A PROPOSAL FOR UNIVERSITY COMMON REQUIREMENTS
4-14-11 Approved version

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 Common 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
Roots of Contemporary Issues (3 cr.)

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

WAYS OF KNOWING: 16 semester credit hours
Inquiry in the Social Sciences (3cr.)
Inquiry in the Humanities (3cr.)
Inquiry in the Creative and Professional Arts (3cr.)
Inquiry in the Natural Sciences (7 cr.)

INTEGRATIVE AND APPLIED LEARNING: 6 semester credit hours
Diversity (3 cr.)
Integrative Capstone (3 cr.)

TOTAL REQUIRED SEMESTER CREDIT HOURS: 34 cr.*
* Only three, three-credit courses may be taken within the major; all other courses must be taken outside one’s major.

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES (3 credits)¹
The three-credit Roots of Contemporary Issues will be required of all students entering as freshmen; all others are encouraged to enroll in this course during their first semester after transferring into WSU. This course will explore various contemporary global problems from an historical perspective, discovering the historical roots of these issues. It will provide a foundation for local and global intercultural

¹ Unlike the other course categories, this course category will have only one course, “Roots of Contemporary Issues,” taught by the history department.
understanding and engagement. This course also will introduce all entering students to the WSU Undergraduate Learning Goals.

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. Such adaptation requires skills involving: (a) working with many different technologies; (b) mixing texts, data, and images; and (c) use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources. 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, interpersonal communication, visual literacy, multimedia authoring and intercultural communication.

WAYS OF KNOWING

INQUIRIES IN THE DISCIPLINES (16 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 the creative and professional 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.

Natural Sciences. The scientific approach is our fundamental way of understanding matter and the universe, as well as past and current life on Earth. It is also the basis of most new technological and medical developments.

Familiarity with the sciences encourages adoption of views about the world that are subject to revision on the basis of additional information. To understand science as a way of knowing, students must recognize certain hallmarks of scientific endeavor, e.g., making valid observations, distinguishing between testable and non-testable ideas, and the critical role of independent corroboration by peers. Courses in the physical and biological sciences provide students with an understanding of fundamental scientific terms, methods,

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2 Arts is broadly defined to include not only the fine arts and performing arts, but also the professional arts, such as architecture, graphic design, digital arts, etc.
concepts, and theories, and introduce them to recent scientific and technological developments and their implications. Also, students in science lab courses learn ways of taking measurements, gathering data, and organizing information. University Common Requirement science courses require students to think critically; to assess the validity of sources, findings and conclusions; and to use quantitative principles to solve problems. In addition, University Common Requirement science courses will advance scientific literacy by making explicit the connections between science and contemporary issues in society.

To ensure that students receive sufficient breadth, students will take one science course in the biological sciences, and one course in the physical sciences, with at least one laboratory component. These courses must provide a fundamental understanding of key scientific principles. Alternatively, students may take the Science 101 and 102 sequence, which explores both biological and physical sciences throughout the sequence. Besides breadth, University Common Requirement science courses will focus on application of basic scientific concepts to personal decision-making and evaluation of science and health-related issues in the popular media.

Social Sciences. The Social Sciences apply scientific principles and methods to understand individual and collective human behavior. These disciplines cover a broad range of subjects, from psychology to sociology and political science, to history and anthropology and economics. Generally speaking, the social sciences examine mental processes, culture, and behavior; study the structures of society and how individuals, groups, institutions, and societies interact with each other and with their environments; and reconstruct how societies functioned in the past. The Social Sciences employ diverse methods and approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, as well as a variety of explanatory theories and models. In acquiring knowledge about themselves and society, students will learn to think critically, to use quantitative methods to assess validity, and to construct knowledge through a variety of scholarly methods and approaches. Social Science courses also assist students to expand their communication skills in self-directed learning projects.

Humanities. The humanities disciplines—philosophy, literature, history, and the study of language—offer multiple methods of interpretation and analysis. These disciplines also engage students in the history of ideas, acquaint them with significant cultural traditions, and give them direct experience of important cultural achievements. Study in the humanities encourages students to explore their own cultural traditions and enables them to participate more fully in their own or other cultures.

Creative and Professional Arts. The production of art, creative expression, and the use of symbol systems and conventions to explore value and meaning are fundamental human activities. Similarly, interpretation of such systems or products is also an essential human skill—and one of our primary ways of making sense of experience. Music, architecture, visual arts, graphic arts, and the kinetic arts offer direct participation in these activities while providing contexts and perspectives by which the arts acquire meaning.

Generally, students who engage in arts and humanities disciplines learn to use various modes of rational inquiry to understand complex human artifacts and, ultimately, to raise questions about the nature of rational inquiry itself. Thus, study in these disciplines develops students’ communication abilities and interpretive and critical thinking skills.

INTEGRATIVE AND APPLIED LEARNING

Integrative and Applied Learning courses synthesize students’ previous knowledge and skills and prepare them to engage actively in issues leading to meaningful change in the world, whether as professionals, citizens, or private individuals. The courses in this area are about making connections; they typically draw on foundational knowledge and the skills developed in Inquiry courses. Learning may be extended
and applied as students address unscripted real-world problems that are sufficiently broad so as to require multiple areas of knowledge and multiple modes of inquiry. Integrative learning builds connections among courses, between theory and practice, or by connecting courses and experientially-based work. These connections may be generated through conventional research papers and projects, as well as through reflective and creative work, and students’ self-assessment of their own learning.

**DIVERSITY (3 credits)**
The Diversity requirement challenges students to critically analyze cultural differences and systems of inequality by learning about the diversity of human values and experiences. This form of analysis assists cross-cultural (both within the United States and trans-national) communication and understanding, as well as personal development, by helping students to identify, analyze and propose alternatives to current systems of inequality and adapt empathically and flexibly to unfamiliar ways of being.

Specifically, Diversity courses should: (a) promote cultural self-awareness; (b) inform how culture is influenced by history, politics, power and privilege, communication styles, economics, institutionalized discrimination and inequality, and cultural values, beliefs and practices; (c) develop empathy skills that enable students to interpret intercultural experiences; (d) promote curiosity on the part of students to ask complex questions about other cultures and classes, and to seek out answers that reflect multiple cultural perspectives; or (e) encourage students to initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.

**INTEGRATIVE CAPSTONE (3 credits)**
Integrative capstone courses bring opportunities for integration, application, and closure to the undergraduate experience, and prepare students for post-baccalaureate work and life-long learning. These courses require students to draw on the skills needed to develop their own research or creative questions, and to initiate investigations and explorations of open-ended issues and problems. They may address all of the baccalaureate learning goals, or only a few; typically, critical thinking, communication, and information literacy skills will be practiced extensively. These courses have as a general prerequisite junior-level standing (senior-level recommended).

**APPENDIX A: WSU LEARNING GOALS & OUTCOMES**

**CRITICAL and CREATIVE THINKING**
Graduates will use reason, evidence, and context to increase knowledge, to reason 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.

**SCIENTIFIC LITERACY**
Graduates will have a basic understanding of major scientific concepts and processes required for personal decision-making, participation in civic affairs, economic productivity and global stewardship.

**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.
DIVERSITY
Graduates will understand, respect and interact constructively 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 and CREATIVE THINKING
Graduates will use reason, evidence, and context to increase knowledge, to reason 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).

SCIENTIFIC LITERACY
Graduates will have a basic understanding of major scientific concepts and processes required for personal decision-making, participation in civic affairs, economic productivity and global stewardship.

For instance, graduates can demonstrate scientific literacy by their ability to:
1. Identify scientific issues underlying global, national, local and personal decisions and communicate positions that are scientifically and technologically informed.
2. Evaluate the quality of scientific and health-related information on the basis of its source and the methods used to generate it.
3. Pose and evaluate arguments based on evidence and apply conclusions from such arguments appropriately.
4. Recognize the societal benefits and risks associated with scientific and technological advances.

**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.

**DIVERSITY**
Graduates will understand, respect and interact constructively with others of similar and diverse cultures, values, and perspectives.

For instance, graduates can demonstrate 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. Analyze and critique social, economic and political inequality on regional, national and global levels, including identifying one’s own position within systems.
3. Recognize how events and patterns in the present and past structure and affect human societies and world ecologies.
4. Critically assess the cultural and social underpinnings of knowledge claims about individuals and groups, and their relations to one another.
   Actively seek opportunities to learn from diverse perspectives and to combat inequalities.

**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.