

# 2016 General Education Task Force Report

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## Guiding Statement: Liberal Arts Education

The work of the General Education Task Force is guided by the following statement on liberal arts education, which was for decades showcased in Western's catalogue, and which was more recently adopted by ACC and CUE to reflect the values of the Western Community and our vision for general education:

*Western believes that liberal education enables people to lead fuller and more interesting lives, to perceive and to understand more of the world around and within themselves, and to participate more intelligently, sensitively, and deliberately in shaping that world. This belief reflects a long tradition in American higher education. In this tradition, the bachelor's degree includes specialized study, the major, together with study over a range of human inquiry, expression and accomplishment. Broadly, the liberal education component of a bachelor's degree deals with issues of truth and falsity, with expressions of what is possible for humans to do and be, with things that bear on choices that we make about what in life we consider important. This broader study helps people gain perspective on who they are and what they do in the world.*

The GUR Task Force was created to develop proposals to improve Western's GUR program, with the goal of fulfilling this vision and more closely aligning it with the goals faculty have established for it. In this report the task force presents three potential general education models for our campus community to consider.

## Background

As a consequence of the explosion in disciplinary content over the last three decades, survey courses have been revised to cover more content, and courses in new interdisciplinary fields and subfields have been added to the course catalogue. While this expansion has increased the breadth of content students are exposed to, it has heightened the risks of two tendencies:

- first, that general education becomes a series of survey courses providing shallow exposure to an ever-increasing range of disparate ideas and subfields and,
- second, that curricular clarity and emphasis on the skills and knowledge most important to further achievement and a liberal education gets lost.

In response to these and other factors, colleges and universities across the country began evaluating and revising their general education programs in the 1980s and 90s. Here at Western, more than five faculty task forces have been convened to consider improvements to Western's general education program. While the specific charges of these task forces have varied, shared threads of concern and hope run through all these efforts. These include concerns about the quality and coherence of our current program, the need to better communicate to students the purpose and value of a liberal arts and sciences education, and the hope of defining a general education that would better reflect our institutional strengths.

While these concerns and hopes could be viewed as subjective, institutional assessment findings reinforce these conclusions. As noted in the [CUE White Paper](#) and the [WSGE report](#), Western's first-year students report fewer interactions with their professors, less practice with

higher-order thinking, and fewer written assignments than do students at other comprehensive universities. While 85% of Western students are “Satisfied to Very Satisfied” with the quality of instruction in their majors, only about *half* of our students now report they are satisfied with the quality of instruction in their GURs. A startling number of students report that their GUR courses do not address the [competencies](#) established by faculty as goals of the program, and that only one or two of their instructors ever mentioned how their courses connect to a liberal arts & sciences education.

While these results do not suggest that our GUR program is “poor” or that students are unified in their dissatisfaction with it, they do point to needed improvements. Western is an extremely successful university ranked among the best in its class in multiple measures. Such success would be impossible without a reasonably good GUR program. Nevertheless, few would argue that our GUR program is as strong as our majors, or that there is anything distinctively “Western” about it. Similarly, admissions staff report that they have a great deal to say about Western’s academic departments and majors but struggle to describe the strengths of our GUR program. Consequently, with regard to GURs, we affirm the WSGE finding that, “Although Western is doing well, it may wish to do better...”

More specifically, we can say the following about our GUR program:

- Our existing program is “reasonably good” as far as preparing students for their majors.
- Our existing program maps poorly onto the goals we have set for it.
- Student satisfaction with the GURs is relatively low.
- There is nothing unique about our existing GUR program that shows how it fits with our values or strengths, nor is there anything about it that is attractive to prospective students.

As noted in the WSGE report, we can also say that there has been mixed faculty support of Western’s current GUR program. There was, however, strong support (67% of surveyed faculty) to lower the current class size for general education courses. Additionally, 64% of faculty surveyed felt that Western should “invest in a greater number of multi-disciplinary and/or thematically linked” general education classes. Although faculty indicated interest in improving our programming, they also indicated that they weren’t interested in discussing changes to the current GUR program without seeing alternatives or specific suggestions; hence the General Education Task Force was created to present alternative models.

## General Education Task Force Charge & Process

Following the release of the WSGE report, and in response to the stated desires to improve GUR programming at Western, the Faculty Senate and the Senate Executive Council created the General Education Task Force in September 2015. The task force, reporting to ACC, was charged with providing three options to the university committee for reforming Western’s general education model—one was specified to be Western’s current GUR model with “minimal adjustments to the structure and goals.” The General Education Task Force was specifically tasked with imagining these options without recommending a particular option, and without

considering issues of implementation, funding and assessment. The task force met every other week from October 2015 until the end of the 2016 Winter quarter, when this completed report was presented to ACC.

- Initial membership included a representative of every college and the Libraries as well as representatives from the ACC, the Registrar, Residential Life, and the VP for Undergraduate Education. Student membership was drawn from Associated Students. Due to conflicting schedules, membership fluctuated over the two quarters the task force met.
- The task force reviewed previous general education discussions and then moved forward by examining a list of fifteen programs that were compiled by the summer planning group, including those from major Washington state universities. In addition to the list of programs, a list of general education program types and definitions was included. The task force wasn't limited to those schools; task force members nominated a few other programs for consideration. In total, seventeen programs were reviewed.
- Task force members divided into groups of four and the plans were distributed among the groups. Using a template generated by task force (see [Appendix A](#)), each group reviewed their assigned programs, identifying them by type and reviewing the number of credits, and strengths and weaknesses. Each group presented the programs they thought were the strongest.
- After this initial review, six programs (Washington State University; Eastern Washington University; Stanford University; Portland State University; California State University, Chico; and Keene State) were identified for the entire task force to review. Using the same template, members reviewed these programs and highlighted the strengths, weaknesses, and the key characteristics of each.
- After reviewing these programs, the group identified key characteristics of the strongest general education models. These key characteristics included:
  - Coherent Structure: Connection between Courses
  - Developmental Program (over 4 years)
  - Strong Diversity Component
  - Student Ownership
- These key characteristics were mapped onto the six programs and presented to the task force for review. This exercise pinpointed the importance of making these the key characteristics of every program presented in this report.
- After devoting a meeting to discuss current issues related to race and inclusion on campus and in higher education in general, the task force invited Drs. Marie Eaton and Vicki Hamblin to address the diversity and internationalization of the curriculum and how it relates to general education. This proved to be very useful and informative to the process. See Findings for more detail.

- The task force decided to present three distinct types of general education models, along with examples from other institutions to illustrate each model (see [Appendix B](#)). The three proposed models are: **Thematic Model** (Portland State); **Blended Core Model** (Keene State) and Western's **Distribution Model** with suggested changes (Washington State University).
- The task force met to outline and compose the overall report while workgroups developed explanations for each of the program models.

## Findings

### Overview of Desirable Characteristics

After reviewing a large number of general education models from different types of institutions, the task force members identified four key characteristics of best practice. Each of these is presented below, with reference to issues of concern about Western's current practice. Campus colleagues are encouraged to consider each of these characteristics when reviewing the model alternatives.

#### 1. Coherent Structure: Connection between Courses

The task force was continually struck by a simple realization: A General Education program is not a basket of loosely associated classes. A *program* implies an intentional sequence of experiences designed to align with and to support clear program goals. It is no accident that the most common criticism of the current GUR requirements is that they lack coherence in their current form, given that they were not designed as a *program*. Instead, they are the result of decades of a small accretion of changes—each motivated by a separate goal or intention. In contrast, a coherent set of requirements requires that a system be created, defined by a recognizable logic of sequence and components unified by clear goals. Ideally, such a program would also achieve a connection between general education and a student's major in such a way as to demonstrate coherence with the institutional values and strengths. Arguably, the achievement of coherence in this manner is much more important than the specific model of general education we select.

#### 2. Broad-based Approaches to Communications Requirements, including Writing in the Content Areas

Students in semester schools typically have a semester-long composition requirement. Quarter-based schools, like the UW, typically require two 11-week composition courses. Western is unique in requiring only one writing course as part of its GURs.

Slightly more than a decade ago, the ACC and the Faculty Senate approved a change in the GURs to require a second writing requirement, Com C, or "Writing in the Content Areas." Because Provost Bodman could not fund this requirement, it was never instituted. However, any GUR reform process should bear in mind the faculty consensus that led to this requirement and the work that was done to frame and define it. Finally, because of the growing popularity of College in the High School and AP Composition, an increasing percentage of our new students

take no writing at Western because they have English 101 waived. Consequently, a second writing requirement, such as the previously passed Com C, should be considered.

### **3. Strong Diversity Component**

With the current issues in higher education related to race, equity, inclusion, class and gender, the task force realized early on that revamping Western's ACGM and BCGM requirements was a necessity. This became even more evident after the racial threats in November, 2015. The task force dedicated several meetings to discussing these issues as a group. Members reviewed emerging work on campus and brought in outside speakers to better inform the task force on the issues of general education, diversity and social responsibility.

Task force members looked at multiple general education programs to find how other schools were addressing issues such as privilege, race, class, gender and identity. Programs varied from requiring a set number of classes to making conscious efforts to integrate these themes into multiple classes throughout a student's education. For instance, Washington State University's diversity requirement "...challenges students to critically analyze cultural differences and systems of inequality by learning about the diversity of human values and experiences." They do this by requiring students and classes to promote cultural self-awareness; to inform how culture is influenced by history, politics, power, privilege, economics, systemic inequality and cultural values; and to guide students in asking complex questions about class and culture.

In order to develop a better understanding of what was being done at Western on this topic, the task force invited Dr. Marie Eaton, retired Fairhaven professor, and Dr. Vicki Hamblin, Executive Director of the Center for International Studies, to discuss the work they have done.

Eaton shared information from Kevin Kumashiro's book, [Troubling Education](#), which outlines four models of diversity education. She identified Western's model as "education about the other," contrasting it with other models that focus on the examination of privilege and social structures, or education to change individuals and society. She stressed the importance of helping students to view complicated issues from multiple perspectives, noting that developing foundational knowledge, followed by investigating challenging questions is one approach to doing this. Importantly, Eaton pointed out that developing an educational system that addresses these issues can not only change the student, it also becomes a form of social justice.

Hamblin spoke of the work done by the OneWorld committee. She noted that learning about the customs, traditions and biases of other cultures can develop in students a sense of empathy and understanding, not only about that other culture, but about their own as well. This includes issues of race, class, gender and identity. The OneWorld committee has developed suggested goals for an international curriculum that could be consulted when developing diversity goals for a revised general education program at WWU. The Center for International Studies is currently offering workshops to [Western faculty to assist them in internationalizing their curriculum](#). The Center's work is an excellent example of what is already being done at Western and what could be built on regardless of our general education program.

#### **4. Student Ownership**

Importantly, the characteristics described above should include a strong student ownership dimension, in which the program is designed in a way that makes it meaningful to them (e.g. students see connections between general education courses and their future careers and roles as citizens). The programs reviewed by the task force accomplished this through structures that enabled student choice of courses that led to a cohesive educational program for them; often this was achieved through themed pathways or clusters of courses. As such, students must be allowed a voice in deciding not only on the type of model, but ultimately on the types of classes made available to them. Whatever its final form, a new general education model should allow students enough flexibility to choose the path they want to take with their own education. This can be done through selecting a specific theme or by selecting classes that follow a defined pathway.



# Overview of Western's Current Practices and Identified Weaknesses

## 1. Poorly Designed Diversity Education Requirement

The catalog copy framing Western's current practice regarding its diversity requirement reads as follows:

“Acquaintance with the values and viewpoints of a variety of cultures and societal roles helps overcome provincialism, aids self-understanding and is an important element in an educated outlook on the contemporary world.”

In practice Western's **ACBM/BCGM** requirements include courses focusing on “non-Western” cultures along with courses about identity and courses about the experiences and responses of several kinds of minority communities. However, the distinction between A and B is purely geographic. A is for courses outside of Europe and North America, while B is for courses dealing primarily with Europe and North America. This approach creates an “us” vs. “them” approach to understanding diversity.

### Issues of Concern

- Our current “Comparative, Gender, and Multicultural Studies” requirements reinforce a Western/non-Western dichotomy.
- The current system can result in a “cultural tourism” model of understanding others, with a focus on “education *about* the ‘other’”.
- Our current approach does not necessarily educate students on social stratification, structural inequalities along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc. or historical dynamics that contribute to current inequities.

## 2. Lack of Coherence in GUR Course Structure

Western's current distribution model lists six broad categories of requirements: communication, quantitative symbolic reasoning, humanities, social sciences, comparative gender and multicultural studies, and natural sciences.

Students have many choices within each category, which results in students selecting courses to fulfill a checklist of requirements. This checklist approach does not help students contextualize coursework into a meaningful GUR system, nor does it help them see how selected courses might fit together to achieve University goals. Furthermore, the 11 competencies that were adopted with the last change to WWU's GUR system are separate from the GUR categories, leading to a system in which students can fulfill the categories without necessarily fulfilling all 11 competencies. Finally, the [competencies](#) and vision of a liberal arts and sciences education are not clearly stated on prominent advising documents, including the Viking Advisor, and [catalog copy](#) introducing GURs (see Western's framing statement on [page 2](#)).



The lack of coherence of the GUR program is manifest in the Viking Advisor, where an explanation of WWU's GUR program is graphically displayed in a way that is too abstract to help clarify the role of GURs at Western (see [Appendix C](#)).

### **Issues of Concern**

Currently, students don't understand the purpose of GURs, why they are required, or how they connect to their major or overall undergraduate education. As a result, they view GURs solely as requirements that need to be checked off in order to graduate. Moreover, many faculty are not able to articulate how or why GURs undergird and support overall undergraduate education, nor does the distribution of content appear to consistently provide coherent outcomes. In addition:

- Students currently take GURs based on which courses have space for enrollment, not in a meaningful sequence or with mindful regard to how courses fit together.
- GURs are not framed in a compelling way.
- The rationale and reasoning behind the GUR program and category definitions is unclear.
- Students often don't understand why GURs are an integral part of the undergraduate program; an explanation of the importance of general education (vs. professional training) is needed.
- An explanation is needed as to how key skills and a comprehensive knowledge base build from GURs to work within major.
- The name of the program is not descriptive, nor does it communicate a compelling conceptualization

### **3. Inadequate Communications Requirements, including Writing**

Currently, Western students are required to take two communication courses—one is the required “ACOM,” the second is selected from either “BCOM” or “CCOM” offerings.

- ACOM consists of English 101, and must be taken in the first 45 credits. It may be satisfied with AP exam scores of 4 or 5.
- BCOM includes a variety of speech or world language options.
- CCOM includes six varied courses from six different departments.

### **Issues of Concern**

- Our program does not embed writing/communication into a skill-development sequence, as is done at many of our peer institutions.
- Western students may receive no formal instruction in writing between ENG 101—which they increasingly may have taken elsewhere—and their upper division Writing Proficiency course(s).
- Students generally lack proficiency in writing along multiple dimensions (organization, punctuation, grammar, syntax, diction, argument structure, etc.).

- In our current system, students do not necessarily learn that conventions vary across disciplines. In addition, more experiences writing within a discipline could contribute to the formation of each student's identity within the academic community.

## Presentation of Models

To address the issues discussed above, the task force presents three general education models, each based upon a distinct model type. Table 1 summarizes whether and how each of the models addresses each key characteristic discussed above. The models are further described in the following section.

The task force presents these plans to the campus community with the hopes they will foster meaningful and engaged dialog from all campus constituents. It is important to note that these models are proposed as possible templates for revision of the current program, and that each can be adapted to WWU's context and phased in in a manner decided upon by the WWU campus community.

**See also Table 1 below: Proposed Model Aligned with Key Characteristics**

**Table 1: Proposed Models aligned with Key Characteristics**

<b>Key Characteristic</b>	<b>Thematic Model</b>	<b>Blended Core Model</b>	<b>Revised WWU Distribution Model</b>
<b>Coherent structure</b>	Courses linked thematically, sharing common goals; Opportunity to apply learning in an integrated capstone course.	Goals established in foundational courses and built upon in upper division; Opportunity to apply learning in an integrated capstone course.	Open-menu selection; Courses are not connected.
<b>4-Year developmental program</b>	Lower & upper division GURs building toward Sr. Capstone service or research projects; Writing requirements in first year & sophomore years and infused through upper division and capstone.	Foundation, distribution, capstone (not necessarily 4-year); Communication in foundation courses; Integrative problem-based capstone course with writing emphasis.	Not developmental overall, except for the possible addition of a sophomore writing course and/or foundational courses in diversity.
<b>Writing</b>	Writing is infused into each level of the model.	The capstone course is a version of the previously approved writing in the disciplines requirement.	Writing could be strengthened via increased use of FIG clusters, with writing in the seminars, and/or addition of the previously approved writing in the disciplines requirement.
<b>Diversity</b>	Courses at all levels linked to diversity outcomes.	Depth model: Foundational diversity course plus infusion via distribution requirement.	Definition of diversity & goals; Re-focusing of ACGM and BCGM; More inclusive definition of humanities.
<b>Student ownership</b>	Students choose a thematic pathway; Interdisciplinary service/research project capstones.	Students choose distribution components and capstone topic.	Students choose distribution.

## Alternative Model 1: Thematic Approach

This model was adapted from Portland State University's University Studies Program ([see Appendix D](#)).

A thematic approach to general education will provide coherence to coursework outside of a student's major and will lay the groundwork for framing a student's major within a larger worldview. This framework allows a more purposeful integration of issues of diversity, internationalization, ethics and social responsibility throughout the four-year program. A thematically-based model will build student cohorts, much like our FIG clusters, a model which has increased retention and student success at Western. The difference is these clusters will span more than one quarter of a student's first year. Because of the tight coherence of this program, its implementation at Western may result in an overall decrease in general education credit hours, allowing for more specialized coursework within the majors. For example, at Portland State University, the program consists of 45 credits (see [Appendix E](#)). General education organized by themes would look strikingly different from our current model:

### First Year

Students entering their first year will choose a theme for a cluster of Freshman Inquiry courses (FRINQ). The linked courses—for example, under the theme *Ways of Knowing*—help students build foundational knowledge and skills such as communication and science literacy. Because students choose a theme for the entire academic year, they have a built-in first year cohort. In addition, students will have a weekly discussion session with peer mentors to help them navigate university life, develop study skills, and integrate course content.

### Second Year

In their second year, students will choose three different clusters of interest for their sophomore inquiry coursework (SINQ). For their three clusters, a student might choose *Interpreting the Past* in fall quarter, *Freedom, Privacy, and Technology* in winter, and *Leading Social Change* in the spring. The intent of this coursework is to introduce students to three different areas outside of their major. Students continue to have a weekly discussion session with peer mentors.

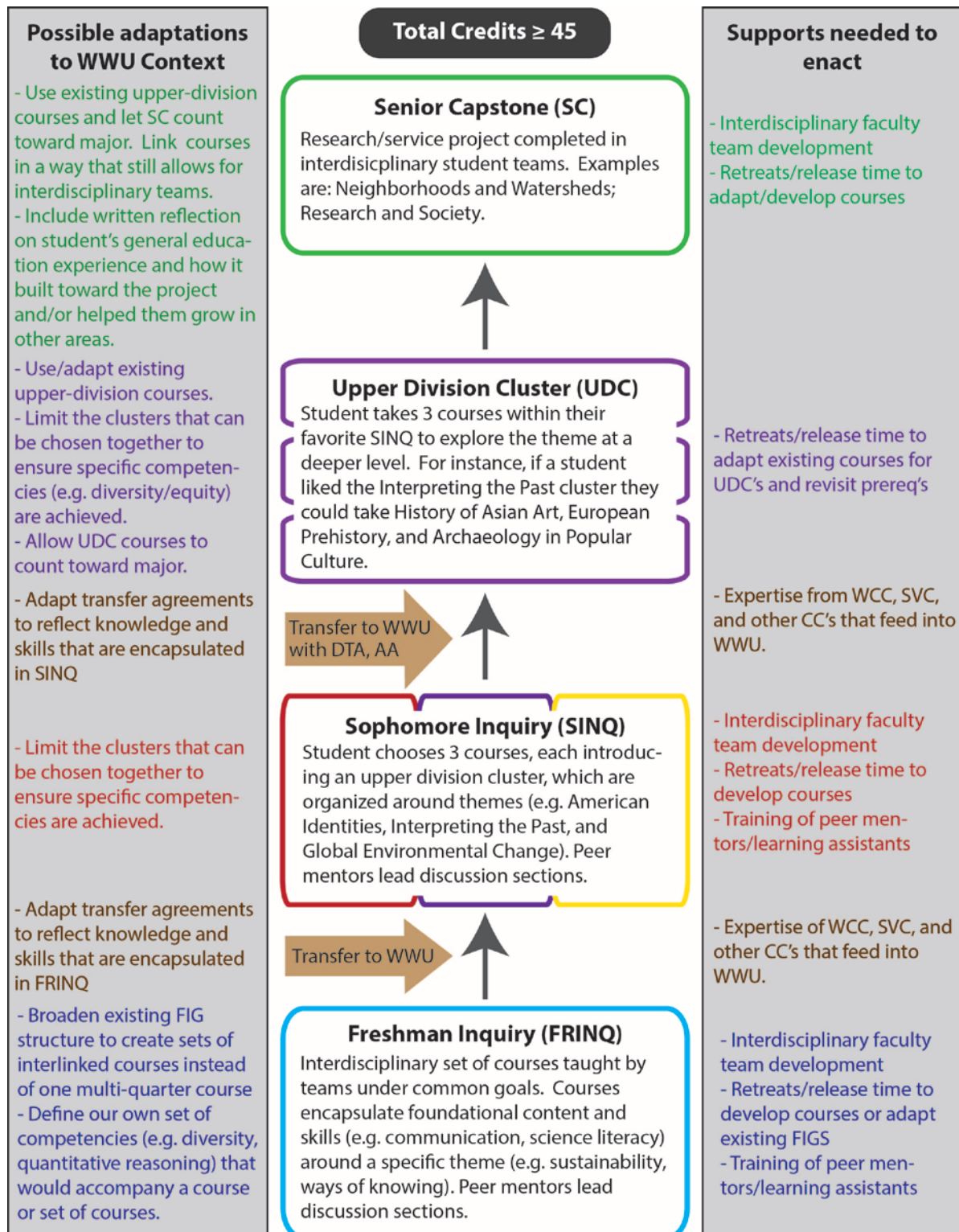
### Upper Division

Upper division GUR courses will be offered in a student's junior year. Juniors will select three courses within the theme of their favorite SINQ cluster. If *Freedom, Privacy, and Technology* was a favorite, the student could go on to deepen their understanding of this cluster by taking *Genes and Society* fall quarter, *History of Modern Science* in winter, and *Media, Opinion, and Voting* in spring.

### Senior Capstone

Finally, a senior capstone course will help every Western student to integrate their general education with their major coursework, as well as to understand how issues of diversity relate to their liberal arts and sciences experience. Capstone courses may be offered both within and outside a student's major and will include research and community service options, as well as opportunities to work in an interdisciplinary team of students.

**Figure 1: Thematic Model Graphic**



## Alternative Model 2: Blended Core Model

This model was adapted from Keene State College's Integrative Studies Program (see [Appendix F](#)).

General Education curriculum models fall on a spectrum that runs broadly from Core Curriculum models, comprised of interdisciplinary courses designed specifically for general education, to distribution models, wherein students receive a range of disciplinary introductions. Somewhere near the center of this spectrum is a Blended Core Curriculum/Distribution Model. In such a model, students complete a small set of core courses, designed to provide a foundation in the most essential academic skills and content required of an arts and science degree, and a broader range of courses from a specific field of study. In some versions of this model a third component provides a capstone or integrative experience. Finally, many blended programs build coherence or distinctiveness through themes or emphases (diversity, internationalization, ethics, etc.) infused throughout both the core and distributive components of the curriculum.

Theoretically, a Blended structure permits an institution to combine the strengths of core curriculum and distribution models while reducing their weaknesses.

- Borrowing from core curriculum programs, for instance, a “Blended” model clearly articulates for students the skills that are foundational for all further academic study. This creates curricular coherence and helps to communicate to students the value of a liberal education—two key goals our GUR reform was initiated to accomplish.
- Borrowing from distribution models, a Blended model provides a breadth of experience in disciplinary study, permitting students to explore majors while becoming broadly educated with “study over a range of human inquiry, expression and accomplishment.”

In addition to the advantages a Blended model would provide for our students, such a model holds advantages for our faculty and institution. It would, for example, aid in addressing the expanding disciplinary content conundrum by helping us clarify what “core skills” we consider foundational for all further academic study.

The distribution component of the model also mirrors our current program and the disciplinary organization of Western's curriculum. In this sense, a Blended model is a good fit with our current culture and organization. Finally, a Blended model permits the inclusion of themes or requirements beyond those represented in core curriculum and distribution requirements. An overview of what a blended model might look like at Western is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Blended Core Curriculum Model  
Hypothetical Western Example with 11-12 Classes**

<p>An integrative, problem-based course with a writing emphasis.</p>	<p align="center"><b>Capstone</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>Discussion</b></p> <p>A capstone would: 1) fulfill the need identified in the “Writing in the Disciplines” course the Faculty Senate previously approved and 2) challenge students to integrate knowledge across fields. Options could include research opportunities, service learning and problem-based courses.</p>
<p>1 Humanities 1 Social Science 2 Natural Science 1 International Diversity* 1 Additional SSC or Hum w/ North American Diversity emphasis**</p>	<p align="center"><b>Distribution Requirements</b></p>	<p>Distribution requirements could continue to require two lab sciences.</p> <p>“International Diversity” and SSC and HUM courses with diversity emphases would infuse diversity content in disciplinary courses and build on recent faculty efforts to internationalize the curriculum. <b>(See examples provided below.)</b></p>
<p>QSR (1-2 courses) Communication (2 courses) Diversity: Stratification and equity (1 course)</p>	<p align="center"><b>Foundation Requirements</b></p>	<p>Establishing “Foundation Requirements” would communicate to students our sense of what skills and knowledge a college education is built on. These are hypothetical examples.</p> <p>A Stratification and Equity course would acquaint students with academic approaches to understanding social forces (e.g. Soc 260) and serve as a prerequisite to the distribution area diversity courses.</p>

\*E.g. Visual History of Africa; World History, Literature of Africa; Peoples of Latin America; Human Geography.

\*\*E.g. Latino(a) Literature; African-American Literature; WSGS; American Cultural Studies; LGBT in American Experience; Indian in American History, etc.



## **Alternative Model 3: WWU's Distribution Model with Suggested Changes**

Based on a review of the concerns expressed by members of the Western community and studying of outstanding general education models from other institutions, the task force identified three adjustments to our current system that could substantially improve Western's GUR model:

1. Bring the diversity education requirement into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
2. Improve the coherence and structure with stronger, more focused goals and better communication of our purpose.
3. Better prepare students to meet the demands of modern communication by enhancing their writing and communication skills.

Each of these improvement opportunities is explained below, including issues of concern, and explanation of Western's current practice, and recommended changes to consider with references to exemplars of better practice. Questions to consider with regard to each change, along with exemplars of good practice, are included in appendices G and H.

### **Improvement Opportunity 1: Bring the diversity education requirement into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

Rather than requiring students to choose from a list of courses that satisfy a diversity requirement, the prevalent best practice trend is linking courses to well-defined goals. Many institutions focus on the development of empathy and skills for understanding others. Others are focusing on creating an understanding of privilege, identity and systemic inequities as a basis, then helping students make sense of these concepts through domestic or international examples—often through a second course that enables them to deeply explore and apply these concepts.

#### **Recommended Changes**

- Articulate diversity learning goals—including skills, knowledge and values related to diversity.
- Develop a Diversity Foundations category for courses that address social stratification and related issues.
- Consider how courses plus experiences (service-learning, study abroad, community-based projects) could serve to meet diversity goals.
- Redefine the humanities GUR to be more inclusive of all peoples' traditions and cultures.
- Add some of the courses that are now ACGM or BCGM to the HUM list.

### **Improvement Opportunity 2: Improve the coherence and structure with stronger, more focused goals and better communication of our purpose.**

#### **Recommended Changes**

- Clearly define the core goals the GUR program, then base the distribution on goals rather than content distribution.

- Develop a strong rationale for GUR programming; communicate this in language that engages the excitement and imagination of students.
- Provide professional development for faculty to help them more strongly frame the purpose of GURs on syllabi and course descriptions.
- Re-name the program, with the intent of the name more strongly capturing the importance and focus of the program.

**Improvement Opportunity 3: Better prepare students to meet the demands of modern communication by enhancing their writing and communication skills.**

**Recommended Changes to Consider:**

- Require a second writing course, such as Writing in Content Area, as previously recommended and approved by both the Writing Task Force Report of 1998 and the GUR reform documents of 2004. Each called for a move toward the requirement of a second writing course at the sophomore level.
- Communication in digital media, especially web based communication, is also important for our students; B-COM offerings should include a range of courses in these areas.

See also Figure 3 below: Distribution Model (WWU), Overview of Recommended Changes.

**Key Questions to Consider** related to each of these improvement opportunities are included in [Appendix G](#).

**Exemplar programs** related to each improvement opportunity are included in [Appendix H](#).

**Figure 3: Distribution Model (WWU)  
Overview of Recommended Changes  
14-15 courses**

3 Humanities 3 Social Science 2 Natural Science w/ lab 1 Natural Science <b>2 Redefined ACGM/BCGM</b>	<b>Distribution Requirements</b>	<b>Discussion</b>  Improvement Opportunity 1: Strengthen Diversity – articulate goals; create category of foundational courses; use second course to delve deeper into issues
QSR (1-2 courses) <b>Expanded Comm (2 courses)</b>	<b>Foundation Requirements</b>	Improvement Opportunity 3: Enhancing Writing and Communication Skills – require a second writing course; include digital communication
<b>Improvement Opportunity 2: Increasing Coherency</b> Articulate strongly focused goals and outcomes Develop strong rationale as foundation for program Rename the program		

## Appendix A: General Education Requirements: Program Review Template

School Name	URL to Program
Program Name	Average Class Size
Total Number of Credits: Bachelor's Degree	Total Number of Credits: Gen Ed Program
How is it structured? (Structural Model)	
What are its goals?	
Is there an internal review or assessment plan?	

What is the relationship between general education courses and major courses?
How does it handle writing requirements?
How do they handle diversity/multicultural requirement?
What are its strengths?
What are its weaknesses?

How is it different than our current program?
General Comments
<b>Additional considerations:</b> sequencing, average time to completion, how well gen ed categories align with program goals, presence of applied learning components

## **Appendix B: Definitions of Types of General Education Models**

The purpose of general education is to provide students with an intentional, integrated course of study that provides intellectual breadth and depth in preparation for further studies, future careers, and lifelong learning. Several models of general education attempt to achieve this goal with varying degrees of success. The following are common general education models and their strengths and weaknesses.

### **The Core Curriculum Model**

- Based on a common core of courses
- Typically delivered in years one and two
- Serves as a foundation for upper-level studies
- Often seen as courses to be “gotten out of the way”

### **The Distribution Model**

- Students select courses from a menu (the “smorgasbord” approach)
- This model emphasizes the number and types of discipline-based courses from specific fields of study (e.g., natural sciences)
- Strength is in breadth and flexibility
- Weakness is lack of cohesion and “randomness” of courses

### **The Blended Distribution Model–Core Curriculum Model**

- This blended model attempts to address weaknesses of Core and Distribution Models
- Students choose a defined core curriculum and select from approved additional courses outside of their primary program of study or major

### **The Thematic Curriculum Model**

- Content organized around general themes reflective of university mission and goals (e.g. sustainability, diversity, citizenship)
- Thematically linked courses connect class content with its relevance to work and society
- Significant time and commitment required from involved faculty
- A budget that provides for its development, pilot testing, implementation, and coordination is required

### **The Learning Community Model**

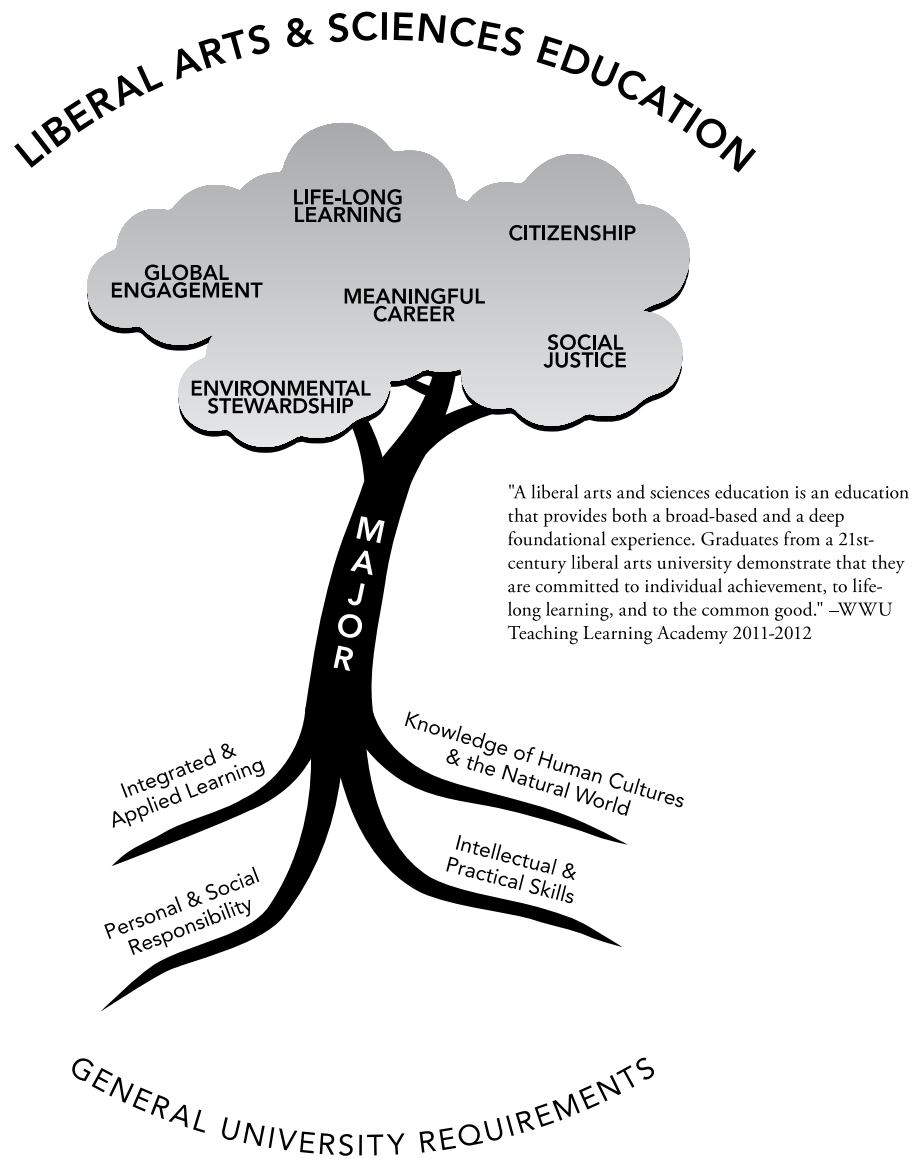
- Follows cohort model for all or part of the general education curriculum
- Improves student retention, persistence, and transition to further studies
- Groups small numbers of students into learning communities that facilitate discussion and create a sense of belonging
- Requires significant amount of program coordination and lead-time to develop and implement



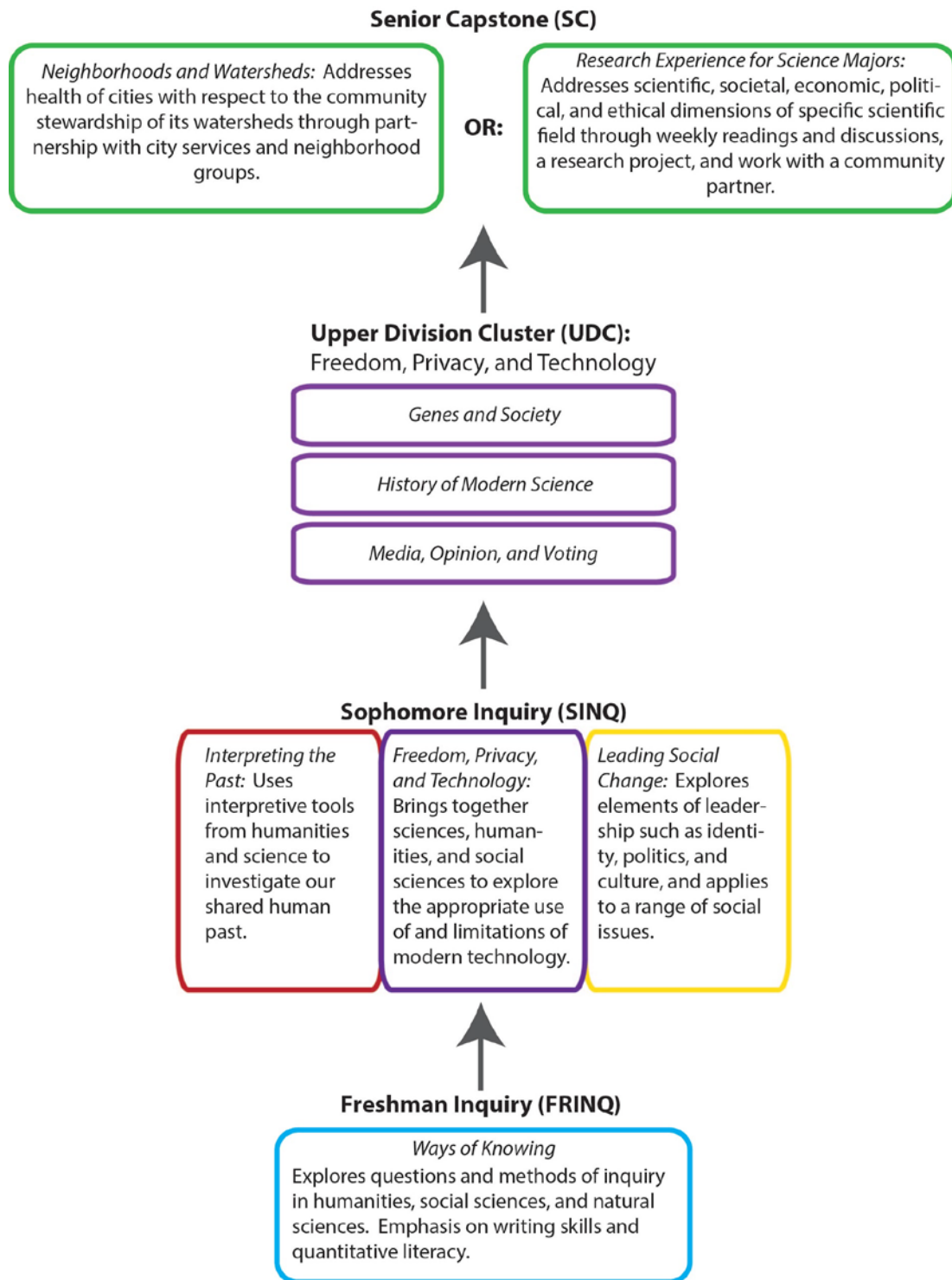
## Appendix C: Western's GUR Visual Display

### Why GURs?

Because a liberal arts education is rooted in our General University Requirements.



## Appendix D: Alternative Model 1: Sample Schedule



## Appendix E: Alternative Model 1: Portland State Model

### Annotated Links

- A. A [sample 4-year schedule](#) for a B.S. in computer science. This allows the viewer to see how the freshman inquiry, sophomore inquiry, and upper division cluster fit into an overall major.
- B. The [peer mentor program](#) is a highly competitive program accepting graduate and undergraduate students to plan and facilitate 50 minute mentor sessions for the freshman inquiry and sophomore clusters for compensation. Portland state has over 100 peer mentors.
- C. [Sophomore Inquiry and Upper division clusters](#). The black box on the left hand side of the screen gives a list of cluster topics.
- D. A Prezi Presentation summarizing the [relationship between Sophomore Inquiry and Upper Division Clusters](#).
- E. [UNST Faculty Resources](#) includes links for faculty, including sample assignments, rubrics, student services, library resources, and more.

### FAQs (answers based on Portland State's model, Western's could be different)

- What is a cluster?  
A cluster is a group of courses related by topic or theme. At the sophomore level, students choose one class from three different clusters of classes. At the junior level, students enroll in classes from one cluster.
- Can I double dip?  
At Portland State, classes taken as part of the general education requirements cannot be applied to a major, but they can be applied to a minor.
- Are there examples of different degree plans?  
Portland State provides a [database](#) of degree maps. Two specific examples:
  - [History BA degree plan](#)
  - [Biology BS degree plan](#)
- Do I need to take math?  
Math requirements determined by major
- How is the writing requirement met?  
Classes taken the FRINQ and SINQ have writing embedded in them and most will meet the [writing requirement](#). Transfer students with fewer than 90 credit are expected to meet a PSU writing requirement by taking a PSU course.

## Appendix F: Alternative Model 2: [Keene State College Model](#)

Inspired and informed by the AAC&U's "Greater Expectations" initiatives, Keene State College calls its General Education program an "Integrative Studies Program" comprised of three parts: Foundations, Perspectives, and Interdisciplinary.

The heart of Keene's core curriculum component, "Foundations," focuses tightly on two requirements, each of which can be met with a single course. These are "Integrated Thinking and Writing" and "Integrated Quantitative Literacy."

"Perspectives" requires six courses in the arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, as follows.

- One Fine and Performing Arts (IA)
- One Humanities (IH)
- One additional Fine and Performing Arts or Humanities (IA or IH)
- One Natural Science (IN)
- One Social Science (IS)
- One additional Natural or Social Science (IN or IS)

Sequentially, Keene State College students gain their core academic skills in [Foundations](#), apply those skills in their Perspective courses, and then return to a final, integrative core experience with an "Interdisciplinary" course. These courses "blend perspectives or methods from two or more academic fields" to help students think creatively and to understand "the relationships between different branches of knowledge or academic disciplines."

"Interdisciplinary" courses provide a capstone of sorts for Keene's general education program and are offered in traditional fields as well as integrative programs such as *Women and Gender Studies*, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, *Environmental Studies* and *American Studies*.

The Keene program is surprisingly conventional. Distribution requirements in traditional disciplines comprise more than half of the courses students take. Nevertheless, the core curriculum features, and the curricular structure whereby distribution requirements are "sandwiched" between core courses, creates a rhetorical coherence the college uses to showcase its distinctiveness. This is emphasized by a useful graphic and concise description.

A Blended/Core Curriculum Model is possible at WWU—whether or not we actually revise our requirements. This is because Blended models are, in part, models of how to communicate the logic of a general education curriculum. For instance, here is our current model described in the logic of a blended model.

## **Appendix G: Key Questions to Consider: Related to Improvement Opportunities**

### **Improvement Opportunity 1: Bring the diversity education requirement into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

- How could we re-frame our diversity requirement to better reflect the needs of our increasingly diverse and globally-interconnected communities of education?
- How would we currently define “diversity” on our campus?
- How could we adopt a developmental approach to understanding diversity, giving our students an initial understanding of foundational diversity concepts, followed by an opportunity for students to explore them in more depth?
- What would be our desired outcomes for the diversity requirement? Would it be a focus on knowledge, skills, dispositions or attitudes?
- How do we move from a model of education *about* the ‘other’ to a model of education that encourages students to examine their privileges and position within domestic and global social structures as well as to challenge stereotypes, assumptions, and ideas?
- How do we give students the opportunity and skills needed to develop empathy and mutual understanding?
- Should this requirement attempt to be purely objective and free of normative statements, or should it encourage students to work towards equity and justice in society and practice ethical decision making? How do we do this while simultaneously upholding academic freedom?
- How do diversity and global studies foci within WWU overlap and support one another?

### **Improvement Opportunity 2: Improve the coherence and structure with stronger, more focused goals and better communication of our purpose**

- Can we move to a sharper focus for our GURs at Western, clearly indicating 5-8 major outcomes?
- Our current system is built on distribution of content—is this relevant and pertinent in a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment (and as preparation for the career trajectories of our students)—or should we move to defining key skills and competencies instead?
- How can we ensure that students find value in GURs as they’re taking them?
- How can we frame the GURs to have stronger appeal for students?
- How can we make the GUR program a reason for students to attend Western?
- Is the language used to describe GUR programming engaging and exciting?

### **Improvement Opportunity 3: Better prepare students by enhancing their writing and communication skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

- With the vast array of communication options available through technology, does a focus on writing alone serve 21<sup>st</sup> century students?

- How could we envision a more holistic approach to communication skills that would benefit students in their current studies and future endeavors?
- How should considerations of equity influence the way writing is taught?
- How can we re-envision communication to be more pertinent to the wide range of digital media pertinent to today's world?

## Appendix H: Additional exemplars of Good Practice from Other Institutions Related to our Concerns

### Improvement Opportunity 1: Bring the diversity education requirement into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

- WWU's One World Committee work, including a suggested list of global competencies (see slide #10): [international.wvu.edu/.../fall-workshop-ppt](http://international.wvu.edu/.../fall-workshop-ppt)  
Suggested Global Competencies:
  - Knowledge of world geography and history.
  - Understanding of diversity of values, beliefs, ideas, and worldviews.
  - Understanding of one's identity and culture in the context of an ever-changing world.
  - Curiosity and openness toward new opportunities, ideas, and ways of thinking.
  - Awareness of ethnic and cultural differences.
  - Ability to examine issues from multiple perspectives.
  - Ability to think critically and creatively, and integrate knowledge of the world
  - Ability to communicate effectively in a second language and interact with people from other cultures.
  - Ability to cope with unfamiliar and challenging settings with resiliency.
  - Ability to locate information and investigate issues about international topics.
- WSU's framing statement for diversity:  
*"The Diversity requirement challenges students to critically analyze cultural differences and systems of inequality by learning about the diversity of human values and experiences. Specifically, Diversity courses: (a) promote cultural self-awareness; (b) inform how culture is influenced by history, politics, power and privilege, communication styles, economics, institutionalized discrimination and inequality, and cultural values, beliefs and practices; (c) develop empathy skills that enable students to interpret intercultural experiences; (d) promote curiosity on the part of students to ask complex questions about other cultures and classes, and to seek out answers that reflect multiple cultural perspectives; or (e) encourages students to initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others."*
- University of Maryland - includes infusion plus capstone (see pg. 22 for description of diversity requirements): <http://www.gened.umd.edu/documents/TransformingGeneralEducation.pdf>
- Eastern Washington University – defines intercultural and global learning (see p. 15): [www.ewu.edu/.../GERR\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.ewu.edu/.../GERR_White_Paper.pdf)
- Report on diversity requirements at model institutions – from a curriculum revision team at UNCA <https://diverse.unm.edu/common/documents/diversity-requirements-at-model-institutions.pdf>
- *Book reference to understand different frameworks for diversity education: Kevin Kumashiro Troubling Education: Queer Activism and Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy. Defines four approaches to diversity—for the other, about the other, privilege & social structures, and education to change individuals and society. Recommended for study as we move forward with changes to our system.*



### **Improvement Opportunity 2: Improve the coherence and structure with stronger, more focused goals and better communication of our purpose**

- <http://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes> - Link to the AACU “LEAP” (Liberal Education and America’s Promise) description of learning outcomes. This is a national public advocacy and campus action initiative to support the promotion of liberal arts education.
- [http://www.tnstate.edu/academic\\_affairs/Learning\\_Outcomes\\_Courses.aspx](http://www.tnstate.edu/academic_affairs/Learning_Outcomes_Courses.aspx) - Lists categories in undergraduate core; outcomes included for each category
- <http://niu.edu/plus/outcomes/index.shtml> - presents eight learning outcomes
- <http://www.keene.edu/academics/isp/students/> - defines overarching themes; presents four focus areas with 2-4 outcomes in each
- <http://ugr.wsu.edu/students/7Goals.html> - defines seven learning goals plus outcomes for each
- <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/academics/general.php> - very easily found under academics; lists 5 focus areas for undergraduate education.
- <http://uccp.tamucc.edu/> - provides overarching conceptualization plus four goals
- <http://www.csun.edu/catalog/general-education/> - introduction/conceptualization
- <http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/ge-paths> - includes video link on webpage; pathways overview
- <http://www.keene.edu/academics/isp/overview/> - provides clear overview of integrated studies program
- <http://ugr.wsu.edu/> - provides overall explanation of UCORE program

### **Improvement Opportunity 3: Better prepare students by enhancing their writing and communication skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

- -programs with required writing/communication foundational course, followed by sophomore course (no transfer credits count) or writing course within the major
- Writing as thinking approaches, with developmental sequence -  
Stanford: <https://undergrad.stanford.edu/programs/pwr/courses/understanding-writing-and-rhetoric-requirements>
- Eastern Washington University – “communicating purposefully and effectively orally, in writing, and in multimedia or multimodal documents and contexts” – see p. 9: [www.ewu.edu/.../GERR\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.ewu.edu/.../GERR_White_Paper.pdf)
- Washington State – 6 credits  
*“Communication courses require students to develop and express ideas in writing and in other media. This includes adapting content and conventions to context, audience, and purpose. Such adaptation requires skills involving: (a) working with many different technologies; (b) mixing texts, data, and images; and (c) the use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources.”*  
*One 3-credit communication course focuses on the written media. The other 3-credit communication course can focus on written or non-written mediums, such as public speaking, conversational foreign language, interpersonal communication, visual literacy, multimedia authoring and intercultural communication.”*