REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK: NEW UNIVERSITY LEARNING REQUIREMENTS

BACKGROUND: Beginning in Fall 2008, the General Education Visioning Committee (GEVC) was tasked by the Office of the Provost to consider new possibilities for structuring general education at WSU in light of current national literature and models, and to conduct an internal review of issues at WSU. In August 2009, the GEVC provided a 51-page report to WSU Provost and Executive Vice President Warwick Bayly. This report detailed the current status and fundamental issues and concerns regarding general education, including: a) an outdated budgeting system; b) a widespread lack of knowledge about the nature, purpose, and structure of the program; c) a fundamental shift in education nationally and internationally to a focus on outcomes; and d) the benefits of creating coherent general education pathways that run "vertically" through all years of a student's baccalaureate program rather than "horizontally" in the first two years, thus allowing students to engage in their declared interests earlier. The GEVC report was approved in December 2009 and can be accessed at: http://vpue.wsu.edu/GEVC.

Out of that report came two major building blocks for a revised General Education curriculum: 1) a Vision of General Education at WSU; and 2) a set of design principles to which any new curriculum should adhere.

THE GEVC VISION: WSU fosters educational outcomes that include knowledge of human cultures, of the arts, and of the natural and physical world. Students develop their intellectual and practical skills through integrated learning experiences that prepare them to be responsible local and global citizens and leaders. They reach this through a broad liberal education, specialization in a major, and community and field-based experiences that explore the world’s major questions.

THE GEVC DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

Any proposal for a revised General Education curriculum should be:

- Learning-goal centered (i.e., significantly advances student achievement of all of the WSU Learning Goals -- see Appendix A);
- Simple, yet flexible;
- Ideally fewer credits than now (40), but no less than 30 credits;
- Integrated with the majors;
- Vertically integrated (i.e., learning goals are addressed throughout the undergraduate experience and not only in the first two years);
- Assessable;
- Workable for all students, including transfer students, all majors, and on all campuses; and
- Intentionally designed to include a first-year experience and an integrative “capstone” experience

REACTIONS TO THE GEVC REPORT: Following approval of the GEVC Report, Provost Bayly indicated that the next step in the revision of the General Education Requirements was to initiate widespread dialogue across the campuses at WSU regarding the report’s implications and suggestions for redefining outcomes and curricula. Toward that end, during the Spring of 2010, the General Education Committee held multiple forums throughout the university and on all campuses to allow faculty, staff and students the chance to provide valuable input regarding the report and its recommendations. In these forums, many expressed the desire not just to react to the principles laid out in the GEVC Report, but to respond to a specific proposal for a revised curricular structure based on those design principles.

After receiving input from the Faculty Senate and faculty, students, and staff in the campus forums, the General Education Committee developed a new set of University Learning Requirements (ULRs) and a
proposed curriculum that meets the above GEVC Vision and required design principles. The GEC proposal can be read in its entirety at the General Education Website (specifically: http://vpue.wsu.edu/newsevents/newsreleases/genedreport.html) and is also provided as an attachment to this email. It presents: a) the newly proposed University Learning Requirements (ULRs); b) sample course plans for a selection of undergraduate majors in order to facilitate an understanding of how the new curriculum would interface with the major; and c) a summary of the advantages and potential controversies associated with the proposal.

REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK:
The General Education (GE) committee now seeks your input and feedback regarding the proposed curriculum revision. Toward that end, we would like faculty, staff, and students to either:

- a) propose specific modifications to the draft proposal to address any problems seen in that proposal;
- b) if you are satisfied with the draft proposal, endorse the draft proposal.

Our intent with this procedure is twofold. First, we would like to ascertain the extent to which faculty, students, and staff approve of the proposed curriculum in its current form. Second, we would like to receive help making any necessary improvements. Thus, we encourage all participants in this process to think holistically and system-wide, and suggest solutions to any problems with the draft proposal (not just identification of the problems).

When evaluating the curriculum proposal, please keep in mind three things. First, the old GE “alphabet” will be retired with the new curriculum [it will stay until students grandfathered in the old system have graduated, i.e., about 6 years or so, and will run behind the scenes. The new system of designators will begin 2012.] For too many, the current designators have become a hindrance rather than a help. Second, change always has controversial elements, many of which we have identified in the proposal. Third, this proposal represents the best, cooperative work of faculty from a wide, representative swath of WSU who have spent the last 1-2 years steeping themselves in national conversation about GE reform. Not that this means this the proposal is perfect — it most certainly is not, hence the need for you to suggest improvements — but it does mean that it results from a sound, fair process that focused on the collective good of students no matter their college.

If you are satisfied with (dare we say, excited about?!) the draft University Learning Requirements curriculum proposal that the GE committee has provided, please provide the GE Committee with that feedback via email addressed to the GE Committee, c/o Mary Arndt, arndtm@wsu.edu. If you would like to offer changes to the proposal, please indicate the reasons why the changes will serve students better in light of the design principles outlined above. Please also note how the changes better address the learning goals.

DEADLINE: October 15th, 2010. Please submit an electronic copy of your comments and proposed changes to the GE Committee, c/o Mary Arndt, via email to arndtm@wsu.edu as a MS Word or PDF document.