

University Studies Program Proposal

Summary 9/15/09

1. Name of GE Model: University Studies Program

2. Goals/Statement of Purpose:

The University Studies curriculum gives students an explicit sense of why and how they are being educated, enabling them to get more from their education and to continue it on their own after college. Moving from the high school absorption of facts to the critical evaluating, reorganizing and creative use of them is a hallmark of a college education. Learning strategies for creating meaning is another mark, as students move from the relative certainties of high school to the competing ways of finding meaning both within and among academic disciplines and majors. How to define a good life or career or life partner; or the health of a human being or ecosystem or economy? Such questions are multidisciplinary, and USP tries to bring multiple disciplinary areas of knowledge and skills to bear on these issues for success both in college and after.

Responding to the constantly evolving natural, social and political environment of the 21st century, USP empowers students to recognize the important questions, identify relevant and valid information, examine their own values and those of others to help see how some of these problems arise and can be addressed, gain knowledge of the large natural and human systems that connect our world and be able to express their ideas thoroughly and forcefully. Critical thinking and articulate writing are the foundational capacities for this education, enabling students to thoughtfully develop, examine, express and apply their ideas and beliefs and to critically examine the ideas and beliefs of self and others. The four dimensions of the USP aim to orient and equip students with the essential knowledge and skills in critical thinking, valuing, connecting and communicating that will enable them to meet these evolving challenges in their future lives, careers and/or further academic pursuits. These areas are developed and reinforced through the entire college career, in a variety of disciplines and into each student's major to better create and practice the habits of successful life-long learning.

3. Key Features

1. Emphasis on a **structured First Year**, including a Core of critical thinking in the Liberal Arts and Sciences to aid in transition to college by :
 - providing a foundation for higher level GE and major courses
 - enabling a more informed selection of majors and minors
 - setting high expectations for college career
2. A comprehensive strategy to **make GE more transparent and meaningful to students** by organizing the GE curriculum into four dimensions applicable to all majors: effective communication; critical thinking; self, society and values; and understanding the complexity of global issues. These dimensions guide students through the curriculum, channeling the array of courses and disciplines into developmental experiences throughout their college career.

3. **Creates explicit connections within GE:** between introductory courses, with upper-level courses and also between GE and the major. Encourages major programs to more explicitly incorporate GE knowledge and skills through the designated “Applications” courses that bring the dimensions of GE into the major, responding to concerns from the major disciplines that students are not adequately prepared for major work. The explicit presence of GE learning outcomes in selected major courses will promote connections in the student learning experience and essential dialogue between faculty offering GE courses and those teaching in majors. Departments will be encouraged to select and revise courses to incorporate higher-level GE learning outcomes. Our goal is that no additional courses be added to any major unless the major so desires. We will have several years to develop this level of the curriculum.
4. Developmental strategy of **applying the skills and knowledge learned in introductory courses to real world issues** in such areas as global and ethical/social/civic problems. These advanced GE courses are offered at the junior level and may be included in the major.
5. **Creates a curriculum** – an explicitly ordered and reasoned arrangement of courses – within a reduced number of credits. Students see why they take each course and where it leads to in the program. Having GE in senior level course also provide opportunities for assessing the GE program as a whole.

4. Strengths of this proposal.

As our current GE program illustrates, you can have a good program that is undercut by lack of connections to students, to the majors and among the courses in the program itself. The USP framework addresses all of these disconnects. The framework is a map orienting students to their undergraduate education: what are the large dimensions of this education, what course areas are included, in what sequence and when, and leading to what end. The connection to majors emphasizes the four dimensions of skills and content that departments have been discussing for the last two years. The connection between courses, as recommended by Middle States, builds developmentally within each dimension, builds off a structured common first year curriculum, and leads to culminating experiences in each area.

The four dimensions provide students with a means of seeing their education as more than a heap of courses. It gives them four threads to follow through every discipline and to support their continuing education beyond college. Critical thinking includes not only logical argumentation and problem solving skills but also developing the abilities to critically evaluate any subject matter – to be aware not only of how to amass and organize facts but also of the procedures by which a discipline determines and interprets its facts and the controversies about these procedures, such as the current junk science debates. The valuing dimension teaches students how to inquire into the value judgments that drive our actions: how to find relevant information and be able to discuss and reconsider these beliefs. The global dimension gives experience in the need to know several disciplines and their interactions in trying to address issues facing our globally connected world. And effective communication, especially writing, is the constant companion of an educated person, being able to articulate what you know so that others can understand.

The USP model offers a systematic framework meeting the GE concerns of our students and faculty to:

- 1- provide a broad liberal arts and sciences foundation within a reduced number of credits
- 2- include a developmental sequence of key skills and knowledge needed throughout college and life.
- 3- be taken early enough to be of use in higher-level courses and the major.
- 4- explicitly lead somewhere – be clearly connected to upper-level GE and to the major.
- 5- involve students with various disciplines working together – multidisciplinary approaches.
- 6- greater emphasis on how to learn, to better enable students to continue learning on their own.
- 7- engage students' interest by permitting them to select courses according to their interest.
- 8- clearly differentiate college from high school learning
- 9- address information and technological literacy; global and diversity awareness and justice.
- 10- Clarify our university identity and advantages of WPU over alternatives such as community colleges.

5. Range of Credits

The University Studies Program is 31-37 credits. An additional 6 credits will be required in the junior level, which may be offered within a major.

6. Program Outcomes

After completing the University Studies Program, students will be able to:

Communicate effectively, using listening, speaking, reading and writing skills

Use quantitative analytical skills to evaluate, process and use numerical data

Identify and solve problems using critical and creative thinking, including scientific reasoning

Describe problems encountered and helpful strategies used to locate, evaluate and apply information

Demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultures, including global and historical perspectives

Describe issues and strategies used to resolve them relating to personal, civic, and social responsibilities

Demonstrate knowledge of ethical thinking and its application to personal choices and issues in society

Use computer and emerging technologies productively

Demonstrate an appreciation for aesthetics and creative activities

Describe how natural systems function and recognize the impact of humans in the environment

7. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

CRITICAL THINKING

Students will be able to:

1. Utilize problem-solving techniques
2. Demonstrates adaptable, flexible thinking
3. Apply critical thinking to produce comprehensive, supported, integrated conclusions
4. Apply creative thinking methods to produce ideas
5. Distinguish fact from opinion, and critical from non-critical information
6. Develop several workable solutions to a problem
7. Demonstrates continuous learning (learning to learn)
8. Collect, analyze and interpret data relevant to testing an hypothesis
9. Analyze historical events and trends using scholarly techniques

Possible Assessment Methods/Measures

- Collegiate Learning Assessment (work with Jane Zeff to coordinate pilot/samples to best serve USP). Standardized test designed to be given to freshmen and seniors to assess growth in student achievement.
- Critical thinking rubric (developed by LLST)
- Information literacy rubric (developed by LLST)
- Successful completion of capstone course

Alignment with University Studies Program Learning Outcomes

1. Use quantitative and analytical skills to evaluate and process numerical data
2. Solve problems using critical and creative thinking and scientific reasoning
3. Demonstrate knowledge of natural processes and scientific concepts
4. Formulate strategies to locate, evaluate and apply information

SELF, SOCIETY, AND VALUES:

Students will be able to:

1. Identify issues related to personal, social and civic responsibilities
2. Demonstrate knowledge of personal and societal values
3. Apply individual choice and action in areas of personal well-being and diversity/justice
4. Explain individual strategy to fulfill personal, social and civic responsibilities
5. Demonstrate knowledge of various approaches to thinking and expression in the arts
6. Demonstrate knowledge of various approaches (historical, cultural and current) to creating meaning in the arts and media

Possible Assessment Methods/Measures

- Collegiate Learning Assessment (work with Jane Zeff to coordinate pilot/samples to best serve USP). Standardized test designed to be given to freshmen and seniors to assess growth in student achievement.
- Successful completion of junior level course
- Adapt rubric from other institutions for use in this dimension

Alignment with GE Program Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate an appreciation for aesthetics and creative activities
2. Solve problems using critical and creative thinking
3. Demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultures, including global and historical perspectives
4. Create strategies that can be used to fulfill personal, civic, and social responsibilities
5. Demonstrate knowledge of ethical thinking and its application to issues in society
6. Formulate strategies to locate, evaluate and apply information

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS:

Students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultures
2. Demonstrate knowledge of global and historical perspectives
3. Demonstrate knowledge of other cultures and world views
4. Apply knowledge, diverse cultural frames of reference, and alternative perspectives to thinking critically and solving problems
5. Analyze global affairs from a variety of disciplinary perspectives
6. Demonstrate knowledge of a foreign language to communicate with others

Possible Assessment Measures/Methods

- Successful completion of Global Applications course
- Adapt rubric from other institutions for use in this dimension

Alignment with University Studies Program Learning Outcomes

1. Solve problems using critical and creative thinking
2. Communicate effectively, using listening, speaking, reading and writing skills
3. Formulate strategies to locate, evaluate and apply information
4. Demonstrate knowledge of diverse cultures, including global and historical perspectives
5. Demonstrate knowledge of ethical thinking and its application to issues in society

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:

Students will be able to:

1. Communicate effectively, using listening, oral, reading and writing skills
2. Utilize technology effectively for academic and professional needs
3. Organize and present ideas and information orally and in writing according to standard usage.
4. Demonstrate understanding of writing as a series of tasks and as a process that involves composing, editing and revising.
5. Demonstrate appropriate language use, clarity, proficiency in writing and citation mechanics.
6. Demonstrate effective reading strategies and processes and critical evaluation of written work.
7. Demonstrate listening/interpretive skills to communicate and work with others and respond to questions accordingly.

Possible Assessment Measures/Methods

- Collegiate Learning Assessment (work with Jane Zeff to coordinate pilot/samples to best serve USP). Standardized test designed to be given to freshmen and seniors to assess growth in student achievement.
- Adapt rubric from other institution for use in this dimension
- Successful completion of Senior Seminar/Capstone Written or Oral Presentation
- Student writing portfolios

Alignment with GE Program Learning Outcomes

1. Communicate effectively, using listening, speaking, reading and writing skills
2. Solve problems using critical and creative thinking and scientific reasoning
3. Demonstrate knowledge of ethical thinking and its application to issues in society
4. Formulate strategies to locate, evaluate and apply information
5. Use computer and emerging technologies effectively