

**Conceptual Framework
for the Reform of General Education
at West Chester University**

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General Education Advisory Board**

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Purpose: This document serves as a Vision Statement for the Reform of the General Education Program at WCU. It lists some elements that the revised curriculum should have, based on faculty input and research into high-impact practices for undergraduate education.* It also lists some desired goals for student learning outcomes to be refined at a later date. This document will serve as the basis for discussions in 2014-15, during which time elements and outcomes will be refined, and course development will begin. Course development, implementation, and assessment procedures will be developed during 2015-16 and 2016-17, with full implementation to begin in Fall 2017. Faculty input will guide these processes at all stages during the next three years.

Vision Statement: West Chester University is committed to providing students with the highest quality liberal arts education. Toward that end, we will engage in a revision of the curriculum to enhance its coherence and clarity, facilitate knowledge transfer, and prepare students for the twenty-first century.

We envision a General Education curriculum that recognizes not only our students' professional goals, but their roles as citizens of a democracy and seekers of truth; one that helps prepare them to become good stewards of our world and to pursue happiness. Our general education curriculum will be designed to give all of our students the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to succeed in their careers, as well as others that we hope will enrich their lives and those of their families, their communities, the commonwealth, the nation, and the world. This curriculum will be evidence-based and continually assessed in order to facilitate improvement and to demonstrate

* AAC&U's "High-Impact Educational Practices" "have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds." For more information, please see <http://www.aacu.org/leap/hip.cfm>.

the effectiveness of our curriculum to students, parents, employers, and the broader community. Our general education curriculum will be designed to go beyond goals that can be measured in a semester or in four years, however, empowering students to sustain a lifelong engagement with ideas, with their community, and with the wider world. We want our students to love learning; to feel a part of a community; to be committed to fairness, justice, and sustainability as they understand them; to integrate their mind, body, and spirit; and to reflect upon their experiences here as among the most meaningful of their lives.

Elements: As the result of campus-wide discussions in 2013-14, and informed by research into high-impact practices by the American Association of Colleges & Universities and others, we have developed the following potential list of elements. In 2014-15, we will explore where these already exist at WCU, where they could be implemented without much effort into existing courses, and what their inclusion would add to our Gen Ed program. While we envision a thorough, intentional integration of General Education with Major and Minor degree Programs, we are neither setting out a list of courses nor a fixed universal curriculum at this time.

Elements we think would improve our Gen Ed curriculum include:

- A first-year seminar or experience that will introduce students to the meaning and value of a “liberal arts” education, and may include a discovery-based research/creative experience
- Experiences in Year 1 that engage real-world, complex problems and big questions, such as:
 - What does it mean to be human?
 - What is “ability” and “disability”?
 - How do we balance technology with tradition, and security with human rights?
 - What are the limits of Nature? What are the limits of *Human* Nature?
- Experiences that require multi- and trans-disciplinary competence
- Experiences that focus on sustainable practices, and encourage living and thinking sustainably and developing a planetary perspective
- Experiences that focus on wellness, or on sustaining life at the personal level
- Experiences that cultivate active, engaged learning, conscious living, and being fully present in the moment
- A wide range of experiences utilizing quantitative, reading, writing, and speaking skills

- Experiences that facilitate integrative learning and knowledge transfer, such as writing-intensive capstone courses and electronic portfolios
- Experiences with scientific literacy for citizenship in the twenty-first century, including experience with the scientific method and scientific argument, as well as statistics and data analysis
- Experiences that develop an international perspective
- Experiences focusing on diversity on two levels: first, that of human diversity locally, nationally, and globally; and, secondly, that of the ways that human diversity has historically been entangled with patterns of domination and subordination
- Experiences with the Arts and Humanities, the Physical Sciences, and the Behavioral and Social Sciences
- Experiences integrating learning with civic engagement or service to the community

Student Learning Outcomes: We recommend the following set of goals as the basis for eventual student learning outcomes. These will be refined, elaborated on, and/or clarified by faculty in 2014-15.

We want our students to be able to...

- Think critically.
- Communicate effectively.
- Reason effectively using quantitative data.
- Be able to follow a scientific argument and distinguish science from pseudoscience.
- Make decisions that consider matters of sustainability.
- Develop personal and social skills in health and wellness.
- Interpret human diversity with an open mind and make decisions that consider structures of social inequality, historically and in the present.
- Engage meaningfully with the Arts and Humanities.
- Consider the relevance of ethical terms, conflicts, and solutions in decision-making.

Communication: The revised General Education Program should be communicated in the following ways:

- It should be clear and easy for everyone to understand: students, faculty, advisors, staff, parents, community partners, the legislature, and the outside world.

- Advising documents should show it as it is: integrated, essential, and exciting.
- It should have a web presence that is vibrant and engaging.