

**LA & S Study Group**  
**Summer 2001**  
**8/29/01**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**INTRODUCTION:** On May 22, 2001 the LA & S study group began its work to review the current LA & S Program. Its charge, issued by VPAA Patricia Spakes, was to:

1. Identify the goals of the current LA & S Program and determine if the goals are currently being met
2. Survey the existing literature on general education programs nationally and identify current trends and innovations
3. Identify the implications of changing teacher licensure requirements and the Board of Higher Education's recent mandates on student assessment on the LA & S Program
4. Recommend a course of action for a future LA & S committee that will begin the ACC proposal process

After meeting regularly over the summer and spending considerable time in subcommittee work, the study group's six faculty members have developed a perspective of the LA & S Program which it hopes to share with faculty, administrators, and students at the College.

**BACKGROUND:** The current LA & S Program, established in 1988, was the result of several years of campus-wide reflection and discussion. Considered at this time to be "cutting edge," the program represented a considerable improvement over the College's previous course distribution model of general education. Noteworthy components have been its interdisciplinary and multicultural courses, its emphasis on writing and critical thinking, and the establishment of the Freshman Foundation Year.

However, this span of thirteen years is a long time in post secondary education. In its entire existence, the LA & S Program has not changed or even been reviewed, even though prior NEASC reports from a decade ago emphasized the need. Presently, an LA & S Program review is even more critical in light of our current NEASC accreditation process. In addition, recent mandates by the BHE in "rising junior" assessment and changes in teaching licensure also require that the College review the program for its efficacy.

Last academic year, President Riccards began the effort to change the program by submitting to the All College Committee (ACC) a proposal that sought to address the widely held perception of the complexity and confusion inherent in the current LA & S Program. While the proposal was sent back for further review, the LA & S Program assessment formally began. In January 2001, Professor George Bohrer convened a faculty workshop that resulted in a compilation of the program's strengths and weaknesses. This study group's work builds upon the previous efforts of other faculty and administrators.

**HOW WE PROCEEDED:** Beginning with a careful review of the LA & S program guide (ACC 405-CC 305), the study group began by creating a common understanding of the program's goals and the means by which such goals are to be accomplished. The full study group also began its efforts to gather relevant information on the general education requirements from FSC's "sister" colleges, as well as from other selected public and private institutions. The results of our efforts, as well as other needed documents, are included in the supplementary materials accompanying this report.

The study group then broke into subcommittees to address three of the stated charges. One subcommittee focused on identifying the program's goals and ascertaining, if possible, if they were being met; the second subcommittee surveyed the current literature on general education programs nationally; and the third identified issues and implications raised by the BHE mandates. The subcommittees' reports are included along with this summary.

The last charge to the study group, to make recommendations on how a future LA & S committee could proceed, underscored all of our deliberations. We believe that the next committee will benefit from the result of our small group's focused efforts, and we are most happy to be resources for that committee and its new charge.

#### **GENERAL STUDY GROUP FINDINGS:**

- The current LA & S Program's goals and means are too complex and confusing and thus difficult to implement and assess
- It is impossible at the present time to determine if the program is meeting its goals given that no one is certain what is being taught and how
- The current LA & S Program contains many important and admirable features that should be retained, clarified, and improved upon
- The College would benefit from research and assessment of other, more "cutting edge" general education and freshman year programs nationally
- The College needs to have a general education program that is more focused, more responsive to student needs, and more understandable
- LA & S, as well as other General Education programs, require constant review and need to be dynamic in order to respond to changes in society and post secondary education
- LA & S program review and assessment is a long, complex, but needed effort that should be initiated immediately this coming academic year

**GENERAL AND SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:** As a study group, we believe unanimously that a serious reexamination and revision of the LA & S program be undertaken. The literature suggests that, in order to be successful, such review should involve all sectors of the college community. Therefore, we recommend the creation of a larger college-wide committee that would include students, administrators, and faculty representatives of all departments and programs. In addition, we recommend that the committee initiate a survey of all students and faculty, as part of an open discussion of the program's strengths and weaknesses and as a means by which to raise awareness of the efforts underway.

Finally, we recommend the following course of actions:

- Either clarify or eliminate the program's emphasis on Modes of Inquiry and the common set of questions that are supposed to be addressed by all LA & S courses
- Establish a closer institutional connection between LA & S and the Writing Across the Curriculum Program
- Reconsider the total number of courses and the total number of requirements in the program
- Clarify what is meant by interdisciplinary
- Consider a foreign language requirement
- Reexamine the course numbering system, which currently lacks clear distinction between introductory and mid-level course offerings
- Clarify the program's goals and means, in order to make it easier for students and faculty to understand and use
- Establish subcommittees for each of the four clusters, as well as the interdisciplinary and multicultural areas, to determine if the stated goals are and purposes are currently being addressed in the courses
- Examine the concepts imbedded in the four clusters and determine if and how the clusters' outcomes can be assessed
- Research other Freshman Foundation Year Programs or Freshman Special Interest Groups (SIGS) as a means by which to reconfigure our own Freshman Foundation Year Program
- Explore possibilities and options for creating learning communities
- Research the efficacy of multi-track general education programs and determine if such changes would be useful to FSC students
- Be apprised of BHE mandates on student assessment and changes in teacher licensure and the impact on curriculum
- Create the means by which faculty can be apprised of changes initiated by the BHE or other external accrediting agencies
- Survey current LA & S courses on their writing and critical thinking components
- Revive the LA & S Council and reconfigure its role in shaping and assessing the current, and perhaps future, LA & S Program

Respectfully submitted,

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**Issue #1**

**What are the goals of the current LA&S Program and are these goals being met?**

**Prepared by Walter Jeffko and Richard Bisk**

## Goals and Means of the Liberal Arts and Science Program

Many faculty members have expressed confusion about the current Liberal Arts and Science Program. Different faculty members have different interpretations of its meaning. In analyzing the program, the committee found it useful to take a “goals and means” approach. The goals articulate the key purposes or vision of the program; while the means are the details of the program that support the goals.

There appears to be strong support within the FSC community for the goals of the LA&S Program. The perceived weaknesses of the program reside in the some the means, as will be explained as this report unfolds. After describing each of the means, we have listed questions to help stimulate thought and discussion for possible action.

### Goals

We see our current LA&S Program as having three goals. The first is a general or overarching one. The other two are specifications of the first goal; they provide its content.

Goal #1 – To provide students with the **skills** (or competencies) and the **knowledge** that constitute an **educated** person, regardless of his or her career objectives. An educated person has the essential skills and knowledge necessary for lifelong learning.

Goal #2 – To assist students in **developing a set of eight interdependent skills** that every educated person should have:

1. Thinking critically and creatively – the fundamental skill underlying all the others.
2. Writing clearly.
3. Reading carefully.
4. Listening and speaking effectively.
5. Quantifying knowledgeably
6. Developing global and temporal perspectives.
7. Integrating holistically.
8. Evaluating intelligently and ethically.

Goal #3 – To provide students with the **knowledge** that every educated person should have:

1. Knowledge of the **different** areas that make up liberal arts and sciences.
2. **Interdisciplinary** knowledge that integrates the liberal arts and sciences content areas.
3. **Multicultural** knowledge.

These goals are stated and developed on pp. 1-8 of the LA&S document.

## Means

The means of the program are developed on pp. 9-31. They include:

1. Modes of Inquiry (pp. 9-10) – Also called “Ways of Knowing,” this is described as an important means for developing critical and creative thinking. The document states: “ In every liberal arts and sciences course, students will approach a similar set of questions although the answers will differ from discipline to discipline.” The modes of inquiry approach emphasizes active modes of learning, a concept that is strongly supported by this committee.

Questions:

- a. Is this term clear to the faculty? Does it mean anything more or other than a discipline method or methodology?
  - b. What is the similar set of questions common to all LA&S disciplines? Is there truly such a common set of questions? How do we know that the common questions are being addressed in all classes?
2. Ethical Component Requirement (p. 11) – This means is seen as developing the goals of critical thinking and evaluating intelligently and ethically. The document states: “An emphasis on the development of ethical reasoning should be present, whenever appropriate, in liberal arts and sciences courses.”

Questions:

- a. Which courses should have an ethical component?
  - b. Should all students be required to take an ethics or values course?
3. Writing Requirement (p. 12) – This requirement is obviously a means to the goals of writing clearly. It has three components:
    - a. Every LA&S course must include an “appropriate” writing requirement. (Math and science courses may substitute problem solving.)
    - b. All students will take Writing I and II in their freshman year.
    - c. All students will satisfy a junior/senior level writing requirement within their major.

Questions:

- a. What is meant by an “appropriate” writing requirement?
- b. Should there be a closer institutional connection between the LA&S program and the Writing Across the Curriculum program?
- c. How do we know if all courses are following their writing requirement?
- d. Is our writing requirement sufficient to prepare students to write effectively on the proposed BHE test for rising juniors?

- e. What is currently offered by departments to fulfill the junior/senior writing requirement?
4. Listening and Speaking Requirement (p. 13) – This means is clearly meant to achieve the goal of listening and speaking effectively. It states: “Each academic department or program area is required to submit an appropriate plan for each major field of study.” This plan should minimally include one or both of the following components:
- a. A required course that specifically addresses speaking and listening skills.
  - b. A specific listening and speaking component in at least two courses required in the major.

Questions:

- a. Is this requirement being met?
  - b. Should the requirement be extended to minors?
5. Health and Fitness Requirement (p. 14) – This requirement emphasizes an **intellectual approach** to health and fitness.

Question: Given that obesity and poor physical fitness are major health problems in the United States, should this requirement include a mandatory physical or exercise component?

6. Intermediate and Advanced Requirement (p. 15) - Students are required to take three intermediate and advanced courses in one LA&S discipline outside of their major. The rationale for this requirement is not made clear in the LA&S document.

Questions:

- a. What goals does this requirement support?
  - b. Does the College’s numbering system clearly identify these courses? Is it acceptable that some 2000 level courses are introductory, while others are intermediate?
7. Liberal Arts and Sciences Clusters (pp16-19, 31) – The cluster requirements are the most important means for achieving the various skills and knowledge goals. All courses in the program, except for Writing I and II and the Health and Fitness courses, are grouped according to one or more of the four clusters in which students must take a minimum number of courses:
- a. Quantitative/Scientific (4 courses).
  - b. Literature, Language and the Arts (4 course).
  - c. Ideas and Events (3 courses).
  - d. Human Behavior (2 courses).

Students must also take four LA&S electives, which may fit into any cluster. Of these 17 courses, two must have special interdisciplinary designation (with one of these taken in the freshman year) and two must have multicultural designation. These courses may also simultaneously satisfy some of the requirements described above.

Questions:

- a. Is twenty courses too many? Many schools require fewer courses.
  - b. Why are four LA&S electives needed?
  - c. Does each cluster have an appropriate number of courses?
  - d. Are the clusters well defined? Some committee members felt that the Ideas and Events cluster, encompassing history, philosophy, political science, geography and economics, was a “catch-all” category that doesn’t have the same clarity and focus as the others. The question was also raised as to why history is given preeminence in this cluster.
  - e. Should there be a foreign language requirement?
8. Interdisciplinary Requirement (p. 20) – As noted above, a student must take two LA&S courses that have a special interdisciplinary designation. We note that there has been considerable debate within the College as to what constitutes such a course.

Questions:

- a. How do we distinguish between a course that has an interdisciplinary component (which all LA&S course must have) and a course that qualifies for interdisciplinary designation? The College needs to come to a consensus on this issue so that the criteria for this designation remain fairly consistent from year to year.
  - b. Is two the appropriate number of interdisciplinary courses particularly given the difficulty of getting these courses approved?
  - c. Should interdisciplinary courses in the LA&S program be modeled on the team taught approach used in the Leadership Academy?
9. Multicultural Requirement (p. 21) – This requirement is meant to help achieve the goals of developing global and temporal perspectives and multicultural knowledge. Students must take two courses with multicultural designation.

Question: Should at least one of the multicultural courses have a global perspective?

10. Freshman Foundation Year (p. 10) – The LA&S document states: “This Freshman Foundation Year will make explicit to first year students that LA&S courses offer skills and content that are significant in the development of an educated person, and serve as the foundation for further learning in their major areas, as well as in the Liberal Arts and Sciences.” Students are required to take Writing I and II, and five LA&S courses encompassing at least three of the clusters. One of these courses must be an interdisciplinary course.



Questions:

- a. Are first year students taking the required courses?
- b. Are all freshman courses addressing the common theme?

11. Liberal Arts and Sciences Council (pp. 28-29) – The Council was originally established as a subcommittee of the ACC Curriculum Committee. Its purpose included recommending courses for inclusion in the program, selecting the annual Freshman Foundation Year theme and evaluating the program. Over time, the committee was dissolved and some of its functions were absorbed by the Curriculum Committee.

Question: Are all of the original functions and responsibilities of the council currently being addressed in an effective manner?

**Issue #2**

**What does the current literature reveal about national trends in general education programs?**

**Prepared by Eric Budd and John Chetro Szivos**

## Trends in General Education

A college education intends to acquaint a person with new ideas and knowledge, introduce people to new cultures, broaden understanding, and enhance the capacity to continue learning throughout life. We should be reminded that curriculum is what Kerr (1977) described as the statement a college makes about what it sees as useful, appropriate, and relevant to the lives of people at this point in time. There is no single college curriculum that can be deemed as the best model and this is evident in the fact that we are a nation without a national curriculum. Therefore, each college has the opportunity to design curricula that they feel will best address the needs of its students, or provide the institution with a unique position.

A survey of curricula reveals that most institutions have emphasized the development of writing skills and oral communication, logical and critical thinking, computer utilization, mathematical analysis, and formal reasoning. This direction is referred to as a “skills-based” curriculum, which is regarded as a reasonable alternative to address the limitation of general education curricula that cannot cover all of the relevant and useful knowledge. The Task Group on General Education (1988) suggested that a general education should seek: “to foster desire and capacity to keep on learning continuously.... to develop habits of and tastes for independent investigations, and by helping students assume responsibility for their own intellectual development. These programs exist above all to prevent stagnation of perception and to vivify thought and action through continuing reflection.”

The two major debates surrounding the core curriculum address the questions of content and coherence. Questions concerning content revolve around what students should know, and have been conceptualized in various ways. There is an agreement that there is such a thing as cultural literacy, but there is no clear agreement as to what constitutes cultural literacy. Levine (1989) thought all students should study the following six topics that are common to all people: the use of symbols, membership in groups and institutions, activities of production and consumption, relationships with nature, sense of time, and values and beliefs. Cheney (1989) had a different idea which was to have general education requirements be 50 of the 120 credit hours needed for graduation and portion the credits across one semester on the origins of civilization, one year on Western civilization, one semester on American civilization, two years of foreign language, one year of mathematics, one year of laboratory science, and one year of social science.

The coherence of the curriculum has been under scrutiny. Institutions of Higher Education have been criticized for creating curricula that represent offerings in a cafeteria-style, rather than weaving together knowledge and skills in a coherent manner. The result of this lack of coherence has been fragmentation, and a lack of common expectations and norms. Zemensky (1989) led an analysis of 25,000 student transcripts and concluded that there is “an absence of structure and coherence in college and university curricula.”

A survey of the literature (Gaff, 1991) points to the following trends in general education programs:

- Liberal arts and sciences subject matter - The trend of the 70s and 80s was towards vocational education that had a deleterious effect on liberal arts. However there have been indications that practitioners are seeing greater value in the study of the arts and sciences through general education. Many practitioners are now seeing the liberal arts as practical arts - a significant part of professional practice.
- Fundamental skills - Writing, speaking, logical and critical thinking, foreign language, mathematics, and academic computing have been emphasized in curricula in most colleges. However there are varying programs to address these skill areas
- Higher standards and more requirements - Some knowledge and skill areas are regarded as so important that colleges are making these skills a requirement for graduation. In some places higher standards have been imposed for admission or advancement.
- Tighter curriculum structure - The trends are away from loose distribution requirements that students may satisfy with a large number of courses. Instead many colleges are deciding on the qualities they think educated students should possess and they are designing more purposeful curricula to achieve these goals.
- The Freshman Year - Emphasis on developing the skills for success as well as stronger advising, and better orientation to college through specially designed freshman seminars and related programs.
- The Senior Year - An effort to prepare students for the work world by completing a significant project, internship, or a capstone experience.
- Global Studies - Several institutions are requiring students to take a course on other cultures with the goals of developing knowledge of people of other nations, positive attitudes towards international affairs, and empathy for people of other cultures.
- Cultural Diversity - Many colleges require courses that make students aware of the cultural pluralism in America and the West. These programs may exist as stand-alone courses or by efforts to infuse the subject matter into all courses.
- Integration of Knowledge - This is often accomplished by linking courses that students take simultaneously, or through the learning community which views learning as an individual but not a solitary act.
- Moral Reflection - The emphasis is on values and ethics as well as technical expertise. The purpose is not to indoctrinate or to get students to adopt a particular belief system or code of behavior.
- Active Learning - In many general education courses students are lectured to, take notes, memorize, and are tested. Some colleges are trying to change this dynamic by stressing modes of active learning that captures the intellectual excitement of the subject matter.

- Extension through all four years - Usually general education requirements are completed in the first two years, but some colleges are offering advanced courses that extend through the four-year experience.
- Assessment - Many colleges are experimenting with various approaches to assessment. There has been much more public scrutiny to hold higher education accountable for achieving educational purposes and the expenditure of funds. Assessment groups are designed to decide what students should learn, clarify the way individuals think and talk about objectives, explore what might be acceptable criteria of learning, set expectations about levels and standards of achievement.

On the table below are listed several institutions and their innovations in these areas, followed by a table surveying the General Education programs of Fitchburg State College's peer institutions.

## Curriculum Trends - Liberal Arts and Sciences Subject Matter

### College/University      Innovation

Roanoke College	Requires interdisciplinary core courses in different chronological time periods focusing on literature, history, and fine arts.
U of North Carolina, Asheville	16 hour humanities core - courses are The Ancient World, The Rise of European Civilization, The Modern World, and The Future and the Individual
U of Nevada, Reno	3 course Western tradition sequence for all students; students read seminal writers from the Greeks to 20 <sup>th</sup> century, as well as study the American experience. Teams of faculty members and TA's meet regularly to plan and teach these courses.
Columbia College	2 semesters interdisciplinary science course using original science papers to show what scientists actually do. Math is taught in the first semester including number systems, methods of pattern recognition, and the concept of a mathematical model. It then deals with the discovery of nuclear fission, promotes discussion of papers by Faraday, the Curies, Rutherford, Bohr, and others. It concludes with discussion of two fission papers. Accompanied by an on-site demonstration of the fission. The second semester begins with more mathematics, emphasizing probability, information processing, and statistics, followed by papers of Mendel, Darwin, and Lederberg leading to Watson, Crick and the genetic code. Examinations are the analysis of other science papers.
Syracuse University	Students take 4 science courses. There are 2 laboratory courses in biology, chemistry, geology, or physics, students may opt for 2 more courses: Intro to Technology, The Social Impact of Technology. In these courses they learn about the technological innovations that follow from basic science and technology
Hunter College	A science for course for non-scientists where the focus is on a few key concepts and infusing a strong historical dimension into the first course of a sequence.

## Curriculum Trends - *Fundamental Skills*

### College/University      Innovation

Whitworth College and

Employed freshman year writing course but found it wasn't enough so they moved to a WAC William Jewell program and trained faculty with the latest methods of teaching writing. These included tenets of: Writing is strengthened with repeated practice; writing is a process not a product; teachers should intervene in the process of student writing by giving feedback and expecting corrections in the next draft; coherence, logical development of a line of argument, highlighting main points, and providing supporting evidence are more important than mechanics, grammar, or spelling; writing is an excellent vehicle to teach skills of critical thinking, as well as to promote learning of a subject matter in virtually all fields; styles vary according to the purpose of the audience, and there is no "right way"; faculty in all departments can learn to give assignments that call for meaningful written responses, to give specific, useful, and constructive feedback to students, and to design test that involve writing.

Illinois Wesleyan Univ.

Language faculty are developing expertise with interactive computer and video systems allowing more practice for students.

Other skills can be taught in this way

- Paine College - Speaking; Evergreen State College - mathematics; Washington College - computing; Jackson State University - critical thinking. The argument made by these institutions is that their graduates will be seriously deficient if they lack speaking skills, mathematical proficiency, computer skills, or the ability to think critically. *Therefore they train a large number of faculty in these areas.*

## Curriculum Trends - Higher Standards and More Requirements

### College/University      Innovation

Macalester College &  
DePauw Univ

In the 1980's many students were concerned about quality to these institutions raised their standards, marketed this aggressively, and the number of applications rose. This was also true in public liberal arts colleges such as *Northeast Missouri State Univ., Mary Washington College in Virginia, and St. Mary's College in Maryland.*

City Univ. of New York

Attempting to raise the level of quality while maintaining its policy of guaranteeing admission to any graduate of the New York City public schools by requiring that applicants complete a college prep. program. The requirements can be met at one of the systems 21 campuses.



## Curriculum Trends - Tighter Curriculum Standards

### College/University Innovation

Harvard Univ.

Graduation requirements that were expected to foster the knowledge, skills, and habits of thought that of general and lasting intellectual significance. This is accomplished by 10 semester courses in 5 substantive areas. There are 150 specifically targeted that make up the General Education requirement. This was reduced from 2500 courses that students could choose from. Literature & arts 3 courses are specified: literature, fine arts or music, and the contexts of culture. History 2 courses: 1 on some aspect of the modern world, and another on the historical process and perspective. Social and philosophical analysis, 1 course on social analysis and another in moral and political philosophy. Science and mathematics, 1 course in physical science and mathematics and another in biological and behavioral science. Foreign cultures, 1 course on Western Europe or a major non-Western culture. In addition proficiency in writing, mathematics, and foreign language.

Brooklyn College

All students must complete a set of 10 interdisciplinary core courses that are designed and taught by teams of faculty members: Classical Origins of Western Culture; Introduction to Art, and Music; People, Power and Politics; The Shaping of the Modern World; Mathematical Reasoning and Computer Programming; Landmarks in Literature; Chemistry and Physics; Biology and Geology; Studies in African, Asian, and Latin American Cultures; and Knowledge, Existence, and Values.

Mount St. Mary's College

Students take 6 interrelated courses in Western history, literature, and philosophy and then spend a year studying American culture to examine comparisons and contrasts.

Hood College

Faculty adopted learning objectives for the Core and its subsections so all faculty can explain to students and the community why these are required, and to meet the objectives of a category

## **Curriculum Trends - The Freshman Year**

### **College/University Innovation**

Univ. of South Carolina

University 101 a program designed to foster the overall development of students and to assist them in making an adjustment to the University. The focus is on 3 topics: self, campus, and higher education. Faculty are expected to create a sense of community among the class, utilize group-building activities that promote social interaction and self-disclosure, and create conditions so that the students look forward to the course. There are units on topics include library research methods, planning for the choice of a major and career, learning about the campus resources, study skills, getting along with others, and whatever the instructor and students decide upon. Teaching methods are a combination of lectures, discussions, writing, and group activities.

Marietta College

Mandatory freshmen seminar with a substantive intellectual focus.

Southwest Texas State Univ.

Offers a 1 credit Seminar for Freshmen, which is primarily motivational and designed to create commitment, foster maturity, raise questions of what constitutes a good life, and the connection between a bachelor degree and a fulfilling life.

## **Curriculum Trends - The Senior Year**

### **College/University Innovation**

Wheaton College

Established a Center for Work and Learning to assist its liberal arts students to become more familiar with the world of work. This is done through internships, more experiential focus in course work, and brings executives, labor leaders and experts to campus.

Hope College

Senior seminar focused on drawing out the students' values and to foster intellectual integration. Students are expected to write a life-view paper that is disciplined and personal.

Muhlenburg College

requires both a freshman and senior year seminar to launch and complete the overall college experience.

## **Curriculum Trends - Global Studies**

### **College/University Innovation**

Concordia College

After lectures on global studies, faculty members were encouraged to apply for grants to support foreign travel and study leading to the development of new or revised courses reflecting their learning. Following their travel they taught various courses containing new material. They then participated in a Global Studies Teaching Conference in which they detailed the changes in their teaching and apparent effects on students.

College of the Holy Cross

Focused on China and sent 10 faculty members from a wide variety of departments to participate in a year long seminar on culture, history, language, of China. The faculty spent one month in China for an in-depth orientation, and to discover opportunities to integrate knowledge and insights into course they would offer.

Variations of the Holy Cross program were seen at St. Joseph's College - Mexico; St Michael's College - Japan; U of San Diego - Latin America, and Japan.

### **Curriculum Trends - Cultural Diversity**

### **College/University Innovation**

UC Berkeley

Requires a course on ethnic minorities

San Jose State Univ.

All courses are required to address contributions of women and minorities to the particular field of study.

## Curriculum Trends - *Integration of Knowledge*

### College/University      Innovation

Wabash College

The first semester students study the unfamiliar culture of ancient China and then the roots of their own heritage in the ancient Greeks and Hebrews. During the second semester they study Western civilization from the medieval period through the process of modernization. They end by returning to China and examine its recent attempts to move into the modern world. The course is taught by a variety of faculty in discussion section of about 15 students.

Whittier College

Students may satisfy the requirements in World Civilizations and in Contemporary Society and the Individual by either taking pairs of carefully coordinated course in different disciplines or team-taught course offered in consecutive semesters. Faculty members must work together to plan and teach these related courses.

Hiram College

Gen - Ed is not organized around departmental questions, but around more universal ideas, problems, or issues. Groups of 3 -4 faculty from 2 or more disciplines organize a collegium that studies a substantial topic. Each collegium organizes and teaches 3 courses to 25 - 30 students. These have included The Idea of the West, The Origin of Life, The Progress Paradox, and The Environment: Ecology, Economics, and Ethics.

Evergreen State College

Learning Community where students and faculty engage in a more intense educational experience.

U of North Texas

A subcollege to create a more integrated education for a small number of students 200 - 500. The curriculum is organized loosely around the themes of virtue, civility, and reason. A 2-week seminar in held in the summer and attended by 30 faculty from 9 departments. Here they discuss ideas, and plan courses. The faculty continue to meet during the term to develop a common reading list, discuss common texts, and consider means for unifying the leaning of their students.

Similar programs are found at *George Mason, Miami of Ohio, California State Polutechnic, and St. Olad College.*

## Curriculum Trends - Moral Reflection

### College/University                      Innovation

Louisiana College

A required interdisciplinary and team-taught course designed to teach students about the nature of values, the process by which they are chosen, and their role in the life of the individual.

St. Andrews Presbyterian

Required interdisciplinary course that deals with a global issue and explores controversies and personal values in relation to it. It culminates in a class position paper that reflects common values concerning the issue that reflects common values concerning the issue that emerge from a semester of study and discussion.

Albion College

Does not add on a course, but infuses ethics into course across the curriculum. Faculty members are encouraged to study values related to their disciplines and to incorporate those topics into regular courses.

Alverno and Clayton State Colleges

These institutions have a competency based curriculum in which valuing is one of the abilities to be developed and assessed.

Earlham College

Supports collaborative student-faculty research on themes central to this character of the college which includes peace, justice, and race and gender equality.

## Curriculum Trends - Active Learning

### College/University Innovation

U of Arizona

A policy to limit its Western Civilization course to sections of 40 each which must be taught by regular faculty members, not teaching assistants. The University states that it values courses that typically seek to individualize and personalize education by means of case studies, class exercises, personal journals, and other engaging techniques.

Dickinson College

Instituted the “discovery approach” in an effort to make the science curriculum more personal, interactive, and experiential. Instead of telling students about scientific concepts the goal is to create a learning environment where students can *discover* science just as those involved in science research do. They try to create an environment that emphasizes questioning and exploration rather than memorization, conceptualization and comprehension rather than rote learning and active participation rather than passive observation.

## Curriculum Trends - Extension Through All Four Years

### College/University Innovation

Cal. State University System

Has a common requirement among all campuses of 48 semester hours in gen.ed, 9 must be at the upper-division level. This was done in part to address the large number of transfer students.

Southern Ill. Edwardsville

Requires students to take 2 introductory and 2 advanced courses for 3 categories, fine arts and humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, and social sciences.

The Senior capstone experience is another way to address this trend.

## Curriculum Trends - Assessment

### College/University      Innovation

King's College

Embeds assessment in to courses as the faculty members seek to measure student progress in regard to each of the college's major learning goals.

U of Connecticut

Conducts focus group conversations with students about their experiences in general education, what they have gained, and their problems. Sub-committees were established to evaluate each of their curriculum goals (clusters). These subcommittees examined the goals of their cluster, and the syllabi for courses offered to see of goals were being met. Tested students on locally developed test instruments in 6 General Education areas: science & technology, foreign languages, culture & modern society, philosophical & ethical analysis, social sciences & comparative analysis, and literature & arts. Created a university assessment committee.

U of Tennessee, Knoxville

Has made assessment a routine part of the University's planning process. They have conducted departmental studies, administration of standardized instruments, survey of student satisfaction, and senior tests and simulations.

Northeast Missouri State Univ.

Conducts a "value-added" assessment that measures student growth in general knowledge during the college years. Other colleges have used standardized achievement tests, personality inventories, or instruments developed by the institution.

# Curriculum Trends - Comprehensive Change

## College/University Innovation

U of Minnesota. Morris

They have incorporated many of these trends. They developed the *ProsPer Program*. Its goals are to develop both process of thought and perspective of the world. The program is guided by explicit learning goals and specific criteria for courses that address each goal. Some of the course allow students to achieve more than one goal, thereby allowing students to meet part of the general education requirements through electives rather than prescribed courses. The thinking process goals are addressed by the following requirements or their equivalence:

- a freshman seminar focusing on the process of inquiry
- a 2 quarter sequence of writing courses
- 2 additional writing-intensive courses
- a speech course and one speech-intensive course
- a course on the computer and one with applications
- foreign language at the level of first year proficiency

Students are required to take courses labeled Expanding Perspectives that are grouped in 3 areas.

1. The Self and Others area includes one course dealing with each of the 5 topics: the self, historical perspectives, different cultures, social institutions, and health and fitness.
2. The Arts areas include a course in analysis and interpretation, one in performance, another in arts and culture.
3. The Physical and the Abstract Worlds area includes 2 courses in the natural world) at least one of which must contain a lab) and 1 in abstract systems.

The Perspectives courses must contain at least 1 dealing with a non-Western culture, and 1 must be taken at an advanced level. A college-wide general education committee approves courses that meet the specific criteria established for each of these areas. There is a special effort to explain to students why these goals are important and how the course requirements meet the goals.



## PEER INSTITUTIONS, GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania	bloomu.edu	128 semester hours, General Education consists of 54 (18 specific and 36 distribution) 18: 9 in Communication, 3 in Quantitative Analytical Reasoning; 3 in Values/Ethics; 3 in Fitness. 36: 12 each in Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences/Math 2 courses to fulfill a diversity requirement
Fort Hays State university	fhsu.edu	55-hour program; 2 components: Foundation Studies (18 hours) and Liberal Arts (37 hours) Foundation Studies: 15 hrs in Analysis & Communication & 3 in Personal Well-being Liberal Arts: a) International Studies (6 hrs); b) Distribution: Humanities (9 hrs); Math & Natural Sciences (10); Social & Behavioral Sciences (9); c) Upper Division Integrative Courses (3 hrs)
Frostburg State University	fsu.edu	a. One Credit required course: Intro to Higher Education: can take any section of this, or select from a list of special interest sections to meet students with similar interests b. Learning Communities: Organized around a theme, 3-4 linked courses including Intro to Higher Education. Students take courses together as group. Maximum of 25/class. Taken in Fall. c. Freshman Project: Selected fall learning communities continue into Spring with a special project
Saginaw Valley State University	svsu.edu	Requires 4 credit hours in International Perspectives
Salisbury State University	ssu.edu	(Difficulty accessing program)
Shippensburg State University	ship.edu	a)1 course in: Writing, Speaking, Math, 2 in History= 15 total credits b)11 courses in 5 categories: Logic/Rational Thinking(1); Linguistic/Literary/Artistic/Cultural Traditions (3); Biological & Physical Sciences (3); Political, Economic & Geographic Sciences (2); Social & Behavioral Sciences (2) c) Completion of a self-paced online tutorial in Library/Information Skills
Sonoma State University	sonoma.edu	3 Options for Completing General Education: a. University-wide: courses in Communication &

Critical Thinking; Natural Sciences & Math; Arts & Humanities; Social Sciences; Integrated Person  
**b. Hutchins School Interdisciplinary Option:**  
 Students can meet lower level General Education Requirements (except math) by taking 4 seminars of 12 units each: The Human Enigma; Exploring the Unknown; In Search of Self; and Challenge & Response in the Modern World  
**c. Individualized General Ed Program**

The College of New Jersey/Trenton State College	tcnj.edu	<p>a. Intellectual Skills (12-21 semester hours): Rhetoric 1 &amp; 2; Math; Foreign Language          b. Interdisciplinary Core: "Understanding Humanity"; 6 semester hours          c. Perspectives on the World: 26 semester hours, courses in natural science, social sciences, arts, history, literature, and philosophy          *Diversity requirement: 9-semester hour (non additive)</p>
University of Nebraska at Kearney	unk.edu	<p>45 hours in General Studies  <b>Writing Intensive Requirement:</b> 12 hours of coursework to further develop writing skills. English 101 &amp; 102 do not meet this requirement.</p>
University of Wisconsin-Stout	uwstout.edu	Basic program, nothing particularly noteworthy
Western Carolina University	wcu.edu	<p>42 semester hours:          a. Core: (15 hrs): Writing (6); Math (3); Oral Communication (3); Wellness (3)          b. Freshman Seminar (3)          c. The Perspectives: Social Sciences (6); Physical &amp; Biological Sciences (6); History (3); Humanities (3); Arts (3); World Cultures (3)          d. Academic Learning Communities</p>
William Patterson University of New Jersey	wilpaterson.edu	<p>a. Racism &amp; Sexism Course requirement          b. General Ed courses spread over 4 years: by completion of 32 credits need 18 General Ed credits, by 64 credits need 36, by 96 need 54 &amp; by graduation (128 credits) need 59-60 Gen Ed</p>

When initiated the LA&S Program met the needs of the institution and its students. As time has passed, it is now appropriate to re-evaluate the program. Specifically, we should examine the Program's content, coherence, and determine if innovations at other institutions could be brought to Fitchburg State to strengthen the existing Program.

**Recommendations:**

- A subcommittee should be created in each cluster, plus IDIS and Multicultural, to examine the goals and course offerings of each cluster to see if the goals are being met.
- Review freshman seminars and the first year in general at other institutions as part of a reconfiguration of the Freshman Foundation Year.
- Examine the use of Learning Communities at other institutions to determine their appropriateness and feasibility at the College.
- Explore the possibility of creating multiple tracks in the LA&S Program.

**Issue #3**

**What are the possible implications of changing teacher licensure requirements and recent BHE student assessment mandates on the LA&S Program?**

**Prepared by Dan Nomishan and Patrice Gray**

## **Mandated Testing and Its Implications for the LA & S Curriculum: The “Rising Junior” Exam and Changes in Educator Licensure Requirements**

State mandated testing continues to play an increasing and serious role in the academic lives of students and faculty. Recent decisions by the State Board of Education, for example, will require a “rising junior” assessment of all FSC students who have earned between 60 and 90 credits in their academic programs. When fully implemented, the mandated assessments will require that such students be tested in critical thinking and verbal, computer, and, and quantitative literacy. At the end of the pilot phase, institutional results will be reported to the BHE for public dissemination.

Existing and changing teacher licensure requirements are another area of concern. One such requirement, the “literacy” test required for teaching majors, continues to be problematic because of our institution’s low passing rate, which, if it continues, threatens to endanger the existence of the College’s education programs. In addition, recently mandated licensure testing that will affect education students the 2001-2002 academic year are upon us. These new licensure tests require students to have more specific content-knowledge of various courses and disciplines. The consequences for our education students are high, for they must pass the test before they begin their internships.

These mandated tests have effects upon faculty as well and raise many curricular issues. One central issue is the connection between standardized testing and the curriculum: to what extent can and should the licensure tests affect what courses departments offer what and individual faculty teach? Who is “responsible” for our students’ success in the “rising junior” and education licensure testing? Such questions need to be addressed by faculty in the future planning for the LA & S program.

### **Part I: The Rising Junior Examination in Writing and Critical Thinking**

Background: Beginning this coming academic year (2001-02) FSC (as well as all public four year colleges in Massachusetts) will be required to begin outcomes-based assessment of *all its students who have completed at least 60 credit hours and before completing 90 credit hours of course work*. Although the current BHE plan is ultimately to assess students in the areas of writing skills, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and computer literacy, only writing and critical thinking skills will be assessed this coming year. It is expected that institutions will be required to begin to pilot the computer literacy exam in the 2002-03 academic year.

Timetable for the writing and critical thinking examination: The Assessment for Academic Proficiency Task Force has recommended that the assessment be developed and piloted over a span of five years (see timetable). Within this time frame, institutions should be able to select an assessment appropriate to their institution, trial test the assessment and calibrate scoring, and share institutional

results with a newly created Office of System-wide Assessment. The Task Force recommends that within this time frame colleges identify appropriate “procedures, services, and courses” to support students who score poorly.

Assessment Instruments: The Task Force has identified five assessment instruments and approaches that colleges may chose from:

The University of Massachusetts/Boston Writing Proficiency Exam  
Academic Profile Essay  
CAAP Writing Test (ACT)  
CAAP Critical Thinking  
California Critical Thinking Skills Tests

Institutions will select and implement one of these assessment instruments this academic year. With the exception of the UMASS exam model, the remaining four options are computer scored/ multiple choice tests with a timed essay component that may be developed and scored locally. The UMASS model offers students a choice between submitting portfolios or writing a timed essay based on preselected articles that students are required to read prior to the exam time.

Implications for LA & S Program: Much will depend on which assessment instrument is selected and piloted by FSC, as well as future determinations by the BHE regarding cut off scores and consequences for low student performance. If the College adopts one of the multiple choice/standardized tests listed above, the assessment is likely to have little effect on the LA & S curriculum, at least in the early years of the pilot. However, if the BHE later mandates certain cut-off scores and assigns punitive measures to the College based on students’ test scores, it is possible that the College will be required to revamp its LA & S curriculum to align to the test. We foresee more discussions about the extent to which standardized tests should drive the general education curriculum and which among the departments should be more “responsible” for preparing students.

If the College decides to develop a portfolio/essay assessment based on the UMASS model, considerable cross-college faculty discussion will be required to shape the instrument, decide on its goals, and create scoring rubrics. Faculty from across the disciplines who teach the LA & S curriculum will have a more direct and obvious role to play as creators, implementers, and possible scorers of the “home-grown” assessment instrument.

Questions Regarding the Rising Junior Exam for Future LA & S Review:

1. To what extent do current LA & S courses develop and enhance students’ critical thinking and writing skills? How do we know?
2. In the current LA & S Program requirements, what parts seem to be geared to helping

- students meet these proficiencies in writing and critical thinking? Should elements of the program be retained or enhanced?
3. How might the College use aggregate student test scores over the next five years of the pilot to improve the LA & S curriculum? What should be the connections between the test and the curriculum?
  3. Where possible, through an examination of current syllabi, identify ways in which current LA & S courses are successful or unsuccessful in assisting the development of student critical thinking skills. Because writing/reading/thinking are so closely linked, work with WAC program to gather data.

## **Part II: Changes in Education Licensure Requirements**

Background: The new Massachusetts requirements for teacher licensure demand that education majors be tested more deeply for their content knowledge in a variety of academic subjects related to their areas of concentration. The Education Departments are concerned with their early childhood, elementary, and middle school majors. It is the responsibility of the other departments who offer secondary education degrees—English, history, and math—to attend to the success of their own majors in the licensure testing. While each program or department has its own requirements, including the early childhood, elementary, and middle school programs, the common denominator in all is the emphasis on students' acquiring and being tested on their in-depth content knowledge of a subject.

Implications for LA & S Program: At the moment, elementary education majors take about 40-45 credits of methods courses compared to about 25-30 for secondary education majors. Because faculty who teach in the LA & S program provide most of the courses that such majors take, the curriculum should be organized with teacher training in mind. Program reviewers need to be apprised of current and future mandated requirements

Currently, for IDIS education double majors in early childhood, elementary, middle school, and special education, 603 CMR 7.06 (pp 16-25) requires greater depth of knowledge in the areas of dance, earth science, English, history, world history, geography, government, classical humanities, mathematics, music, and political science/political philosophy (including economics). In some cases, the mandate is clear regarding what students need to know; in other cases, the mandate is less clear. Where it is not clear, the expectation is that the highest curricular expectations will suffice.

### Questions Regarding Licensure for Future LA & S Review:

1. To what extent must/should the content of BHE-mandated teachers' licensure tests influence LA & S courses? To what extent might curricular changes enhance or erode the departments' current program goals?
2. How can faculty who teach in the LA & S program balance the its program goals of more integrated and synthetic learning for students with this required emphasis on course content for testing purposes? In other words, how might a perceived need to "teach to the test" affect teaching goals and pedagogy?
3. What is the responsibility of the individual faculty member teaching in the LA & S program to ensure, where possible, that education students are getting what they need? How will faculty know what students need?
4. To what extent do current LA & S courses prepare prospective education majors to pass the MTEL "literacy" test? This test will continue to be required of students who wish to pursue a teaching major. To date, low student test scores have placed the College at risk of losing its education programs. What can be done within existing and future LA & S courses to enable students to acquire the skills they need in order to be successful?