

04/01/2020

WOU General Education Update

No pressure, no diamonds.

- Thomas Carlyle

The General Education Office remains open and available to students, staff and faculty. You can contact us at gened@wou.edu or by calling 503-838-8348.

As always, we request that students check in with their Academic Advisors before initiating petition requests as there may be program implications to guide their planning around meeting their General Education requirements.

Petitions can still be filed online as always, (www.wou.edu/gened/petitions-form) and students can still arrange appointments via WCS; appointments will simply be held via remote conferencing.

Requirements and petitions

One of the most important functions of the General Education office is helping students meet General Education requirements with transfer courses, Study Abroad experience, or other situations that meet the spirit of a General Education requirement and just isn't being recognized by Degree Tracks. Just how does this process work?

Students (or their advisors) initiate petition requests with the General Education petition form. Many requests are quite straightforward (like waiving an FYS requirement for students changing catalogs or applying a W course that was not identified as such on the scheduling worksheet) and can be handled quickly and efficiently. Others are more complicated.

The General Education Director initially reviews each petition request. If more information is needed (like a course description or syllabus), students are contacted and asked to provide that update to their petition. Depending upon the nature of the request, members of the General Education Committee are asked to review the petition request and provide their input. For example, our Humanities representative is frequently asked to review petitions related to Foundations: Writing requirements. Representatives sometimes request that Division Chairs, Department Heads, or Program Coordinators also be consulted, or may recommend review by the Full Committee.

Some petitions are always reviewed by the full General Education Committee. These include Associate's degrees not already articulated to WOU's General Education requirements or petitions that raise issues not previously reviewed by the Committee. Student appeals of petition decisions are also reviewed by the full General Education Committee.

As we continue to receive and review petitions, coordination with the registrar's office has allowed for the gradual updating of Degree Tracks and the establishment of some precedents that have enabled the continual improvement of our process for efficiency and transparency.

By the numbers: Winter Term Petitions processed:

554 total petition requests (54 declined with 2 appeals)

169 transfer courses

232 catalog year change issues (including 154 FYS waivers)

67 LACC issues, 73 BA/BS additional requirement issues (36 W, 10 D, 27 Q)

10 Associate's Degree reviews

2 AB degree issues

WOU General Education supports transfer of Concordia students

WOU General Education is part of the broader effort to support students displaced by the Concordia closure.

Thanks to a quick and thoughtful review of the Concordia General Education requirements by the General Education Committee, we have developed a passport-style model to allow Concordia students to transfer their prior coursework in to meet General Education requirements.

Building an online pathway

As we all now know, all WOU classes will be delivered remotely this Spring term. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity. While the rapid adjustment to various forms of remote delivery should not be confused with the kind of intentional instructional design that is necessary to build an online course, the current innovation dovetails with the goal of developing a fully online General Education pathway.

Several majors already offer their coursework fully online (over the past 7 terms, an average of 61 students have taken online coursework only in these programs). For these students, and future students as more programs develop pathways delivered online, the lack of a General Education program that allows online completion is a barrier.

Development of an online pathway can also be an enrollment booster. Banner scheduling data indicates that online course sections are closer to their maximum capacity – filling at rates of 78% for all sections compared to only 63% for all face-to-face sections (as of 1/30/2020).

Student success considerations are key. For example, the First Year Writing program is developing a coordinated online instructional strategy for WR 121 and WR 122, which includes assessment of student outcomes in contrast to face-to-face instruction to ensure that student success in the online environment is supported. The First Year Seminars, developed in large part to foster a sense of community and belonging for WOU students, will need to be carefully conceptualized if offered in an online setting.

Our goal in General Education is to build a pathway that supports success of students needing to complete their coursework online. This goal requires adequate infrastructure (capacity in our learning management system, available proctoring services, and other supports). It includes supporting enrollment by offering enough options in each requirement. Most importantly, it requires ensuring the courses we recommend to students employ the best practices recommended by the WOU online PLC, rely on open education resources, and are accessible and inclusive. By working in partnership with the Center for Academic Innovation and other groups to certify and promote General Education online classes that meet the above criteria, we can meet this goal.

We're using Banner data to identify currently available high-capacity courses and to find room for growth and we've surveyed campus to explore interest in developing new prospects. Prior to this Spring, there were no online courses in Health Promotion or in Scientific Perspectives and very limited options for Communication and Language and Science, Technology and Society. As we all stretch to bring our students their coursework in new ways, hold on to your great ideas – we'd like to make them a part of this effort.

Worried about the General Education aquarium? Don't be! Our little mascots have been retrieved from the General Education office and are now doing their work remotely too.

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