a way that encourages diversity and equity.

Scott Mensing: It is important to note that content follows outcomes in situations like these. We wish to write an ideal core curriculum and let the disciplines fill it with broad strokes of knowledge.
Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science): Something that I’d like the Senate to keep in mind as you ask questions is that purpose of the General Education Task Force is to design the outcomes and the structure of general education without respect to content. Once this committee has resolved its goals and completed its title task, there is a standing Core Curriculum Board which is charged with filling the core with content-filled courses that meet the needs of each outcome.

Senator Juliana Fehr (Education): I was wondering if you guys had a plan in place to measure the success of these outcomes.

Scott Mensing: The short answer is, “No.” As Jeff pointed out, measurement is a difficult job. What parallel universities might do is take an incoming freshman class and follow them through their four years in a longitudinal study to assess how well the new system works. Our task is to make sure that whatever gets put in place can be assessed, not design the measurement metrics. You may be aware that the two staff positions to assess the core have moved on so there are currently no staffed positions which assess the core and we realize that’s a deficiency in our core.

Senator Paul Herget (Liberal Arts): I’d like to hear the blue plan.

Senator Darrel Deraedt (Liberal Arts): It says, “able to use written and oral forms of communication.” Where is the oral coming in? I would like to see a communications class required.

Scott Mensing: That raises a good point; so far, these structures are only a discussion point. There’s no reason a class from any discipline could design a class which suffices them. Now, although we can’t dictate what a major should do, we can encourage their behavior to build upon what we have as outcomes. Communication skills are aimed to be built in to these plans and the details will come later.

Jeffrey LaCombe: We should really deemphasize the boxes which say implementation; it’s not there for concrete fact, it’s there to get the conversation rolling.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): I hesitantly challenge one aspect of these plans, somewhat with the fear of being called a communist. I don't particularly subscribe to the constitutional requirement class here; it won't help with the current problem of venerating the constitution; our belief that the document is pure and flawless stifles critical analysis which is something each contributing member of society should consider in spades, questioning if the rules at hand always play fair. Quality improvement, if you will. I would
prefer something along the idea of “legal ethics,” wherein the constitution may be studied, but not focused on the U.S. and NV constitutions considering that there are many other legal structures available in the current world. I realize the goal is to create citizens; however, I feel there is an opportunity here to make global citizens.

Scott Mensing: You did ask us to start this meeting by reciting The Pledge [of Allegiance], did you not? <pause for laughs> The language of these outcomes can be reworked in any way; it is mandated by the regents/legislature that we have a minimum of one credit of U.S./NV constitution; this is the language of one committee—the purpose of going out and getting this feedback is to refine the language of these outcomes to both suffice the regents' requirements and provide for some enlightening.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): If I could give you my succinct suggestion for the constitutional requirement, it would be an outcome focused on “Legal Ethics.” Something which allows for a focus on U.S./NV constitution as well as legal practice worldwide.

Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science): Just to reiterate for my sake, you’re saying that labeling that outcome “U.S./NV Constitution” suffices the requirement of the Regents, but consequently sets the bar too low. The goal of your outcome would be to not only teach about the governing documents but to teach to think analytically about it, correct?

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): Well, more along the lines that an outcome of legal ethics opens the door for a worldwide analysis of policy and legal practice; global citizens are a more valuable goal than U.S. citizens.

Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science): I’m in favor of that.

Jeffrey LaCombe: Ethics are mentioned under goal 1; they would have a home there; but I see the words could be tweaked.

Senator Taylor Snell (Liberal Arts): I’m in the favor of concentrating on global ethics. Most times, students don’t really realize what they are reading and the ability to contrast on a geographical basis with legal emphasis would be beneficial.

Scott Mensing: We have tried to write these outcomes around the idea of reasoning skills rather than knowledge.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): If there are no objections, we will consider the Blue Plan for General Education revision.
Scott Mensing: You might notice that there is a preamble at the beginning of each of these; the intent of each of these is to have a reasoning citizen who can evaluate data that comes about every day based on evidence and logic. However, these two plans are simply alternative ways to deliver such education.

There are two parts to this plan: Integrative foundations and Focused Inquiry. The intent of this plan is to move our education a bit farther away from discipline-based, content based delivery of education wherein some colleges have a cornerstone on the market of a field.

Within the integrative foundations part of the plan, you can think of this plan as a closet from which you can pick, pull, mix, match and ultimately put together a wardrobe of education that covers all the limbs or outcomes. There would be three freshman/sophomore experiences which would at their heart get at the natural sciences and their quantitative reasoning skills so that you aren’t taking a science apart from a math but rather putting them together. The idea is to globalize the education within a graduate. These would all be on the order of 100 or 200 level courses. The outcomes and competencies would be similar to the first set, however, the ways of educating them would be different. These are not the kinds of courses that already exist on our campus. This might be the kind of fertile ground wherein a class could be taught by two different faculty members, possibly from two different departments or colleges. These are hard to imagine because indeed these are not classes we teach right now.

I would point out in particular that in the natural sciences these would be application/laboratory based courses. We would be moving away from a basic course in – insert subject—so that the introduction courses would be removed, allowing the professor doesn’t have to cover so much material, but rather chooses one subject and delves more deeply into the content so that students learn how that professor and his peers learns knowledge and makes knowledge. You’ll notice that both plans are roughly the same size in terms of credits. There is a lot of communication involved in these plans.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): Does the university have the power to tell professors a certain percentage of a course needs to be determined by a certain concept? Like the 25% for communication and literacy?

Scott Mensing: Yes, we have that power.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): Why is in the integrative foundations rather than the focused inquiry?
Jeffrey LaCombe: It’s not a good reason, but I think it was that the integrative foundations needed to emphasize that the courses should be integrative, even as far as the proportions of the grades. It was a natural fit to emphasize communication and literacy there.

Senator Juliana Fehr (Education): I really enjoy the Blue Plan; the integrative foundations seems like a great way to teach; putting all these reasoning skills across such a broad spectrum seems like it would make more involved students. I was wondering what you meant by “Selected Cultures” under Diversities.

Scott Mensing: I don’t know. I guess it means you wouldn’t focus on one culture. Say one week you’re focusing on culture X and the next week you’re talking about culture Y.

Jeffrey LaCombe: I guess it’s also a tip of the hat to say you don’t have to study all cultures, just be versed in a few here and there.

Senator Meelad Menbari (Division of Health Sciences): Forgive my ignorance, but do we currently have a natural sciences requirement?

Scott Mensing: Yes. You haven’t taken it? <laughs>

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): I have a quick comment; I appreciate everything you have done here and I know you haven’t been charged with this but I’d like to address how difficult it is to consider these two alternatives where one of the real problems on campus is low faculty standards and low recruitment standards. I hear from faculty all the time that some graduates can’t form a proper sentence or do basic math. I think these issues need to be addressed before up hauling the entire core curriculum.

Jeffrey LaCombe: First off, I’d like to agree; it’s absolutely true. However, before we can get there, in answering the basic question within your comment, “how do we know if we are succeeding?” How do you know if your graduates are meeting your standards? Well, we need to define some outcomes that can be measured—the standards come first and then the metrics. We are trying to do both at the same time—less chicken before egg and more chicken and egg.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): On the topic of faculty low academic standards, I’m wondering whether asking them to focus on outcomes rather than skills would give them less incentive to test based on knowledge, passing students without these fundamental skills. Perhaps in asking them to redesign their courses, we also ask them to raise their standards.
Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science): Regardless that grade inflation has been a large problem here on campus. (Speaker Broad: All over the world, actually. Jeffrey LaCombe: Everyone’s above average. <Pause for laughs.>) Senator del Carlo: That’s a nice thought. However, the point I’m trying to make is that the core already has an internal standard as to how well as student has absorbed the skills and knowledge of the general education and that is the capstone; it’s not unheard of for a student to fail a capstone and you can’t graduate without one—there’s hope at the top end for education by all means. Emphasizing it would be very utile in measuring success; we are down to one in the general and one in the majors and hopefully one or the other can do some learning at the top end of the education.

Senator Paul Herget (Liberal Arts): I was just wondering how these are chosen in the end.

Scott Mensing: I’ll give you the timeline and the process. Over the next month we are meeting with several departments across campus to get feedback and refine these plans as best as possible and sometime in the first week of May, we will take all the comments and summarize them, revise the plans as suggested by the summaries. By the end of the semester, the final plans will be posted. There will be, in the fall, a faculty vote. The student input is very important in the early stages to adjust language because the vote will not include students to choose between Blue, Silver, or no change.

Jeffrey LaCombe: No earlier than Fall 2013. The blue plan would take more time by far to implement.

Senator Juliana Fehr: I want to say that I like the blue alternative because it’s easier to visual a four year plan for graduation rather than something just freshmen and sophomores do and the outcomes are phrased to focus on higher order thinking.

Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science): Just as you guys are looking over these plans, I would like to throw out a couple points about the politics behind these alternatives. Not necessarily what a good plan is, what a bad plan is, but more along the lines of who is dealing with these plans. First would be that Scott just touched on which is Faculty Control of the Curriculum; he’s right, these early stages of development are our only opportunity to really revise the plans before us. The Senators-elect need to be focused right now. These things aren’t going to referendum like with our normal ASUN-y things but they could be put to survey and get student feedback. This is definitely a job for the ASUN Senate of the 80th Session.

The next political factor is the core curriculum versus the major. The core curriculum is always going to come first and will always get preference by the regents and
then there is the consequent idea that the majors are just left with the rest of the brunt of higher education. Even more inhibiting to the majors is the recent credit cap at 120 credits so now the majors are being asked to skim down on their material while not being exceeding the 80 credits not claimed by the core curriculum. By putting this maximum on there, you’re left with a degree that isn’t as competitive as degrees from other institutions that can put more field-specific knowledge into a 120 credits; everyone wants a doctor who took three more biology courses or a businessman who knows just that much more math. As it stands, both of these plans streamline the core curriculum by a solid factor and allow the majors to have more freedom, however the General Education Task Force was asked to write revised plans without respect to the majors. Having a cohesive core gives students the opportunity to learn something; having a core focused on outcomes that are not redundant gives the students some opportunity to learn for the sake of knowledge, not learn for the sake of crossing a course off their requirements list. These plans give some freedom to the students to complete these outcomes in their own interest areas.

The last factor in the construction of these plans that I’d like to mention are the people who wrote them. They are active professors on this campus. Scott is in geography and Joe is in chemistry (Jeffrey LaCombe is in Engineering). Either way, they are active and they have control over the curriculum and if they’ve written these plans, they see the potential in these paths of delivering education. I know I have a tendency to run meetings I’m not chairing, but perhaps we could get a consensus of the Senate’s opinion and give that to Scott and Jeff.

Senator Darryl Deraedt (Liberal Arts): It’s really hard to see the blue plan from behind the Silver plan which is so close to familiar, but I do see the value in making radical changes now—I mean, if these opportunities only come along so infrequently, then now is a great opportunity to test-run a really novel method of higher education. These plans just need to be sustainable. I would, however, like to see classes that are more interactive and allow for more student-instructor interaction.

Scott Mensing: What do you mean by that?

Senator Darryl Deraedt (Liberal Arts): I think students are expected to be sponges and just absorb every last drop of information that comes out of the instructor but that’s really not feasible when you can’t really speak back and forth with the instructor. Which is why I like seeing the senior seminar in this plan.

Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science): Yes, and there is somewhat of a natural limit to the amount of discussion that one can have in a course wherein the student:faculty ratio is
so large and hopefully the tuition increases will bring in some more professors into departments strapped for bodies.

Senator Harley Travis Moore (Business): Was there any revision with respect to how other universities accomplish the core curriculum?

Scott Mensing: Oh yes. Invariably, every week when people from different departments came in to present their idea on how to represent their college in the core curriculum, they would bring along examples from other institutions. As well, several of us from the committee have gone to national conferences to compare and contrast the core curriculum here at the University of Nevada. So yes, there has been internal comparison, giving us a foundational system that we know we are moving from and then comparing it to other institutions as references.

Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Science): To answer a question that is somewhat embedded in Senator Moore's comment, is probably the question of how does the University of Nevada currently compare to other institutions. Just as a couple of numbers that stood out to me: the UC System have something called the Breadth System which is something along the lines of 48 credits and credits don’t change; that’s a whole lot of core credits. As well, I think it was the University of Southern California that streamlined their core down to 18 credits. Right now with these plans, the University of Nevada's Blue and Silver plans, the core curriculum would be intermediately comparable to other institutions in terms of size.

Jeffrey LaCombe: I don’t remember the exact number, but I think it’s probably good to announce that the regents set a minimum number of core curriculum credits that need to be in place and it’s somewhere around 20.

Senator Robert Eugene del Carlo (Sciences): 21 or 22.

Scott Mensing: We are above these mandated minimums because we require capstones at the upper end that can’t be taught at the community colleges.

Senator Jasper Allen Jacobs (Business): It might be mentioned that some of those colleges work on trimesters so they may have more classes, but they may not necessarily be doing more work.

Senator Taylor Snell (Liberal Arts): I was going to ask what your committee thought of the USC plan.
Scott Mensing: Well one member was particularly enamored; but you have to remember that while there were 18 credits in the core, there were external math and English requirements that weren’t mentioned here. But they’re a private institution so they can do whatever they want.

Jeffrey LaCombe: Their approach was also much more like the blue plan. More holistic in that sense. There were some proponents in the committee and we tried to integrate some of those into these plans.

Senator Taylor Snell (Liberal Arts): I briefly looked over it and I think it would be useful because I know some engineering majors have a hard time getting through all of their curriculum on time, ending up in 5 year plans.

Jeffrey LaCombe: They’re not supposed to but they do; it’s up to 132 credits right now.

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): I’d like to comment that although we have a problem graduating students at this school – (Scott Mensing and Jeffrey LaCombe in tandem: All schools have that problem) – that rather than student apathy, advisors have bore the brunt of poor attrition rates because that’s an easy avenue to blame, “Oh it’s bad advising.” And with that said, I think the blue alternative affords more intuitive course completion strategies that require less intense advising, almost as if there’s a smaller learning curve in the blue plan than in the Silver and current core curricula. Are there any more thoughts on the subject? How about we do a roll call vote announcing the color of plan you prefer most.

Scott Mensing: Do you want us to be present or absent for this vote?

Speaker Joseph Broad (Liberal Arts): You can stick around for this. Unless you want it to be a surprise.
Special Committee on Undergraduate Research and Journals

Chair

Secretary of the Senate, Joselle Benitez (Liberal Arts):

Speaker Broad (Liberal Arts): Blue
Senator Deraedt (Liberal Arts): Blue
Senator Edgington (Engineering): Blue
Senator Herget (Liberal Arts): Blue
Senator Hummel (Education): Blue
Senator Kobany (CABNR): Silver
Senator Moore (Business): Blue (w/revisions)
Senator Sheehy (CABNR): Blue
Senator Smith (Div. HealthSci): Blue
Senator Zikakis (Business): Pass, Abstain

Blue: 18, Silver: 2, Abstentions: 1.

Jeffrey LaCombe: I'd like to add that although vote could go silver just for logistical reasons. So if you have any comments on how to integrate the blue into the silver, that'd be great.

President of the Association, Casey Stiteler: I would just like to take a moment to thank you both for the work you're putting into this and the way you are going about it, to come to us and ask our opinion of the plans here at the Senate Table. <Applause.>

Scott Mensing: I would just like to say that this was a great discussion. I would urge you to make your voices heard in whatever avenues you can. There are 12,000 of you that are going to have to live through this. Faculty think differently about this. They think about the work involved. This was really great; thank you for inviting us. <Applause.>

Sincerely,

Robert Eugene del Carlo
Senator on behalf of the College of Science
University of Nevada

robert.del.carlo@me.com
As a land grant, research institution, UNR will offer all of its students an education that prepares them to meet the multiple challenges of the future. This has two discrete components: 1) a broad, general foundation that provides all students with fundamental intellectual skills and knowledge about the world in which they live, and 2) a more advanced, specialized knowledge of a particular discipline, which is offered by the major. In their general education, students will be expected to develop fundamental intellectual practices and habits of mind that cut across numerous courses and prepare them for their majors (Goal I). Thinking critically requires all students to understand multiple systems of producing and valuing knowledge and expression; therefore, they will be provided broad comparative experience regardless of the particular major in which they develop advanced skills (Goals II and III). The fourth component occurs at the senior level, as students are completing their majors (Goal IV). An integrative experience demonstrates the effective deployment of skills acquired in earlier general education components (Goals I, II, and III) as well as in their major.

**Goal I: Foundations of Intellectual Practice**

Students learn a wide range of fundamental skills that are broadly applicable in many disciplines including effective communication in a variety of media, quantitative reasoning and analysis skills, and the ability to collect, organize and evaluate data and information. These foundations are reinforced throughout the general education curriculum.

**Outcome 1: Effective Communication.** Students will be effective communicators, able to use written, oral, and other forms of discourse for a variety of scholarly and professional purposes.

**Outcome 2: Quantitative Reasoning.** Students will be able to apply quantitative reasoning and statistical analysis methods to understand and solve problems.

**Outcome 3: Critical Analysis and Use of Information.** Students will be effective consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information. These skills will include the ability to 1) employ systematic methods to search for, collect, organize, and evaluate information, 2) to critically evaluate the methods, context, findings or arguments that produced that information, and 3) formulate conclusions based on their own analysis of the information.

**Implementation: 6 credits**

**English:** Introduced with 3 credits of English 102 in the first year, then reinforced throughout the curriculum.

**Mathematics:** Introduced with 3 credits in lower division mathematics or statistics in the first year, then reinforced throughout the curriculum.

**Goal II: Ways of Understanding the Physical World**

Students learn about the process and methods of scientific inquiry, examining the principles underlying a body of scientific knowledge, how those principles were developed, and how they are applied. Students learn to evaluate the soundness of scientific arguments and appreciate how current ideas might change in response to new evidence.

**Outcome 1: Understanding physical and natural phenomena.** Students will be able to explain the process by which scientists investigate and answer questions about the natural and physical world; be able to articulate basic principles used to explain natural phenomena; and apply the scientific process through collecting data to test a hypothesis through observational or experimental research.

**Outcome 2: Connecting Science and Technology with Society.** Students will be able to connect science and technology to real-world problems and issues in the physical world by analyzing scientific data related to a problem of societal concern; be able to discriminate between sound and unsound interpretation of data; and employ cogent reasoning methods in their own examinations of problems and issues.

**Implementation: 6 credits**

**Natural Sciences:** 6 credits in the physical sciences, natural sciences, health sciences, engineering, or related topics. Courses should cover both fundamental knowledge and its application. A minimum of 1 credit hour of laboratory experiences must be included in the 6 credits.
Goal III: Ways of Understanding the Human World

Students study the range of human thought, values, beliefs, expressions, and practices, in both contemporary and past contexts. These perspectives are examined over the course of human history, stressing how they have led to and provide context for contemporary societies, cultures, and individual identities.

Outcome 1: **Understanding Cultures, Societies, and Individuals.** Students will analyze social/human conditions by systematically studying individuals, groups, communities, and cultures. Students will analyze primary texts in their historical and cultural contexts, as well as interpret, model, observe, or experiment, as means of inquiring into human problems. Students will engage in modes of analysis attentive to considerations of ethics, diversity and equity, as well as globalization.

Outcome 2: **Creative Interpretation and Expression.** Students will apply techniques of literary and artistic analysis to study and interpret works of literature, art, philosophy, music, and other forms of creative expression in the context of culture, society, and individual identity. Students also may cast their interpretation in the form of creative expression.

Outcome 3: **Constitution.** Students will be familiar with the essential elements of the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Nevada, including their origins and histories, and their relationships with American institutions and ideals.

**Implementation:** 12 credits

| Humanities: | 6 credits in the “core humanities”, including segments on the NV and US Constitutions, as well as diversity and equity issues. |
| Arts: | 3 credits in the arts, including art, dance, music, theater, and related topics. |
| Social Sciences: | 3 credits in social sciences, economics, geography, political science, anthropology, psychology, or related topics. |

Goal IV: Integration, Synthesis, and Cross-Disciplinary Application of Knowledge

Students learn to apply their knowledge and fundamental skills through intense engagement of a problem. These experiences consist of cross-disciplinary approaches to a subject that draw upon ideas and practices introduced through general education and refined in major and minor preparation (Goals II and III).

Outcome 1: **Integration.** Students will recognize and be able to apply the relationships between various disciplinary ways of knowing and forms of argumentation to critically evaluate information and synthesize new knowledge.

**Implementation:** 3 credits

**General Capstone Course:** Capstone courses, to be taken in the senior year, are identified each semester in the class schedule. Students with questions about the appropriateness of a particular capstone course should see their advisor.
Attributes of a UNR Graduate

The University of Nevada intends to cultivate students’ intellectual and practical skills, including inquiry and analysis; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy; and teamwork and problem solving. General education will promote personal and social responsibility through civic knowledge and engagement; intercultural knowledge and competence; ethical reasoning and action; and foundations and skills for lifelong learning. The University will cultivate student knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world as well as develop integrative and applied learning skills.

Integrative Foundation

The following is the foundation upon which the undergraduate student will build to become a generally well educated person. As such, students will develop knowledge of natural and social sciences, humanistic reasoning, and the creative arts. Upon completion of students will meet the following competencies.

- **Natural Science & Quantitative Reasoning – Freshman/Sophomore experience**
  Competencies to be met:
  - Ability to recognize, search for, collect, organize, and evaluate scientific information, methods, and findings based on scientific modes of reasoning and forms of arguments
  - Ability to synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations
  - Ability to interpret modes of quantitative reasoning and statistical analysis, including representation of data, evaluation of quantitative relationships, and use of graphical and/or spatial forms

- **Social Science Reasoning & Globalization – Freshman/ Sophomore experience**
  Competencies to be met:
  - Ability to identify the dimensions of social scientific analysis so as to be able to evaluate relations among/between individuals, communities or societies
  - Ability to read critically and understand historic or contemporary texts
  - Learn about global studies and cultivate intercultural competencies
  - Ability to synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations
  - Develop oral communications skills and evaluate information from digital sources

- **Humanistic Reasoning & Creative Arts – Freshman/Sophomore experience**
  Competencies to be met:
  - Ability to interpret texts, creative works, compositions, productions and/or performances in their historical and cultural contexts
  - Demonstrate knowledge of art’s role in shaping the history and diversity of the world’s cultures as well as its effect on cross-cultural issues and interactions
  - Ability to synthesize and transfer learning to new, complex situations
  - Develop written and visual communications skills

- **Capstone Course -- General capstone; Senior seminar**
  Competencies to be met:
  - Ability to apply specialized modes of reasoning, knowledge or creative processes multi-disciplinary and/or cross cultural settings that are broadly focused
  - Ability to analyze and evaluate applications of scholarship, research and/or creative expression to new settings and complex problems
  - Ability to cultivate comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion
  - Ability to grasp new understandings about ethical and/or substantive issues and themes that affect the world community and broad cross-sections of humanity
  - Develop written, oral, visual communications skills and/or information or quantitative literacy
- One course is to be taken in each of the 4 categories. Each is a 3 credit course for total of 12 credits. No ‘double-dipping’.
- A minimum of 25% of the grade in an integrative foundation course will be based on the specified communication and literacy skills (the last bullet noted in each case).
- None will have course pre-requisites or co-requisites, except for the requirement of senior standing in the case of Capstone courses.
- These courses should be taken, whenever possible, before taking Focused Inquiry courses.

**Focused Inquiry**

Focused Inquiry courses will enhance student’s ability to critically think in a particular area of knowledge. Focused Inquiry will enrich the competencies developed in the foundations courses. Analytical techniques and methodologies are demonstrated to illuminate specific topics. Students should select courses that will best position them for success within their major.

- **Math**
  - Solve quantitative problems by employing computational strategies in fundamental mathematics, including at least three of the following: mathematical reasoning; linear and exponential models; probability and combinatorics; statistics; algebra; trigonometry; calculus
  - Apply college-level mathematical techniques effectively to real world situations
  - Interpret data and draw inferences from mathematical representations, such as equations, formulas, tables, graphs
  - Use variables and other abstractions to represent unknown quantities, in order to solve college-level mathematical problems involving empirical or theoretical phenomena; problem domains include natural sciences, social sciences, personal finance

- **Writing**
  - Explore essay forms with particular attention to interpretation and argument
  - Demonstrate analytical reading, writing, and critical thinking
  - Compose and communicate effectively in a range of media for a variety of rhetorical and creative purposes

- **Arts**
  - Ability to recognize, evaluate, and interpret creative techniques, design principles, media, disciplines, and/or genres
  - OR Engage in creative expression at the college level (in art, dance, music or theatre)

- **Natural Science**
  - Gain practical understanding of the scientific method
  - Ability to examine fundamental principles underlying a body of scientific knowledge and how those principles were developed
  - Apply the scientific method in at least four substantial lab experiences
  - Gather and analyze data, draw conclusions, and make inferences

- **Humanities with US Diversity OR Ethics**
  - Understand values, practices, ideas, and achievements that characterize (as well as those that differentiate) selected cultures
  - Trace sources and development of some important modern intellectual traditions and cultural institutions
  - Ability to examine a body of knowledge in the humanities and how it developed
  - Analyze issues of identity and diversity within the US
  - OR Spur greater civic engagement and social responsibility through better understandings of ethics

- **US & NV constitution (1 credit)**
  - Analyze the philosophical, political, social, and institutional implications reflected in the US and Nevada constitutions
  - Promote deeper knowledge of, debate about, and practice of democracy

- 1 taken in each of the 6 categories. Each course is a minimum of 3 credits except for Constitutional requirement which is 1 credit for a total of 16 credits
- No ‘double dipping’ except for the constitutional requirement
Considerations for Development and Assessment of Outcomes-Based General Education Curricula

Custom Research Brief • March 7, 2012

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I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

- **Outcomes-based General Education Requirements**
  - What are the components of revised general education curricula?
  - How do administrators develop outcomes-based general education requirements? What key points do they consider? What motivates the development of a new curriculum?
  - What campus stakeholders are involved in transitions of general education programs?
  - How do outcomes-based general education requirements differ from traditional general education curricula?

- **Outcomes Measured**
  - What outcomes do administrators measure to evaluate general education curricula?
  - Why do administrators choose these outcomes? How do outcomes differ from discipline-specific learning objectives at an institution?
  - What do administrators consider to be the most and least important outcomes to measure in the context of general education curricula?

- **Assessment Strategies**
  - What types of data do administrators use to measure outcomes?
  - How do administrators collect data? What is the frequency of data collection?
  - Who is responsible for data collection? Who analyzes the data to assess progress toward outcomes?
  - How do administrators use data collected?

Project Sources

- Education Advisory Board’s internal and online (www.educationadvisoryboard.com) research libraries
- National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (http://nces.ed.gov/)
- Websites of contact institutions
- Association of American Colleges and Universities (www.aacu.org)
## I. Research Methodology

### Research Parameters

The Council interviewed directors of general education at the following institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Year of Most Recent General Education Revision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California State University-Fresno</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>18,000/21,000</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>6,500/15,000</td>
<td>Research University (very high activity)</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King College</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1,600/1,900</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Lutheran University</td>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>3,300/3,500</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)</td>
<td>2011/2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State University of New York-Geneseo</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>5,400/5,700</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Delaware</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>17,500/21,000</td>
<td>Research University (very high activity)</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nebraska-Lincoln</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>19,400/24,600</td>
<td>Research University (very high activity)</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Utah</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>23,400/30,000</td>
<td>Research University (very high activity)</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** National Center for Education Statistics
II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Key Observations

- **Administrators use broad requirements distributed across departments, knowledge area-requirements, and outcomes-focused requirements for general education.** Institutions with state-mandated general education requirements develop learning outcomes based on those parameters, while institutions with less stringent state requirements often use learning outcomes as general education requirements.

- **All contacts base their understanding of general education outcomes on the American Association of Colleges and Universities’ LEAP initiative.** Administrators modify LEAP learning outcomes to fit institutional themes, goals, and needs.

- **Some administrators place greater emphasis on writing, oral communication, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning.** These skills are typically necessary to become proficient in knowledge areas such as global perspectives, American culture, and natural sciences. Skill-based outcomes are particularly important to a student’s development after graduation, as are ethical inquiry and global perspectives outcomes.

- **Faculty should drive development and assessment of learning outcomes whenever possible to ensure maximum buy-in.** General education outcomes must originate from instructors to ensure proper coverage in course content.

- **Administrators use a rigorous course proposal process to ensure general education courses meet learning outcomes criteria.** General education committees review proposals that typically include a syllabus as well as descriptions of applicable outcomes, assessment methods, and skills developed.

- **Integration of co-curricular student experiences into general education programs reinforces the holistic mission of general education.** Capstone requirements integrate multiple general education themes and learning outcomes into a culminating experience such as a research project, internship, or service project. Study abroad, student leadership positions, and independent study opportunities can meet learning outcomes with proper approval from faculty.

- **Administrators should develop governance documents and a course review schedule to account for the iterative nature of general education.** Strong governance documents guide approval of general education courses and also serve as a reference for faculty who teach core courses. Additionally, governance documents approved by the faculty senate promote acceptance of the general education process among faculty.

- **Faculty determine the percentage of students in a course who meet the targeted learning outcome for assessment, which then informs review of the course.** General education administrators may alter assessment methods or course content according to assessment results. To measure broad trends, administrators survey freshman and senior classes with a standardized test such as the Defining Issues Test, which measures ethical awareness.
### III. REQUIREMENTS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

#### The Value of Learning Outcomes in General Education

Traditional general education models typically only require students to complete a series of requirements distributed across multiple disciplines. Outcomes-based general education models provide measurable means to assess students’ progress toward institutional learning goals, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions Traditional General Education Leaves Unanswered for Administrators</th>
<th>Advantages to Outcomes-based Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>How do we know requirements develop key skills in students such as writing and quantitative reasoning?</em></td>
<td>• Clarifies purposes and goals of general education programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How effectively do our instructors teach general education courses?</em></td>
<td>• Generates specific data that measures instructional performance and curricular effectiveness toward goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How do we demonstrate the value of our general education program to our accrediting organization?</em></td>
<td>• Guides program review efforts as administrators use assessment data for revisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How do we know what to improve during revisions of the general education program?</em></td>
<td>• Answers the question, “What should all undergraduate students, regardless of major or career aspirations, know or be able to do upon graduation?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Approaches to Outcomes-based General Education Requirements

Outcomes-based general education programs range from discipline-based models, which set requirements around traditional subject or knowledge areas, to outcomes-centric models, which use outcomes as the curricular requirements. Contact institutions most commonly organize general education requirements around several knowledge areas or themes, such as “Quantitative Studies” or “Civilizations.” The diagram below distinguishes these approaches.

#### Prevalence of General Education Approaches Among Contact Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplined-Based Approach to Requirements</th>
<th>General Knowledge Area Requirements</th>
<th>Using Outcomes as Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Example: Students must complete one course in each of the following subjects</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mathematics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Basic Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Natural Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Social Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Humanities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. American History</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Foreign Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fine Arts</td>
<td><em>Example: Students must complete two courses in each of five areas</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Engaging Arts and Performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interpreting Living Traditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Exploring Nature and Number</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Investigating Human Behavior, Culture, and Institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Encountering Perspectives on Diversity</td>
<td><em>Example: Students must complete three credit hours for each of 10 learning outcomes, such as</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Develop intellectual and practical skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Build knowledge of diverse peoples and cultures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Exercise individual and social responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Integrate learned abilities and adapt them to new settings and questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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III. Requirements and Learning Outcomes

Some contact institutions require students to fulfill “modes of inquiry” that explore cross-disciplinary intellectual themes and develop key proficiencies such as writing and research. At Duke University, students must complete two courses in each of six modes of inquiry and five areas of knowledge. A single course may fulfill a maximum of two knowledge areas and three modes of inquiry.

**Areas of Knowledge and Modes of Inquiry at Duke University**

*Modes of Inquiry*

**Cross-cultural inquiry:** Develops a student’s ability to identify culture and cultural differences across time, place, and national boundaries.

**Ethical inquiry:** Promotes students’ critical assessment of the consequences of personal and political decision-making.

**Foreign languages:** Increases students’ awareness of how language frames and structures understanding and effective communication.

**Science, technology, and society:** Teaches students basic scientific concepts as well as how and why technological advances are made and incorporated into society.

**Research:** Develops students’ understanding of the process by which knowledge is created, organized, assessed, and synthesized.

**Writing:** Creates a sustained development of students’ writing skills, which is central to learning and communicating effectively in society.

Some institutions use outcomes as general education requirements. Students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln must complete a course that meets each of 10 learning outcomes. An outline of the institution’s model is below.

**Learning Outcomes as General Education Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Outcomes (10 total)</th>
<th>Sample Courses Meeting Outcome (3 credits each)</th>
<th>30 Total Credits Needed to Complete General Education Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students should be able to...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use mathematical, statistical, or computational reasoning to solve problems and draw inferences.</td>
<td>Computer Science I: Informatics Focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use knowledge, theories, methods, and historical perspectives to understand and evaluate human behavior</td>
<td>Survey of Criminal Justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit global awareness or knowledge of human diversity through analysis of an issue</td>
<td>World Food Economics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Requirements:**

Students must work in at least three subject areas to fully complete requirements. A single course may address up to two learning outcomes, but a student may only use that course to satisfy one outcome requirement (the student may select which outcome the course satisfies).
### III. REQUIREMENTS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

#### Requiring Students to Build Collaborative Skills

**Duke University** requires students to complete a first year seminar and a small group learning experience as part of the general education program. First-year students must complete a seminar (designated with an “S” after the course number) in their first year or face academic suspensions for two semesters. After the first year, students must complete two seminars, tutorials, thesis courses, or independent study courses to satisfy the small group learning requirement.

#### Developing Learning Outcomes from AACU Standards

Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Liberal Education and America’s Promise (AACU LEAP) guidelines include “Essential Learning Outcomes” divided into four categories. Among the outcomes below, contacts emphasize oral and written communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and critical thinking as the most important proficiencies for students to develop. The following chart outlines LEAP standards and demonstrates how contact institutions tailor them as needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAP Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Examples of Learning Outcomes at Contact Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- General understanding of topics in the sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages and the arts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to understand the diverse ways of thinking that underlie the search for knowledge in the arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences. (University of Delaware)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inquiry and analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Critical and creative thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Written and oral communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quantitative literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information technology literacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teamwork and problem solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to communicate effectively through writing, speaking, and use of numbers. Students will demonstrate information literacy and employ analytical skills when presented with a problem. (King College)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal and Social Responsibility, Including</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Civic knowledge and engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intercultural knowledge and competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ethical reasoning and action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will be able to explain ethical principles, civics, and stewardship, and their importance to society. Students will also exhibit global awareness or knowledge of human diversity through analysis of an event or problem. (University of Nebraska-Lincoln)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will develop the intellectual curiosity, confidence, and engagement that leads to lifelong learning. They will also recognize ethical responsibilities to self and society. (University of Delaware)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Requirements and Learning Outcomes

LEAP Learning Outcomes (continued)  
Examples of Learning Outcomes at Contact Institutions (continued)

Integrative and Applied Learning
- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Capstone Experience at University of Delaware
Students will complete an honors thesis, internship, service project, study abroad experience, or independent research that requires a use of the skills and knowledge they developed studying various disciplines.

Application of Learning Outcomes to Courses

At many institutions, courses must meet at least one learning outcome to be included in the general education program. Faculty must explicitly state how their courses meet certain outcomes in a proposal submitted to general education committees and administrators. Administrators then develop a list of approved courses that students may take to fulfill requirements. The course approval process for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Achievement-Centered Education (ACE) model is below.

Requiring ACE Courses to Meet Learning Outcomes

Course Proposal
Includes:
- Outcome(s) satisfied in course
- Other skills reinforced by course
- Copy of syllabus
- Description of graded assignments used to assess students’ achievement of outcomes

ACE Subcommittee of the University Curriculum Committee Review
Committee consists of:
- A faculty member from each undergraduate college
- The chair of the University Curriculum Committee, who is ex officio

Review Criteria
- Does the course clearly address learning outcome(s)?
- Does the course develop students’ ability to achieve these outcome(s)?
- Does the course provide opportunities to demonstrate achievement of outcome(s)?

Meeting Learning Outcomes with Co-Curricular Activities

Experiences outside the classroom satisfy learning outcomes and requirements at several institutions. For instance, students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln can meet learning outcomes this way provided they have a faculty sponsor and seek certification through his or her associate dean. The University of Delaware requires students to complete a “Discovery Learning Experience” in which students use classroom knowledge and skills in a real-world situation such as internships, study abroad, service learning, and independent study.

Discipline-Specific Learning Outcomes

SUNY-Genesee operates a discipline-based general education model. Administrators use outcomes to demonstrate what subject-area knowledge students acquire rather than what broad-based skills students develop and can apply to multiple fields or situations. Outcomes also encompass skills important to a particular discipline, such as design of scientific experiments or knowledge of computer programming. The following list describes learning outcomes for the U.S. Histories requirement.

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III. REQUIREMENTS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

U.S. History Learning Outcomes at SUNY-Geneseo

- Knowledge of a basic narrative of American history: political, economic, social, and cultural, including knowledge of unity and diversity in American society
- Knowledge of common institutions in American society and how they have affected different groups
- An understanding of America’s evolving relationship with the rest of the world
- An understanding of the distinct, overlapping, and shared histories of people based on varied identities and experiences, especially those connected to at least two of the following: race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and disability
- An understanding of the causes and effects of inequalities, past and present, rooted in American social, economic, legal, and political structures, and of efforts to eradicate those structural inequalities

Integrating Outcomes Across Disciplines

Duke University administers a “University Course,” open to all undergraduate and graduate students regardless of major. The course analyzes a problem such as global food concerns from a variety of perspectives. Contacts report these courses help overcome silos among students and faculty in different academic departments and encourage students to analyze problems from multiple angles.

Building Effective Institutional and Discipline-Specific Outcomes

General education administrators at many institutions use broad institutional learning outcomes and more targeted discipline-specific learning outcomes in tandem. Institutional learning outcomes must be general enough to apply to several disciplines, while discipline-specific outcomes must demonstrate a connection to institutional learning outcomes, as the diagram below illustrates.

Anatomy of an Effective Institutional Learning Outcome

Example: “Students will be able to engage questions of ethics and recognize responsibilities to self, community, and society at large.”

- Inclusion of the phrase “students will be able to”
- Broadly applicable to multiple disciplines and precise enough to measure a specific proficiency
- Measureable through assessment (a written assignment, discussion group, or political internship would effectively assess proficiency in the outcome above)

Anatomy of an Effective Discipline-Specific Learning Outcome

Example: “Students will learn about the science of Psychology [and understand] its basic research methodology and values. Students will use critical thinking to learn how both individual and collective human behavior is influenced by mental processes.”

- Incorporation of knowledge and skills unique to the discipline
- Alignment with broader institutional learning outcomes (critical thinking)
- Measureable through assessment (a research project or experiment would be effective)
Faculty-Driven Assessment

Many general education programs rely on instructors to assess student progress toward learning outcomes. Contacts recommend administrators avoid using the term “assessment” and encourage instructors to use existing course assignments to measure outcomes. Additionally, faculty can better select the types of data collection most useful to gauge student learning within their discipline.

Assessment Strategies

Not every assessment method is appropriate for every outcome. Some outcomes, such as writing proficiency, cannot be measured through an embedded test question. Administrators primarily use learning outcomes data gleaned from assessments to review and revise general education courses. The graphic below outline several assessment strategies.

| Use Rubrics | Instructors at CSU-Fullerton, King College, and the University of Utah use rubrics as standardized tools to assess student competency in a learning outcome. Each rubric separates the outcome into several proficiencies. Instructors then rank a student’s level of proficiency in each area according to a scale. Contacts caution that although rubrics increase uniformity of assessment, instructors do not always use rubrics consistently. |
| Add Questions to Exams and Assign Reflection Essays | Translation of a learning outcome into a series of questions or problems on a test simplifies assessment for faculty. Instructors at SUNY-Geneseo create at least one question specific to a course learning outcome on each test. Administrators track the percentages of students who answer these questions correctly to gauge progress toward a learning outcome. Course evaluations at Duke University contain ten questions based on learning outcomes. |
| Require E-Portfolios and Collect Student Artifacts | Faculty at University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Duke University collect student work that demonstrates progress toward an outcome in the Blackboard learning management system. Department administrators then consolidate this information into a report, which they submit to the general education committee to ensure courses meet outcomes. Duke requires students purchase a $90 five-year license for the e-portfolio software. |
| Relate Assessments to Real-World Situations | To combine scientific, ethical, cultural, and historical themes, Biology 101 instructors at CSU-Fresno ask why students think it is important that people get vaccinated. Contacts attribute a 50 percent decrease in the failure rate of Biology 101 students since adoption of this strategy to increased student interest in solving a real-world problem through multiple perspectives. |
IV. ASSESSMENT METHODS

Multi-Pronged Approaches to Assessment

Multiple assessment methods used in conjunction properly measure student competency in a course. Administrators at Pacific Lutheran University use three primary methods to assess progress toward institutional learning outcomes, as seen below.

Assessment of “Expression” Learning Outcome
Students will communicate clearly in both written and oral forms; adapt messages to various audiences using appropriate media, convention, or styles; and create symbols or meanings in a variety of expressive media, both verbal and nonverbal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collegiate Learning Assessment</th>
<th>Random Email Survey of Current Students</th>
<th>Departmental Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-year and senior students take the Collegiate Learning Assessment. Administrators analyze questions that pertain to learning outcomes to gauge student progress.</td>
<td>A small sample of students from each class reflects on an experience where they have encountered a learning outcome. Students must explain how learning outcomes align with each other.</td>
<td>In the spring, every department completes a report that explains how faculty collect data (e.g., through exams or essays) on an outcome. Assessment administrators compare these reports to student survey responses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine long-term progress towards learning outcomes, administrators at Duke University give incoming and outgoing students one of three surveys. The graphic below describes this model.

Cohort-based Surveys for Long-term Assessment of Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division of First-year Class</th>
<th>Baseline Surveys</th>
<th>Senior Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every incoming class is randomly divided into three groups, each of which takes a different survey. The surveys assess one of three learning outcomes: global perspectives, critical thinking, or moral and ethical development.</td>
<td>One cohort takes the Global Perspective Inventory test to measure baseline knowledge of students.</td>
<td>Each cohort takes the same test again upon graduation. Faculty and administrators from the institutional research office compare results to the baseline surveys to measure student progress toward each learning outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One cohort takes the Reasoning about Current Issues (RCI) test to measure critical thinking skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One cohort takes the Defining Issues Test, Version 2 (DIT-2) to measure ethical and moral reasoning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. ASSESSMENT METHODS

How Assessment Informs Curricular Decisions

General education administrators partner with personnel from the institutional research or assessment office to analyze collected data and calculate the percentage of students in each core course that meet designated learning outcome criteria. Administrators use these figures during periodic reviews of each core course. Institutions that use rubrics, such as King College and CSU-Fresno, track the percentage of students who meet a minimum number of criteria in each rubric. At King College, the dean of the school of arts and sciences invites faculty who teach core courses to a fall workshop that elucidates trends, progress, and best practices. Administrators also mentor faculty individually to modify assessment methods and metrics or change teaching methods to improve student learning.

Administrators at SUNY-Geneseo stagger course reviews according to outcome or subject area to limit committee time commitments. Contacts report this approach allows reviewers to focus intently on criteria for a few outcomes at a time without balancing consideration for other outcomes. SUNY-Geneseo’s review schedule is below.

**Staggered Course Review According to Outcome**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year One</th>
<th>Year Two</th>
<th>Year Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courses that illustrate the following outcomes are assessed:</td>
<td>Courses that illustrate the following outcomes are assessed:</td>
<td>Courses that illustrate the following outcomes are assessed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Critical writing and reading</td>
<td>- Social science</td>
<td>- Natural science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Numeric-symbolic reasoning</td>
<td>- Foreign language</td>
<td>- Non-western traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Western humanities</td>
<td>- Fine arts</td>
<td>- U.S. Histories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Information management</td>
<td>- Basic research</td>
<td>- Oral discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Basic research</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

The general education committee reviews each core course every three years. Faculty analyze percentages of students who meet designated outcomes, assessment approaches, and delivery methods to make adjustments. Committee members also examine aggregate data to determine which outcomes, if any, require more attention or course additions.
V. DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Learning Outcomes Based Upon AACU Standards

All contact institutions use general education learning outcomes from the AACU to some degree. General education administrators and faculty attend the AACU Institute on General Education and Assessment, held annually over a long weekend in the summer, to begin building an outcomes-based general education model. The session covers how to analyze campus dynamics, foster stakeholder engagement, and allocate resources efficiently. Fees for a five-member team to attend the four-day program amount to $6,700 for AACU member institutions and $7,500 for non-member institutions.

“ AACU outcomes were developed after five years of study. It seems efficient to adopt a set of outcomes a group of faculty spent five years studying rather than develop our own, especially since those outcomes are both comprehensive and elegant in their coverage and design.”

-Council Interview

Topics Covered at AACU Institute on General Education and Assessment

- Process of reforming general education on campus
- Models for general education structure and delivery
- Strategies to use general education to enhance student success
- Assessment approaches
- Special topics such as connecting departmental majors to general education goals, allocating resources, using institutional data to advance learning and campus communication, and integrating the curriculum and co-curriculum.

Development and Implementation of Outcomes-based General Education

Some contact institutions develop learning outcomes based on established or state-mandated general education requirements, such as at the University of Utah and SUNY-Geneseo. Contacts at other institutions with more flexible structures recommend administrators first adopt learning outcomes and use them to guide curricular development. The diagram below illustrates implementation of outcomes-based general education.

Outreach Phase
Reach out to faculty to gain their support and input. Ask for volunteers to work on a general education review committee, and compensate faculty through course releases. Decide the purpose of general education at the institution and what key skills or knowledge areas every student should have upon graduation.

Development Phase
Develop a series of governing documents, such as the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s four documents that outline institutional learning objectives, curricular structure, course approval processes, and governance and assessment. Strong governance documents alleviate pushback from faculty who may be concerned their course will not be included.

Implementation Phase
Approve courses for inclusion in the general education curriculum based on learning outcomes and criteria set forth in governance documents. Host forums and seek approval from each college’s faculty.

Develop assessment methods alongside learning outcomes to ensure congruency.
V. DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Campus Partnerships in General Education

Administrators should invite members of the campus community to participate in program development, which involves creation of learning outcomes and curricular requirements, and program maintenance, which includes assessment and course review. The diagram below illustrates involvement from various stakeholders.

### Stakeholders Involved in General Education Development and Maintenance

#### Development Partners
- **Provost or president:** Initiates general education discussion and review
- **Representatives from each undergraduate college, student affairs, admissions, and other units:** Serve on general education development committee to create governing documents
- **Faculty senate:** Approves learning outcomes
- **Chair of the undergraduate curriculum committee:** Ex officio chair of the development committee
- **Dean of undergraduate studies or arts and sciences:** Houses general education program

#### Maintenance Partners
- **Institutional research or assessment office:** Works with faculty to develop assessment methods and assists with analysis of data
- **Academic advisers:** Serve as initial point of contact for student questions on completion of general education requirements
- **Director of general education or dean of curriculum:** Coordinates assessment methods and serves as resource for faculty
- **Curriculum or general education committee:** Completes periodic review of general education courses and assesses progress toward learning outcomes

### Major Challenges

Contacts warn of the following potential challenges to outcomes-based general education.

#### Challenges and Solutions in Outcomes-based General Education

**Challenges**
- Some students in demanding programs, such as engineering or business, cannot take many non-major credits.
- Transfer students from other institutions bring credit from courses that do not necessarily meet learning outcomes.
- Some departments are reluctant to release data faculty collect that could result in removal of a course from the general education curriculum.

**Solutions**
- Encourage faculty in these departments to design courses that meet both learning outcomes and major requirements. Allow students to count appropriate major courses towards general education requirements.
- Award credit for transfer courses with direct equivalency to a certified general education course. For all others, use a standardized rubric with guidelines to decide whether to award credit.
- Emphasize to faculty that courses will be improved before they are dropped. Alternatively, implement an e-portfolio program that makes student work directly available for general education committee review.
VI. APPENDIX

Required General Education Credit Hours Among Contact Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Required Credit Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSU-Fresno</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King College</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Lutheran University</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNY-Geneseo</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Delaware</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nebraska-Lincoln</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Utah</td>
<td>40</td>
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</tbody>
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VI. APPENDIX

Sample Learning Outcome at Pacific Lutheran University

The Department of Mathematics
Mathematics Element

General Education Program
Pacific Lutheran University

Framing Language and Program Goals

Department of Mathematics Mission Statement
The Department of Mathematics seeks to provide an excellent education for our students as our primary goal. Deeply rooted in the tradition of liberal arts education, mathematics is essential to many areas of study. We serve a diverse group of students and disciplines; we give a solid foundation to the science students, provide the tools needed for professional students, and prepare our mathematics majors for graduate work or for entering the work force. To do this, we provide a variety of learning environments and methods including technologies, group and individual study, and off-campus experiences. We strive to help all students view mathematics as part of the human endeavor, apply mathematics and logical skills as world citizens, and become life-long learners. Through research, we expand fundamental knowledge of mathematics and sustain our intellectual vitality. We invite students to join us on this journey.

Department Goals
1. To advance the university’s Principles of General Education and Integrated Learning Objectives.
2. To provide backgrounds for other disciplines.
3. To provide a comprehensive pre-professional program for those directly entering the fields of teaching and applied mathematics.
4. To provide a nucleus of essential courses which will develop the breadth and maturity of mathematical thought for continued study of mathematics at the graduate level.
5. To develop the mental skills necessary for the creation, analysis, and critique of mathematical topics.
6. To provide a view of mathematics as a part of humanistic behavior.

General Education Element Description

Exploring Nature and Number
These courses invite exploration of the natural world around and within us and provide expression of our human inclination to order what we see and to think in quantitative terms.

Mathematics Reasoning
Studying in mathematics sharpens the mind for lifelong service by developing a command of logical argument, abstract reasoning, pattern recognition, and quantitative analysis. The ability to work with quantitative information lies at the heart of informed citizenship in the twenty-first century; it opens the doors to many traditional and new careers; and it enables the individual to navigate in the increasingly complicated quantified world.

1 http://www.plu.edu/general-education/General%20Education%20Program%20Outcomes/home.php
VI. APPENDIX

General Education Element Learning Outcomes

The student completing a General Education mathematics course will demonstrate:

1. An understanding of and competence with using the symbolic language of mathematics. Depending on the level of the class, this may include algebraic notation, notational syntax, or the rules for manipulating functions, derivatives, integrals and matrices;

2. An ability to translate between the symbolic language of mathematics, graphical representations of mathematical information and verbal descriptions;

3. An understanding of the process of applying mathematics to solve a problem that is not originally expressed in mathematical form; in particular, the ability to identify variables and to determine relationships between variables in order to formulate a mathematical problem from a verbal description;

4. An ability to recognize mathematical principles relevant to natural and social phenomena, and the ability to use those principles to gain insight into the phenomena;

5. An appreciation for the importance of precise language and thought when doing mathematics;

6. An increased ability to understand and use abstract mathematical concepts;

7. An understanding that mathematics is more than just a collection of facts, rules and algorithms; rather, it is about assembling evidence, applying logic and determining the truth of claims; and,

8. An awareness that mathematics is a creative and on-going intellectual pursuit that has made seminal contributions to the development of modern civilization.

Alignment with Institutional Learning Objectives

The above learning outcomes relate directly to the university Integrative Learning Objectives (ILOs) that organize the abilities our students develop in six categories as shown below.

a. Knowledge Base: Objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4
b. Critical Reflection: Objectives 3, 4, 5, and 6
c. Expression: Objectives 1, 2, and 5
d. Interaction with Others: Objectives 4 and 5
e. Valuing: Objectives 5, 7 and 8
f. Multiple Frameworks: Objectives 6, 7 and 8.
VI. APPENDIX

Institutional Learning Outcomes from the University of Delaware

Upon graduation from the University of Delaware, students will be able to:

1. Attain effective skills in (a) oral and (b) written communication, (c) quantitative reasoning, and (d) the use of information technology.

2. Learn to think critically to solve problems.

3. Be able to work and learn both independently and collaboratively.

4. Engage questions of ethics and recognize responsibilities to self, community, and society at large.

5. Understand the diverse ways of thinking that underlie the search for knowledge in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences.

6. Develop the intellectual curiosity, confidence, and engagement that will lead to lifelong learning.

7. Develop the ability to integrate academic knowledge with experiences that extend the boundaries of the classroom.

8. Expand understanding and appreciation of human creativity and diverse forms of aesthetic and intellectual expression.

9. Understand the foundations of United States society including the significance of its cultural diversity.

10. Develop an international perspective in order to live and work effectively in an increasingly global society.

http://www2.udel.edu/gened/
University Leadership Council

Considerations for Development and Assessment of Outcomes-Based General Education Curricula

Networking Contacts • March 5, 2012

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