A PROPOSAL FOR UNIVERSITY LEARNING REQUIREMENTS

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 following University Learning Requirements assist students in meeting that vision while also adhering to the set of design principles recommended by the General Education Visioning Committee, including that they be: based on learning goals (see Appendix A); simple, yet flexible enough to work for all students (including transfer students), all majors, and on all campuses; integrated with the major and vertically throughout the undergraduate experience; provide for a coherent first year experience and culminate in a meaningful integrative and applied “capstone” experience; and assessable. Detailed descriptions of these requirements are provided on the following pages.

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE: 3 semester credit hours
First Year Seminar (3 cr.)

FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES: 9 semester credit hours
Quantitative Reasoning (3 cr.)
Communication (3 cr.)
Written Communication (3 cr.)

WAYS OF KNOWING: 13 semester credit hours
Inquiry in the Natural and Physical Sciences (4 cr.)
Inquiry in the Social Sciences (3 cr.)
Inquiry in the Humanities (3 cr.)
Inquiry in the Creative Arts (3 cr.)

INTEGRATIVE AND APPLIED LEARNING: 9 semester credit hours
Intercultural Engagement (3 cr.)
Civic Engagement (3 cr.)
400-level Integrative Capstone (3 cr.)

TOTAL REQUIRED SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS: 34 cr.*
*Many of the ULRs may be fulfilled while meeting major requirements. See “Supporting Documents” for sample undergraduate major plans. Finally, because any curriculum proposal will have its advantages and controversies, we have outlined these issues at the end of the proposal.
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR (3 credits)

The three-credit First-Year Seminar (FYS) will be required of all students entering as freshmen; all others are encouraged to enroll in FYS during their first semester after transferring into WSU. Seminars will be individually developed by faculty and will be centered on topics following the passionate intellectual interests of the instructor. In turn, students will enroll in any FYS section that most sparks their interest or curiosity. Thus, the purpose of the FYS is two-fold: first, to facilitate early engagement with faculty and fellow students with common academic interests; and second, introduce all entering students to the WSU Undergraduate Learning Goals via the lens of a specific disciplinary or interdisciplinary approach. The FYS will have a prefix from individual departments and will be capped at 35 students*, allowing for an immediate and intimate introduction to the WSU Learning Goals as well as content from a specific discipline.

FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES

QUANTITATIVE REASONING (3 credits)

The Quantitative Reasoning course requires students not only to solve quantitative problems, but also to move beyond numerical calculations and memorization of equations and formulas. Thus, WSU graduates also must know how to interpret, evaluate, and critique the results of such analyses, and to identify limitations of models and quantitative results.

COMMUNICATION* (6 credits)

Communication courses* require students to develop and express ideas in writing and in other mediums. This includes adapting content and conventions to context, audience, and purpose. Development of communication abilities involves working with many different technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images, and involves skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the type of writing or presentation. Finally students will hone clarity, fluency, and accuracy.

One three-credit communication course focuses on the written medium. The other three-credit communication course can focus on written or non-written mediums, such as public speaking, conversational foreign language, visual literacy, multimedia authoring and intercultural communication. Because communication abilities develop through repeated practice across the curriculum (e.g., “writing across the curriculum”) beyond foundational courses, the “Writing in the Major” (M-course) model should be retained.

*This limit allows (and requires) the seminar to be interactive and engaging, characterized by collaborative learning, active group discussion, writing, and presenting. All FYS classes must address the Learning Goals of Critical & Creative Thinking, Communication, and Information Literacy at a minimum, but are encouraged to incorporate other LGs as appropriate to the course content. FYS activities and assignments should also be intentionally designed to expose students to campus resources and elements of the campus community that will be critical to their future academic success (e.g., academic advising, library resources, career counseling, and co-curricular activities and student organizations).

*Communication courses are those courses that meet the Communication Learning Goal, which are not restricted to courses from the College of Communications or with a “Com” or “ComSt” prefix.
WAYS OF KNOWING

INQUIRIES IN THE DISCIPLINES (13 credits)

The ability to engage in critical inquiry and challenge pre-existing assumptions is an essential skill in the evaluation and creation of knowledge. Innovation requires divergent thinking, risk taking, and the capacity to locate, integrate and synthesize information from a variety of sources and using a variety of methods. In completing the series of Inquiry courses, students will gain broad exposure to and comfort with critical and creative thought processes across a variety of disciplinary areas. By asking and attempting to answer the “big questions” in a variety of disciplines, students will learn how to generate, evaluate, disseminate and apply knowledge within those disciplinary contexts and beyond.

The organization of these requirements into these four broad areas — natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and arts — ensures that students will experience a wide variety of modes of scholarly inquiry, thus equipping students to draw conclusions and make decisions based on multi-faceted frames of reference, thereby enhancing students’ critical thinking and information literacy skills.

INTEGRATIVE AND APPLIED LEARNING

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (3 credits)

The Civic Engagement course requires students and alumni of WSU to become more socially aware, responsible, and actively engaged in issues leading to meaningful change in the world. As such, Civic engagement promotes critical inquiry into the foundations of citizenship at the local, national, or global levels. Specifically, Civic Engagement courses will help students: (a) understand community issues; (b) learn how to engage with civic-minded groups to effect positive change; (c) become aware of, and responsible for, the impact of their actions on others; or (d) apply academic concepts and/or identify career connections through community work and networks. To achieve these ends, a variety of pedagogies may be used, including but not limited to: service-learning opportunities, experiential learning, classroom projects, and/or direct community involvement via internship or other community service projects.

INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT (3 credits)

Intercultural engagement introduces students to cultural differences and similarities through an exploration of the diversity of human values and experiences, while laying the groundwork for cross-cultural communication, understanding, and personal growth. As such, Intercultural Engagement courses enable students to identify their own cultural patterns, to compare and contrast them with those of others, and to adapt empathically and flexibly to unfamiliar ways of being. Specifically, Intercultural Engagement courses should: (a) promote cultural self-awareness; (b) enhance understanding of the complexity of cultural worldview frameworks and how these are influenced by history, politics, communication styles, economics, and cultural values, beliefs and practices; (c) develop empathy skills that enable students to interpret intercultural experiences from multiple worldviews; (d) promote curiosity on the part of students to ask complex questions about other cultures and to seek out answers that reflect multiple cultural perspectives; or (e) encourage students to initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
400-LEVEL INTEGRATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE (3 credits)

These “capstone” learning experiences require students to gather, synthesize, and think critically about information, and to integrate previous learning so as to frame and solve problems effectively. Integrative capstone courses may address all of the learning goals, or focus only on a few. Typically, however, critical thinking, communication, and information literacy skills will be practiced extensively in these courses with the expectation that students reach mastery levels of performance to “cap” their undergraduate careers. Some courses may employ inter- or multidisciplinary approaches to topical issues, while others may be grounded in specific methodologies from the disciplines. These courses have as a general prerequisite junior-level standing (senior-level standing recommended), and will ordinarily be taken within the major.
ADVANTAGES AND CONTROVERSIES OF PROPOSED STRUCTURE

Advantages

- Intentionally designed around the agreed-upon University Learning Goals, thereby facilitating the assessment of our undergraduate learning outcomes.
-Embeds high-impact transformational learning experiences (early exposure to major and research; hands-on inquiry courses; applied/integrative experience).
- Maintains (or increases) student choice in the design of their undergraduate learning experience; encourages intentionality in the design and selection of courses.
- Simple and flexible for all majors and colleges.
- Repositions General Education as a university-wide program with contributions from all units.
- Reduces the number of required credit hours, thereby creating both streamlined efficiency and opportunities for further student exploration of disciplines.
- Opens up opportunities for students to pursue double majors, minors, and certificates to a much greater extent ➔ perhaps making our students more marketable with broader skill sets and knowledge bases.
- Multiple opportunities for integration with the major, providing early (FYS) and continued exposure (Inquiry and Applied Learning courses) to disciplinary perspectives and contact with faculty and fellow students.
- Colleges can customize additional requirements beyond the ULRs.
- Any faculty member from any college can teach small seminars, thereby providing an early opportunity for recruitment to the major and connection with the department (which research suggests increases student retention/persistence).
- Removes curricular bottlenecks by avoiding a single set of courses that ALL students must take.
- Tier 3 (T) courses eliminated! Rather, the “capstone” experience is encouraged (although not required) to be in the major to provide coherence, integration, and application of undergraduate learning.
- Better for transfer students. Direct Transfer AA would fulfill all ULRs except the 400-level Applied Learning Experience.
- Easier for switching majors.
- Serves as needed impetus for reform of University Learning (General Education) budget and oversight.
- Early and continued exposure to University Learning Goals throughout the 4 year experience.
- Explicit focus on the Creative Arts.
- Promotion of opportunities for civic engagement.

Controversies

- Potential differential negative impacts on various departments; must address the budgetary and resource implications.
- Time and resources needed to develop new courses and support ongoing faculty development to maintain the integrity of the intended university learning model.
- Fear that integration with the major dilutes general education.
- Paradigm shift from “content” to “learning goals”.
- Staffing considerations.
- Need intentional plans for governance, assessment, communication, and eventual ratification of the curricular structure proposal.
APPENDIX A: WSU LEARNING GOALS

CRITICAL & CREATIVE THINKING

Graduates will use evidence and context to construct knowledge in order to reason, including reasoning ethically, and to innovate in imaginative ways.

QUANTITATIVE REASONING

Graduates will solve quantitative problems from a wide variety of authentic contexts and everyday life situations.

INFORMATION LITERACY

Graduates will effectively identify, locate, evaluate, use responsibly and share information for the problem at hand.

COMMUNICATION

Graduates will write, speak and listen to achieve intended meaning and understanding among all participants.

INTERCULTURAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Graduates will employ self-understanding and interact effectively with others of similar and diverse cultures, values, and perspectives.

DEPTH, BREADTH, AND INTEGRATION OF LEARNING

Graduates will develop depth, breadth, and integration of learning for the benefit of themselves, their communities, their employers, and for society at large.
WSU LEARNING GOALS WITH EXAMPLES OF OUTCOMES

CRITICAL & CREATIVE THINKING

Graduates will use evidence and context to construct knowledge in order to reason, including reasoning ethically, and to innovate in imaginative ways.

For instance, graduates can demonstrate critical and creative thinking by their ability to:
1. Define, analyze, and solve problems.
2. Integrate and synthesize knowledge from multiple sources.
3. Assess the accuracy and validity of findings and conclusions.
4. Understand how one thinks, reasons, and makes value judgments, including ethical and aesthetical judgments.
5. Understand diverse viewpoints, including different philosophical and cultural perspectives.
6. Combine and synthesize existing ideas, images, or expertise in original ways.
7. Think, react, and work in an imaginative way characterized by a high degree of innovation, divergent thinking, and risk taking.

QUANTITATIVE REASONING

Graduates will solve quantitative problems from a wide variety of authentic contexts and everyday life situations.

For instance, graduates can demonstrate quantitative and symbolic reasoning by their ability to:
1. Explain information presented in mathematical forms (e.g., equations, graphs, diagrams, tables, and words).
2. Convert relevant information into various mathematical forms (e.g., equations, graphs, diagrams, tables, and words).
3. Understand and apply quantitative principles and methods in the solution of problems.
4. Make judgments and draw appropriate conclusions based on the quantitative analysis of data, while recognizing the limits of this analysis.
5. Identify and evaluate important assumptions in estimation, modeling, and data analysis.
6. Express quantitative evidence in support of the argument or purpose of work (in terms of what evidence is used and how it is formatted, presented, and contextualized).

INFORMATION LITERACY

Graduates will effectively identify, locate, evaluate, use responsibly and share information for the problem at hand.

For instance, graduates can demonstrate information literacy by their ability to:
1. Determine the extent and type of information needed.
2. Implement well-designed search strategies.
3. Access information effectively and efficiently from multiple sources.
4. Assess credibility and applicability of information sources.
5. Use information to accomplish a specific purpose.
6. Access and use information ethically and legally.
COMMUNICATION

Graduates will write, speak and listen to achieve intended meaning and understanding among all participants.

For instance, graduates can demonstrate the ability to:
1. Recognize how circumstances, background, values, interests and needs shape communication sent and received.
2. Tailor message to the audience.
3. Express concepts propositions and beliefs in coherent, concise and technically correct form.
4. Choose appropriate communication medium and technology.
5. Speak with comfort in front of groups.
6. Follow social norms for individual and small group interactions, which includes listening actively.

INTERCULTURAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Graduates will employ self-understanding and interact effectively with others of similar and diverse cultures, values, and perspectives.

For instance, graduates can demonstrate intercultural and civic engagement by their ability to:
1. Critically assess their own core values, cultural assumptions and biases in relation to those held by other individuals, cultures, and societies.
2. Recognize how events & patterns in the present and past structure and affect human societies and world ecologies.
3. Critically assess the cultural and social underpinnings of knowledge claims.
4. Actively seek opportunities to learn from diverse perspectives.
5. Practice personal integrity, citizenship, and service to others.

DEPTH, BREADTH, AND INTEGRATION OF LEARNING

Graduates will develop depth, breadth, and integration of learning for the benefit of themselves, their communities, their employers, and for society at large.

For instance, graduates can demonstrate depth, breadth, and integration of learning:

1. Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts.
2. By showing a depth of knowledge within the chosen academic field of study based on integration of its history, core methods, techniques, vocabulary, and unsolved problems.
3. By applying the concepts of the general and specialized studies to personal, academic, service learning, professional, and/or community activities.
4. By understanding how the methods and concepts of the chosen discipline relate to those of other disciplines and by possessing the ability to engage in cross-disciplinary activities.