

General Education Learning Outcomes at WOU

Document prepared for the consideration of the WOU Faculty Senate
by the Ad Hoc LEAP Committee, March 10th, 2015

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Proposal Summary

Executive Summary

The Ad Hoc LEAP committee has spent several months exploring the second part 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)

As discussed at the February 24, 2015 Faculty Senate meeting, the two main options the committee was considering for these General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs) were:

- A subset of the Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (ULOs) approved by Senate last term
- All of the ULOs

After continued debate, and with the insight gained from our committee members who attended the Association of American Colleges & Universities' General Education and Assessment Conference in February, the committee has come to the conclusion that this decision requires data that are not presently available and that cannot be gathered in a short time frame.

As such, the committee recommends that Faculty Senate adopt all of the ULOs for use as GELOs in the short term.

Further, we recommend that the question of GELOs is revisited after three years has passed, using data gathered from assessment in the interim to make fact-based decisions about which ULOs to retain for GELOs.

Proposal

1. In the short term, use all of the approved ULOs as GELOs
2. Over the next three years, gather assessment data on current general education
3. At the end of the three-year period (end of Spring Term 2018), revisit the selection of GELOs based on analysis of the gathered assessment data

Proposal Details (Process & Rationale)

Why Do We Need General Education Learning Outcomes?

1. ULOs vs GELOs
 - a. The Undergraduate Learning Outcomes (ULOs) adopted by Faculty Senate are overall outcomes for WOU's undergraduate students.
 - b. General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs) are those outcomes assessed at the General Education (GE) level instead of the program level.

2. GE is intended to "introduce students to the content and methodology of the principal areas of knowledge – the humanities and creative arts, the natural sciences, mathematics and the social sciences," before they move on to specialization in a major/minor. This broad liberal arts focus makes GE an ideal area to measure many of the ULOs, which are intended to provide a similar focus.

What Options Did the Committee Consider?

1. Subset of ULOs
 - a. Our charge specifically asked us to consider which outcomes were "most appropriate for Gen Ed and which for degree programs."
 - b. Each member of the committee examined the ULOs with this in mind, and from the result of that and other discussions we came up with the following set of possible GELOs:
 - i. Inquiry and Analysis; Critical Thinking; Written and Oral/Signed Communication; Quantitative Literacy; Information Literacy; Intercultural Knowledge and Competency; Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning
 - ii. We also considered adding Creative Thinking and Practice to the list.
 - c. These outcomes were selected based on the outcome definitions approved by faculty senate, which were taken from the VALUE rubrics associated with LEAP.

- d. Practically speaking, the subset we suggested for GE represented basic competencies we considered essential regardless of major specialty, which could then be built on at the major/minor level with the remaining outcomes.
2. All ULOs (as a permanent set of GELOs)
 - a. One potential problem with using a sub-set of ULOs for GELOs would be ensuring that the ULOs not assessed at the GE level were covered elsewhere in a student's undergraduate education at WOU.
 - b. Assessing all ULOs as GELOs would avoid this problem, but would also lead to significantly more assessment work.
 - c. Specialized study in majors and minors will help students further strengthen competencies developed in general education. To fully understand student achievement, therefore, we will still assess both general education and degree programs.
 3. Short-term "pre-assessment" of all ULOs, followed by more specific GELO selection
 - a. Ultimately, the committee felt that there simply were not adequate data available to split GE outcomes from the approved ULOs. Any decision we could have returned—no matter how well-reasoned and well-argued—would nonetheless have been based on philosophical arguments about the nature of GE and the ULOs, and not on practice.
 - b. Before we can say with any certainty what outcomes are taught at the GE level, and decide which we should be teaching going forward, we need data that shows this. Once that data has been gathered and analyzed, it will be much easier to decide whether outcomes belong there, or whether they should be removed from the list of GELOs. The committee set a limit of three years for this "pre-assessment" period.
 - c. The point of this "pre-assessment" is simply to gather data on which of the GELOs we are teaching at the GE level. The proposal is not intended to serve as a permanent list of GELOs.

Why Did the Committee Not Map Outcomes to GE Courses?

1. One possible exercise in which the committee could have engaged was the mapping of outcomes to specific GE courses. For a number of reasons, the committee felt that this would not have been a productive exercise. Among these reasons are:
 - a. Expertise. Individual faculty members are the experts on their courses' content and structure. For the committee or another external body to arbitrarily impose strong restrictions on how a course should be taught and what should be assessed in individual courses would help nobody.
 - b. Data. As noted in the executive summary, the committee feels that more data are needed on student outcomes needed to make decisions on which outcomes are best emphasized in general education at WOU. We need to know where we are before we can say where we should be going.
 - c. Assessment should be faculty-driven. Again, faculty are the experts on the content of their courses. It should be the place of individual faculty members, working in conjunction with others in their department and division, to play this key role in gathering and interpreting data on outcomes, as well as drawing conclusions and making recommendations based on that data.
 - d. Mapping outcomes (or selecting them) to general education courses without data is an end-point, not a starting point. Assessment is required before decisions can be made about which outcomes we are developing/pursuing/teaching/doing at the general education level.

Who Will Gather Data? Who Will Assess the Data Gathered?

1. These questions are outside of the scope of the charges given to the committee.
2. Nonetheless, it is important to make explicit that faculty ownership of the outcomes is essential for their success in the long term.
3. Faculty Senate should make every effort to ensure that the outcomes do not "fall through the cracks" after approval. This is our chance as a faculty to play a strong and active role

in forming assessment, GE, and the undergraduate experience at WOU, and we ignore it at our—and our students'—peril.

Questions & Answers

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: 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: Why are we doing this?

A: The ultimate goal of assessment is to produce better learning, not to assess for the sake of assessment. By selecting and assessing ULOs and GELOs, we will be able to learn where our programs' strengths and weaknesses are, and engage in wide-ranging conversations about the teaching and curriculum process. Assessment is finding out whether we are doing what we say we are doing as effectively as possible. In short, we are studying teaching and learning in order to make good decisions at the institutional level.

Q: What's Next?

A: Regardless of what steps we take at this time, assessment is next. Adopting outcomes for GE means nothing if we do not actively study our students' achievement of these outcomes, and then interpret and analyze that data to make programmatic and structural improvements based on what we learn.

Q: Who is going to use the assessment data gathered?

A: As an institution, we are required to provide assessment data to our accreditors. More importantly, however, faculty can use the data gathered in assessment to improve their educational programs so their students can achieve more. Another huge benefit of assessment is

that we will be able to clearly communicate with external audiences and stakeholders about the kinds of things our students can do, as well as about our successes. Finally, assessment data can be useful in scholarship (Boyer model), and shared within the university community so all of us can learn from each others' expertise as faculty and educators.

Q: Will assessment of student learning outcomes be used to evaluate 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 are 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. Rather, we are gathering data across the institution to inform our undergraduate curriculum goals.

Addendum: WOU's Undergraduate 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> [note: this is an example of a URL where WOU's information about LEAP could be placed. It is not a real URL.]

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.
- Teamwork and problem solving

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 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.

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