

LEAP at WOU

Document prepared for the consideration of the WOU Faculty Senate
by the Ad Hoc LEAP Committee, November 7th, 2014

Please direct comments and questions to:
Gay Timken (timkeng@wou.edu)
Stewart Baker (bakersc@wou.edu)

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Proposal Summary

Executive Summary

The Ad Hoc LEAP committee strongly recommends that WOU replace its existing “Institutional Aspirations for Learning” with the LEAP “Essential Learning Outcomes.” 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.

Should the Faculty Senate approve this proposal and accept the modified LEAP outcomes, the committee intends to move forward with carrying out the remainder of its charge by “consider[ing] which [outcomes] would be most appropriate for Gen Ed and which for degree programs in context of replacing existing institutional outcomes.” (May 13, 2014 Faculty Senate minutes)

Proposed Changes to WOU's "institutional aspirations" in catalog

1. Replace title: “institutional aspirations” with “undergraduate learning outcomes.”
2. Replace content with modified LEAP outcomes (see below for details)

Proposal Details

Why Change our Aspirations?

1. Why change our “institutional aspirations”?
 - a. The current “Institutional Aspirations for Learning” reflect the values and goals Western Oregon University (WOU) holds for its students, but are difficult to assess meaningfully.
 - b. By adopting a clearer set of outcomes, WOU can more effectively communicate the achievements of its students and graduates.

2. Why now?
 - a. Accrediting organizations require assessment of general education. The LEAP outcomes are tied to an established series of rubrics and other resources, which will assist faculty and staff with assessment in all areas.
 - b. The university's transition to independent governance and a new president gives the faculty an unprecedented opportunity to effectively and strongly assert their academic aims and strategic academic vision.

Why LEAP?

1. Why replace “institutional aspirations” with LEAP's “Essential Learning Outcomes”?
 - a. WOU's existing aspirations map effectively onto the LEAP learning outcomes.
 - b. The LEAP outcomes clearly and accurately identify the essential academic aims of WOU's undergraduate programs.
 - c. LEAP's outcomes and the VALUE rubrics packaged with them will be more easily understood by outside groups committed to the university's and its students' success, as well as by WOU's students themselves.

2. If the LEAP outcomes are so good, why modify them?
 - a. The specific objectives embedded within LEAP accurately capture the breadth and depth of the education of WOU undergraduates. However, minor modification of the LEAP outcomes makes them an even stronger fit for WOU in four areas which the committee found lacking:
 - a.i. Student use of technology
 - a.ii. ‘Embodied’ education
 - a.iii. Inclusion of signing as a form of communication
 - a.iv. Creativity as an essential outcome
 - b. Minor modification of LEAP language is proposed for the purpose of more explicitly framing language for these areas. Specifically, the committee suggests that:

- b.i. The "critical and creative thinking" outcome be separated into two separate outcomes, and that "and practice" be added to the new "creative thinking" outcome
 - b.ii. The written and oral communication outcome and its definition be amended to read "written and oral/signed communication," and the word "listeners" be replaced with "audience" in its definition
 - b.iii. "Using appropriate technologies" be added to the "practiced extensively" statement under Intellectual and Practical Skills
 - b.iv. "Healthy life course decisions" be added to the "Anchored through" statement under Personal and Social Responsibility
 - c. The committee also proposes minor modifications to the initial framing language, in order to more clearly tie the LEAP outcomes to student success at WOU; one formatting change to the "Knowledge of Human Cultures" heading to be clear that it is not an outcome, but framing language; and the deletion of two duplicate definitions of the "global learning" rubric in the "detailed outcomes and definitions" section.
 - d. These minor modifications do not reduce the integrity of the overall LEAP package, as the VALUE rubrics used to measure the outcomes remain the same.
 - e. Adopting modified LEAP outcomes allows WOU to connect to a national project advocating for the value of a liberal education for both workplace success and good citizenship, and is consistent with the Oregon University System's decision to adopt LEAP
 - f. Modifying the LEAP outcomes as proposed ensures that WOU's unique and diverse undergraduate education is well represented, and provides WOU with a framework to clearly communicate student success to students and other stakeholders.
3. Why not make more modifications?
- a. The committee firmly believes that the minor modifications as proposed make no substantive changes to the LEAP outcomes, and that they adhere to the spirit of clarity and individual institutional success that LEAP aims to achieve.
 - b. Furthermore, each modification has been carefully considered by the members of the committee and determined to add specific value to the outcomes as they might be adopted at WOU while changing as little as possible.
 - c. Making large-scale changes would undermine the adoption of the LEAP outcomes and render the VALUE rubrics meaningless. As such, we do not recommend making further changes.

Proposed Modifications to LEAP's Essential Learning Outcomes

Modification Type	Original Language	Modified Language
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical and Creative Thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Thinking • <u>Creative Thinking and Practice</u>
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written and Oral Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written and Oral/<u>Signed</u> Communication
Framing Language	<i>Practiced extensively</i> , across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance	<i>Practiced extensively</i> , across the curriculum <u>using appropriate technology</u> , in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance
Framing Language	<i>Anchored</i> through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges	<i>Anchored</i> through active involvement with diverse communities, real-world challenges, <u>and healthy life course decisions</u>
Framing Language	<u>Students should prepare</u> for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:	<u>WOU students prepare</u> for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:
Formatting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts <p><i>Focused</i> by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring</p>	Through <u>focused</u> study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts, <u>and by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring</u>
Outcome Definition	Oral communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the listeners' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.	Oral / <u>signed</u> communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the <u>audience's</u> attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.

Proposed New Learning Outcomes

Undergraduate Learning Outcomes¹

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

¹ WOU's Undergraduate Learning Outcomes are based on the LEAP essential learning outcomes created by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU). More information about the LEAP outcomes and outcome assessment at WOU can be found at <https://www.aacu.org/leap> and <http://wou.edu/outcomes>.

Outcome Definitions²

- 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.

² Outcome definitions are pulled from the AACU's VALUE rubrics, which are used to assess outcomes at WOU. More information on the VALUE rubrics can be found at <https://www.aacu.org/value>

- 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.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is LEAP?

A: LEAP (Liberal Education, America’s Promise) is a project of the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AACU). The LEAP framework lays out essential learning outcomes of a liberal education, focusing on key skills and attributes developed through breadth and depth of study. For more details on LEAP, including case studies, outcomes and definitions, and the rubrics it uses for assessing its outcomes, please see <https://www.aacu.org/leap>

Q: What is the proposal?

A: The Faculty Senate Ad Hoc LEAP Committee recommends that Western Oregon University replace its existing Institutional Aspirations for Learning (page 5, WOU catalog) with a slightly modified version of the LEAP framework.

Q: Faculty Senate has an Ad Hoc LEAP Committee? What is that?

A: At the meeting on May 13, 2014, the Faculty Senate created the Ad Hoc LEAP Committee and charged it to study the proposal that WOU adopt the LEAP framework as its institutional outcomes and make a recommendation as to whether WOU should adopt all, some or none of the LEAP framework. The committee was also charged with considering which LEAP outcomes fit with WOU’s general education.

Q: Are LEAP’s Essential Learning Outcomes different from WOU’s existing institutional aspirations?

A: There are differences. The LEAP framework is clear and concise, communicating in an inviting way to students and prospective students. The LEAP framework focuses the connection between the acquisition of broad-based knowledge and the development across disciplines of skills and a sense of personal and social responsibility. Finally, the LEAP framework has assessable outcomes and provides adaptable tools for assessment.

Faculty Senate’s Ad Hoc LEAP Committee studied the current institutional aspirations and the LEAP framework closely. With few exceptions, the committee found that the LEAP framework overlapped with the substance our current aspirations. In those cases, the committee recommends revisions to the LEAP framework so that it fits WOU.

Q: What are the proposed revisions?

A: The committee identified a few places where the LEAP framework did not adequately fit WOU’s context. The committee recommends that:

- (1) the *critical and creative thinking* outcome be separated into two separate outcomes, and that “and practice” be added to the new “creative thinking” outcome;
- (2) the *written and oral communication* outcome and its definition be amended to read “written and oral/signed communication,” and the word "listeners" in its definition be replaced with "audience's";
- (3) “using appropriate technologies” be added to the “practiced extensively” statement under *Intellectual and Practical Skills*, and
- (4) “healthy life course decisions” be added to the “Anchored through” statement under *Personal and Social Responsibility*.

Beyond those changes, the committee strongly recommends that we refrain from editing the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes because overall it is a very close fit with what currently says it does. The more alterations we make, the less valuable its resources will be to us.

Q: Why adopt the LEAP framework now?

- A: There are several reasons to support this change. Adopting the LEAP framework will:
- Communicate clearly to students and others the goals and purposes of a WOU education;
 - Establish a clear overall identity and direction for WOU's academic programs, especially important given imminent changes in institutional leadership and governance;
 - Provide areas of focus around which we can organize collaborations across disciplines;
 - Jumpstart institution-level assessment, by providing assessable outcomes and well-developed tools for assessment; and
 - Connect WOU to a larger national project that advocates for the value of a liberal education in the 21st century.

Q: Will LEAP replace current degree program assessment?

- A: No. Current degree program assessment will continue. The LEAP does, however, provide a way to organize the findings of our on-going program level assessment so that it can be used to document our institution's overall success.

Q: Will assessment of student learning outcomes be used to fire faculty or dismantle academic programs?

- A: The greatest risk in assessment is not participating at all. The external constituencies who support our work (e.g., accrediting agencies, state and federal funders) require that we demonstrate the value of our programs and the learning they create. The best assessment is by the faculty for the improvement of academic programs. We do not want the absence of faculty involvement to result in the use of outsiders to evaluate and transform our academic programs.

Assessment of student learning outcomes focuses on how curriculum contributes to program-level outcomes. Programs include degree programs and general education. The faculty is expected to participate in assessment of student learning outcomes and improving academic programs based on assessment findings. Program-level assessment is not, however, used in the evaluation of individual faculty.

The Ad Hoc LEAP committee wishes to make explicit that a move to adopt the LEAP outcomes and VALUE rubrics is not a judgment of our faculty members or their teaching. Indeed, it is our belief that clear assessment based on LEAP's concrete and measurable outcomes will show that WOU's faculty is one of its strongest assets.

Q: Who needs accreditation? Would it be so bad if we skipped assessment and lost accreditation?

- A: Without accreditation, our students would likely be ineligible for federal and state financial aid, and could experience significant barriers to having their credits and/or degrees recognized by other institutions.

Institutionally, WOU would lose its ability to compete for federal grants supporting students and research. Additionally, many specialized accrediting organizations require their programs to be located in an institution that has been accredited by regional or national organizations. Finally, accreditation itself, as a collegial process of peer review, models the value of shared governance.³

³ See http://www.chea.org/pdf/pres_ltr_value_accrd_5-03.pdf

Addendum: Current "Institutional Aspirations"

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.