

Status Report on the Learning Outcomes for General Education

At the meeting on May 13, 2014, the Faculty Senate created an Ad Hoc LEAP Committee:

Charge of committee to examine LEAP outcomes, how they make sense for WOU and whether we want to include all of them. Also consider which would be most appropriate for Gen Ed and which for degree programs in context of replacing existing institutional outcomes.²

Accordingly, the LEAP Committee submitted a report that included a proposal to adopt new Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (ULOs) and the definitions and the rubrics upon which the outcomes were developed. The Faculty Senate adopted the ULOs and the related documents at the meeting on November 25, 2014. As was noted in that report:

These Learning Outcomes would apply to the entire WOU undergraduate degree program, which includes coursework completed as part of the major, minor, and general education requirements.

Having completed the first part of the Faculty Senate charge, the LEAP Committee is now working on the second half of the charge, which is to identify the ULOs that are most appropriate for General Education (Gen Ed) at WOU. The purpose of this status report is to describe the process the committee adopted in order to complete this task and to present the subset list of specific learning outcomes for Gen Ed. The Committee members want to emphasize that this is a work-in-progress and that feedback from the campus community will help finalize the framework.

The process

While there is more than one way to complete the general education requirements at WOU depending on the specific degree (B.A., B.S., B.F.A., B.M., or A.B.), an overwhelming percentage of the students complete them through coursework in the LACC, and courses that fulfil the writing-intensive (W,) diversity (D,) and quantitative literacy (Q) requirements, some of which might be at the upper-division level as well.

This breadth of general education (Gen Ed) might suggest that the entire ULOs (in Appendix I) are applicable to the Gen Ed. This premise is understandable given that general education is integral to liberal education. But, ULOs are not merely about outcomes that we value. The

² http://www.wou.edu/president/facultysenate/documents/2013-2014_files/FS%20Minutes%205_13_14.pdf

institution needs to provide evidence that students have achieved those outcomes. This inability to assess the progress made towards the “Institutional Aspirations” (Appendix III) was the point of departure for the Faculty Senate to create this Ad Hoc Committee and to charge it with the responsibility of developing institutional outcomes, with clear definitions and rubrics. Thus, the question is not whether the ULOs are relevant to Gen Ed; of course, they are. Instead, the question is whether we will be able to confidently assess how Gen Ed provides the foundational learning experiences for students to attain certain outcomes, and whether some of the ULOs require higher-order abilities that students might be able to pick up only through learning opportunities provided in their respective majors and minors.

The process then meant identifying—as per the adopted definitions (Appendix II) and rubrics³—the outcomes for which evidentiary support could be provided to demonstrate students’ competencies.

The Result

The systematic assaying of the ULOs with the outcome definitions and the rubrics led the committee to conclude that some outcomes require students to perform at higher-order abilities and, thus, are not appropriate for Gen Ed. While the Gen Ed might, and does, prepare students for achievement towards those outcomes, the competencies can be demonstrated via evidence obtained only through the learning experiences in the majors and minors.

Therefore, with this guiding principle, the committee determined that seven out of the eleven Undergraduate Learning Outcomes are best suited for Gen Ed, beyond the “Knowledge” outcome that is inherent in all WOU coursework. The committee determined that graduating students should be able to demonstrate competency for the seven outcomes for Gen Ed., which are listed in the following page:

³ The rubrics can be accessed at: http://www.wou.edu/president/facultysenate/documents/2013-2014_files/All_Rubrics.pdf

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

Through study in the sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

- **Inquiry and analysis**

Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues/ objects/works through the collection and analysis of evidence that result in informed conclusions/ judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.

- **Critical thinking**

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

- **Written and oral/signed communication:**

- *Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.*
- *Reading is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language"*
- *Oral / signed communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the audiences' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.*

- **Quantitative literacy**

Quantitative Literacy (QL) – also known as Numeracy or Quantitative Reasoning (QR) – is a "habit of mind," competency, and comfort in working with numerical data. Individuals with strong QL skills possess the ability to reason and solve quantitative problems from a wide array of authentic contexts and everyday life situations. They understand and can create sophisticated arguments supported by quantitative evidence and they can clearly communicate those arguments in a variety of formats (using words, tables, graphs, mathematical equations, etc., as appropriate).

- **Information literacy**

The ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate,

evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand.

- **Intercultural knowledge and competence**

Intercultural Knowledge and Competence is "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts."

- **Foundations and skills for lifelong learning**

Lifelong learning is "all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence". An endeavor of higher education is to prepare students to be this type of learner by developing specific dispositions and skills described in this rubric while in school.

Appendix I

Undergraduate Learning Outcomes

WOU students prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

Through focused study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts, and by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, Including

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking and practice
- Written and oral/signed communication
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum using appropriate technology, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

Personal and Social Responsibility, Including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities, real-world challenges, and healthy life course decisions

Integrative and Applied Learning, Including

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

Appendix II

Outcome Definitions

- Inquiry and analysis
 - Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues/ objects/works through the collection and analysis of evidence that result in informed conclusions/ judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.
- Critical thinking
 - Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.
- Creative thinking and practice
 - Creative thinking and practice is both the capacity to combine or synthesize existing ideas, images, or expertise in original ways and the experience of thinking, reacting, and working in an imaginative way characterized by a high degree of innovation, divergent thinking, and risk taking.
- Written and oral / signed communication
 - Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.
 - Reading is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (Snow et al., 2002). (From www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB8024/index1.html)
 - Oral / signed communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the audiences' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.
- Quantitative literacy
 - Quantitative Literacy (QL) – also known as Numeracy or Quantitative Reasoning (QR) – is a "habit of mind," competency, and comfort in working with numerical data. Individuals with strong QL skills possess the ability to reason and solve quantitative problems from a wide array of authentic contexts and everyday life situations. They understand and can create sophisticated arguments supported by quantitative evidence and they can clearly communicate those arguments in a variety of formats (using words, tables, graphs, mathematical equations, etc., as appropriate).
- Information literacy
 - The ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand. - The National Forum on Information Literacy.

- Teamwork and problem solving
 - Teamwork is behaviors under the control of individual team members (effort they put into team tasks, their manner of interacting with others on team, and the quantity and quality of contributions they make to team discussions).
 - Problem solving is the process of designing, evaluating and implementing a strategy to answer an open-ended question or achieve a desired goal.
- Civic engagement and global learning
 - Civic engagement is "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes." (Excerpted from Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000, Preface, page vi.) In addition, civic engagement encompassed actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community.
 - Global learning is a critical analysis of and an engagement with complex, interdependent global systems and legacies (such as natural, physical, social, cultural, economic, and political) and their implications for people's lives and the earth's sustainability. Through global learning, students should 1) become informed, open-minded, and responsible people who are attentive to diversity across the spectrum of differences, 2) seek to understand how their actions affect both local and global communities, and 3) address the world's most pressing and enduring issues collaboratively and equitably.
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
 - Intercultural Knowledge and Competence is "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts." (Bennett, J. M. 2008. Transformative training: Designing programs for culture learning. In Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence: Understanding and utilizing cultural diversity to build successful organizations, ed. M. A. Moodian, 95-110. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.)
- Ethical reasoning
 - Ethical Reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Students' ethical self-identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues.
- Lifelong learning
 - Lifelong learning is "all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence". An endeavor of higher education is to prepare students to be this type of learner by developing specific dispositions and skills described in this rubric while in school. (From The European Commission. 2000. Commission staff working paper: A memorandum on

lifelong learning. Retrieved September 3, 2003, www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/lifelong-oth-enl-t02.pdf.)

- Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies (i.e., integrative learning)
 - Integrative learning is an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus.

Appendix III

Institutional Aspirations for Learning (from page 5 of 2014-2015 catalog)

Students at WOU will be challenged to achieve their highest potential through a rigorous and stimulating curriculum. Between 2004 and 2005, a set of educational goals called Institutional Aspirations for Learning were collaboratively developed by our faculty after focused discussions about the fundamental aims of liberal education in the 21st century. These aspirations constitute the core competencies, skills, experiences and values credited to, and expected of, WOU's educational process and its graduates. We believe that these aspirations are the basic building blocks of a high-quality education as well as the foundations for productive careers, life long development and informed citizenship on a local, national and global level.

1. Students will develop more refined critical thinking skills, including advanced analytical, logical and quantitative reasoning abilities as well as excellent problem-solving skills.
2. Students will develop effective communicative abilities, including listening, observing, speaking, writing and dialoguing.
3. Students will become active readers with an enhanced ability to carefully, closely and thoughtfully read a range of texts.
4. Students will acquire field or discipline specific knowledge and they will understand disciplinary modes of intellectual inquiry.
5. Students will develop an interdisciplinary and integrative perspective as they recognize, explore, appreciate and engage the interconnections between disciplines.
6. Students will develop advanced research abilities and they will demonstrate improvements in their information and media literacy.
7. Students will learn how to use appropriate technologies.
8. Students will acquire and demonstrate competencies, skills, attributes and values necessary for successful participation in a diverse, pluralistic and increasingly interdependent world.
9. Students will be able to work effectively in teams.
10. Students will strive to be well-balanced persons capable of making thoughtful and healthy choices.
11. Students will be able to apply theory in relevant, appropriate and reflective ways.

Our talented, dedicated and enthusiastic faculty will support, assist and encourage students as they pursue and attain these fundamental educational goals. In our culture of accountability, these institutional aspirations will also serve as common guideposts for our on-going assessment and enhancement of learning outcomes.