

Working Principles for a Revised General Education Program at William Paterson University September 2008

In October 2007 the expanded WPU Senate GE Committee began work on revising our current GE curriculum. The Committee and its subcommittees met frequently during the year to gather ideas and discuss how we could best approach this task. It held four all-campus forums, attended department meetings across campus and organized online discussion groups. It researched dozens of other colleges and universities who have revised their GE programs and organized this information to help the college community become aware of recent thinking about and models for GE programs.

As a result of this research and these discussions, the Committee continued work over the summer and has created a list of guidelines for the reform of GE which express the ideas collected last year concerning the problems and potential of GE on our campus. These guidelines will inform and direct our discussion this Fall as we work together to create consensus for a comprehensive WPU curriculum for the General Education of our students.

Connectivity and integration over four years:

1. GE will **underlie and connect** the entire undergraduate curriculum.
2. The skills developed in GE will be addressed in **all four undergraduate years** and explicitly continued in the Major. Experience with these skills in a variety of contexts is a key factor in successful application. **College-long learning** helps to reinforce life-long learning.
3. There will be GE area requirements **both leading to and incorporated in the major** requirements. The current division of GE versus the Major will end. New major courses may not be required so much as the explicit inclusion of continuing skill development in current courses. One example is writing intensive courses.
4. There will be explicit **connections of both skills and course content** among GE courses **both within the same term and across terms**. Students and faculty will explicitly incorporate in their teaching and learning how their courses connect. The structure of the curriculum will promote this, such as clusters, linked courses, preparation for research, common experiences.
5. The skills and content required in GE courses will be **explicitly connected to large areas of development** extending throughout the undergraduate experience and beyond. We are currently considering four areas: writing, critical thinking & research skills, global skills & perspectives and self development skills. (There will be four workshops on four consecutive Fridays beginning September 26th to discuss how to implement each of these.)

Revised First-year Seminar and focus on first year educational experiences:

6. The University will develop an approach that focuses **special attention on the first year**, building foundational knowledge and skills that carry through the entire undergraduate career.
7. The **First-Year Seminar** will be part of GE, a **3 credit academic course**, and will be a signature course introducing students using interdisciplinary approaches to a topic or issue of interest to the teaching faculty.
8. First year courses will clearly **distinguish university versus high school** approaches to learning.
9. First year courses will be predominately **small in size** and designed to promote **meaningful academic relationships** with students, faculty engagement and student responsibility.
10. All freshmen will have a significant academic **experience with a full time faculty** member.
11. Provide incentives for more **full-time faculty to teach 1st year** courses.

Types of pedagogy and courses:

12. Increase students' awareness of the educational process through **more intentional learning**; students need to know and articulate why they are taking every course in the GE curriculum. Applications of previously developed skills should be frequent and explicit.
13. The new GE will give students experiences informed and enriched by **disciplinary skills and content**, but not necessarily by means of the first course in the major as we do now.
14. A wide variety of disciplinary experiences in the first 2 years will **prepare students for selecting a major** without necessarily relying only upon "Introduction to a Discipline" courses as we do now.

We will find means (such as the new First-year Seminar) to blend student interest and curricular structure to better match students with potential majors.

15. **Interdisciplinary approaches** connecting various areas of study to each other will be encouraged, both within a single course or in a cluster.
16. Several **experiential approaches** to GE pedagogy were raised at meetings and will be considered for inclusion, such as community service, project learning or internships. Experiential approaches can be developed within GE and carry through into the major.
17. The themes/approaches and student learning outcomes of GE will be integrated with **co-curricular (including student development) experiences** whenever possible. Opportunities to enrich the residential experience with academics should be encouraged.

Structure and implementation:

18. There will be a **reduction in the number** of GE courses.
19. Selection of GE courses will provide **both choice and structured** experiences.
20. Students will have some **flexibility** in how they meet their GE requirements. The options should be clearly explained and not compromise the goals of the GE program. One example would be to fulfill 2 requirements with one course.
21. Majors will have some **flexibility** in how their students meet their GE requirements. Such options would be approved by the GE Committee, clearly explained and not compromise the goals of the GE program. BFA majors are obvious examples and others are possible.
22. Provide **resources for faculty** to develop and implement new and revised courses.
23. All faculty and departments currently engaged in teaching in the GE program will have opportunities to continue doing so in the new curriculum. **No faculty or departments will be eliminated** as a result of the curricular changes in the new GE program.
24. On our campus “General Education” seems to be a broadly misunderstood term that has acquired a pejorative sense. “The Common Curriculum” or “the Comprehensive Curriculum” are two **suggested new names for GE** reflecting the connections described in these guidelines.