

University Studies Program Narrative (Draft 3-20-09)

“When we try to pickup anything by itself, we find it attached to everything in the universe.” – John Muir

Statement of Purpose

We live in a time of rapidly changing technology and communication that has both created and revealed new connections between us and with the world we live in. An education for the 21st century has to prepare students for responding to the issues that will arise in this constantly evolving environment. There is great potential for not only improving our own lives but also those of the six billion fellow citizens of our planet. There is also a humbling and disturbing potential for great harm as advanced political, economic and military systems are developed and used, as well as the effects of human interactions with nature from bacteria and endangered species to the rainforests and global warming.

Our students must be able to confidently face these issues, empowered with an education that helps them 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 is the foundational capacity for this century, enabling students to thoughtfully develop, examine, express and apply their ideas and beliefs and to critically examine the ideas and beliefs of others. “Critical” here does not mean to find fault with but rather to find the value in something.

The University Studies Program (USP) at William Paterson seeks to develop graduates who are such informed, critical thinkers empowered by the knowledge, skills and dispositions essential to life-long learning. They will be more able to recognize and act upon their political, social, economic, ethical and environmental responsibilities as citizens within their local, regional, national, and global communities. Moreover, graduates will understand and know how to understand better the interdependencies and events that impact and continually transform these communities and their personal roles in effecting positive change.

Learning how to learn is a distinctive quality of an undergraduate education, and the University Studies Program develops this capacity in both foundational and major college courses, helping to prepare students for the multiple job changes and re-educations that most of them will encounter. Success in this new world will require combining knowledge and skills from a variety of disciplines. Broad exposure to the Liberal Arts will help students explore their potential and select a major, while applying their knowledge to real world problems will help them to respect the views of others and more confidently act upon their own. The four dimensions of the USP aim to equip students with the critical thinking, valuing, connecting and communicating knowledge and skills that will enable them to meet the evolving challenges in their future careers and/or further academic pursuits.

The Grid of Course Topic Areas

Building on the Guidelines for Curriculum Revision presented to the campus in September 2008, the new **University Studies Program** believes life-long learning begins with college-long learning, that is, learning how to learn that is developed and reinforced throughout all four years of the undergraduate experience—about two years of **University Studies Foundations** and two years of **University Studies Applications in the majors**. The four educational competencies that are addressed are *Critical Thinking; Self, Society, and Values; Global Connections; and Effective Communication*. Within each of these competency areas, a developmental sequence of course topic areas has been designated as shown on the University Studies Curriculum Grid. Each course topic area is open to a variety of courses that fulfill the Student Learning Outcomes and course area description. Students will have choices among

courses for most course topic areas and flexibility in scheduling when courses are taken, with clear linkages between USP offerings and their majors. Major departments will have the option of developing Applications course topic areas in their major or directing their students to other selected courses.

The campus discussions last year and research of General Education reforms in similar universities has led to our focus on these four dimensions of the curriculum. Writing and Critical Thinking are repeatedly described on our campus and elsewhere as the two skill areas most essential to success both within and after college. The other fundamental areas, “Self, Society and Values” and “Global Connections”, are also the two most commonly described general competency areas both on our campus and on others, as well as by employers and is consistent with the “accomplishment and growth” described in the WPU Mission Statement. This proposal has used the publications and advice of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) to follow many of the discussions and issues in current GE reform, and our proposed program is in keeping with their recommendations.

The Grid used to present the proposed curriculum to the WPU Community is designed to make clear both vertical and horizontal connections. Moving vertically down a column illustrates how skills build year to year and move from first year Foundations including the Critical Thinking Core into the more advanced Foundations in Values and Global connections and later into Applications in a student’s major. Viewing the grid across rows allows both faculty and students to get a better understanding of a student’s program year to year—i.e., what level of a competency is intended for the first semester (fall) of a student’s experience compared to the second year second semester for that student. Also the possibilities for the clustering and linking of courses within a semester will be more apparent. Note that the first year is designed to give students both academic structure and choice by providing a variety of critical thinking experiences in the liberal arts areas of the curriculum to help define the beginning of their undergraduate careers.

The Grid helps illustrate the developmental connections both within each competency area and across each semester building into the major. The same information can be shown in a traditional list of the proposed areas and credits throughout the undergraduate experience. Some areas (e.g., writing/communication intensive = WCI) are open to “double counting.” In these cases one course fulfills the requirements for two course topic areas, and thus both requirements can be satisfied. Students may be delayed entering specific courses in the Grid if they have Basic Skills requirements or they may skip parts of the Grid due to proficiency testing (e.g., second languages) or Advanced Placement testing, etc. The need to take major requirements in the first two years may also move USP courses into later semesters.

UNIVERSITY STUDIES

University Foundations: 40-46 credits (“double counting” WCI courses)

Critical Thinking: 5 classes (16 credits)

1. First Year Inquiry
2. Critical Approaches to Thinking in the Humanities (list is alphabetical, any order OK)
3. Critical Approaches to Thinking in Mathematics
4. Critical Approaches to Thinking in the Sciences (with lab)
5. Critical Approaches to Thinking in the Social Sciences

Self, Society, and Values 3 classes (12 credits)

1. Personal well-being
2. Identity, Diversity and Equity
3. Comparative Values in the Arts
4. Ethics and Social Responsibility (may be in major)

Global Awareness and Skills 3 classes plus 0-2 classes in language (9-15 credits)

1. Second Language and its cultural contexts (placement testing)
2. Second language and its cultural contexts (students must demonstrate level of proficiency)
3. Approaches for Understanding Global Issues I: Historical
4. Approaches for Understanding Global Issues II
5. Approaches for Resolving Global Issues (may be in major)

Effective Communication 3 classes (3-9 credits) (**Intensive courses may double count**)

1. University Writing
2. Writing Intensive Course
3. Writing or Communication Intensive

University Applications: 6-15 credits (within the major or directed by the major)

Critical Approaches to Reasoning: 2 classes (6 credits)

1. Research course in the major or directed by major
2. Capstone course in major or directed to interdisciplinary course

Self, Society, and Values and Global Connections – *recommended* (optional 0-3 credits)

Values in Action - one experience from a variety of options

Effective Communication 2 classes (0-6 credits) (**Intensive courses may double count**)

1. Writing intensive in major
2. Writing or communication intensive in major

University Studies Program Foundations courses are mostly taken in the first two undergraduate years and comprise 3-5 courses per semester. Students needing to take major courses or basic skills during this time will rearrange their USP requirements accordingly. Vertically, the sequencing of the two middle columns (Self, Society, and Values and Global) is strongly recommended. The order of the “Critical Approaches to Thinking” courses in column one is open to student choice.

Horizontally, the first year is the most fixed of the course arrangements with fall term: First Year Inquiry, plus the first of the “Critical Thinking” courses, Personal well-being, Second Language and University Writing and then spring term: the other three “Critical Thinking” courses, the second term of language and the WCI course all strongly recommended. Not all students will complete all of the USP Foundations courses during the first two years, just as they do not complete the current GE requirements within this time frame. Majors will have to determine how best their students can meet these requirements.

Connecting courses within a semester by recommending courses to be taken at the same time (**links**) or team-teaching (**clusters**) is encouraged, especially in combination with the First Year Inquiry seminar.

University Studies Program Applications occur during the Junior and Senior years (in most cases) and will take place primarily in each student’s major. Each major will have the choice of adapting or creating new courses in the major to meet these requirements or directing students to courses outside the major to fulfill them.

Explanation of the Four Educational Dimensions and the Course Topic Areas (the boxes)

I. Critical thinking (7 courses total, 5 Foundations and 2 Applications)

Critical thinking is the starting point and context for the entire University Studies curriculum. Critical thinking is what differentiates the college from the high school educational experience. It is a nexus of

skills, strategies and practices that creates the potential for students to continue lifelong education beyond attaining their university degree. It is taking an active and deliberate approach to problems as they arise. It is designed to foster a sense of curiosity, imagination and engagement reinforced by the capacities to find and process relevant information and to articulate personal beliefs and arguments in order to participate in more effective personal and public decision making and action. To become a more complete thinker requires becoming proficient in a variety of approaches to thinking along with an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, their limits and abuses. There is not one skill here that is easily transferable but several emphases and approaches developed across the liberal arts. Critical reasoning is the repeated and deliberate practice of thinking so that one has a variety of thinking strategies available, can respond more rationally in a crisis, as well as evaluate the thinking processes of oneself and others. Critical thinking is the ability to make judgments of value that can be explained, acted upon and assessed for effectiveness. Critical thinking requires gaining literacy in the use of information and technology for learning, which will be incorporated into each of these courses. The authoritative role of a textbook may require some rethinking in a course that questions such authority.

First Year Inquiry (FYI)

This seminar will be an introduction to the undergraduate academic experience. Faculty will have the opportunity to teach an issue or topic they love at an appropriate level for beginning the college careers of new students. A portion of the course will specifically address Critical Thinking issues concerning clarity of thought, expression and argument and strategies for dealing with them. Another portion will incorporate some of the adjustment to college material from the current First Year Seminar course, such as understanding the curriculum, effective study practices, time management, etc. Developing effective writing and speaking will also be a course emphasis. Connecting the First Year Inquiry with other courses within the semester through related courses (links) or team-teaching (clusters) is encouraged.

Students will select their FYI seminar according to their interests. Some seminars could appeal to students in or considering a particular major. Some could include a service or civic engagement component. Some could help departments make contact with potential majors through topics of mutual interest. The First Year Experience office will maintain a website with descriptions of each section, permitting students to select their top 5 choices and be placed into one of these.

“Critical Approaches to Thinking” courses

There are at least four distinct academic approaches for identifying and evaluating problems and applying reason in working toward their solution, those practiced in Humanities, in Mathematics, in Science and in Social Science. These could approximately be described as focused upon but not limited to interpretation, quantification, scientific method and norm-based method respectively. Experiencing how practitioners in each area exercise their reasoning will be a major aspect of each course. Each course will give a broad overview of the variety of disciplines in its area including discussion of the variety of thinking strategies and methods within this approach that these various disciplines and interdisciplinary efforts use. Strengths and weaknesses of each approach will be discussed along with current debates concerning this type of thinking – both in the profession and in current events, such as valid versus “junk” science. Each course may be taught from the perspective of one discipline or one thinker working in this area or may be a joint interdisciplinary (united) or multidisciplinary (parallel) effort among the disciplines. It is not so much an introduction to the discipline for majors as it is to subject matters and how to deal with these – how to think about them in the discipline (or several) and its general academic area.

The four courses can be taken in any order, with the possibility of more than one in a semester. Connecting courses within a semester through sharing the same students in parallel teaching (links) or team-teaching (clusters) is encouraged.

Critical Approaches to Thinking – Humanities

Critical Approaches to Thinking – Mathematics

Critical Approaches to Thinking – Science

Critical Approaches to Thinking – Social Science

Research in Major or directed by Major

Many majors already have a discipline-specific research course that works with the application of critical reasoning in their field. All majors will be encouraged to provide such a course or to direct students to a higher-level experience in critical thinking. Such courses could include rhetoric, statistics, logic, etc.

Capstone in major or Interdisciplinary option

Most majors now have a capstone course for all of their students, and all majors will be encouraged to provide such a culminating experience for their students. For students in majors without a capstone experience, there will be an option of an interdisciplinary culminating experience to bring together their undergraduate career through applying what they have learned to problems in the post-graduate world.

II. Self, Society and Values (4 courses total, 4 Foundations and 1 optional Applications)

The capacity to formulate, evaluate and articulate the motivating values in our lives is an essential prerequisite for a more effective and satisfying personal and professional life and for citizen participation in a democracy. Developing this capacity begins with a focus on the self and the information, beliefs and values the individual uses to manage his or her well being and the serious consequences these can have for ourselves and others. These consequences will then be examined further in the broader social and global context of how issues of race, class, and gender impact the rights and experiences of everyone. The role of values in our lives is examined further in the arts and then in ethics and its applications in social and civic responsibility. Exploring the variety of ethical and aesthetic values and belief systems across history and across cultures in today's world helps students better understand and act upon their own values and be able to respect and discuss the values of others, promoting greater tolerance and communication. This study of values and their consequences in self and society will provide students with a broader view of what values people hold and why they hold them. It will prepare students for better selecting and articulating the values and beliefs that best reflect their interests, lead to a better understanding and respect for others, and enable them to participate with others more effectively locally, nationally and globally.

Personal Well-being

Our values, beliefs and habits inform our lifestyle behaviors, having consequences for both our own well-being and that of those around us. Student well-being issues are a main reason for lowered undergraduate performance and dropping out, as well as for similar personal and professional problems after college. Discovering and maintaining personal physical and mental well-being is a difficult task amid the competing claims of living in the residence halls (50% of freshmen), personal and cultural habits, peer groups, popular culture, and an overload of unregulated information from the internet. Courses in this area will provide opportunities to critique information, examine values, attitudes and beliefs that govern personal behavior, and develop the knowledge and skills necessary to support life long well-being for undergraduate, personal and professional success.

Identity, Diversity and Equity

We each identify ourselves through membership in many different groupings, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion, neighborhood, area of study, etc. All of these identities have had and will continue to have consequences in our lives. The relations among these groups may not always be transparent, especially where one group enjoys advantages over or oppresses another. Courses in this area will examine such dominant relationships both in the United States and the world, promote an open discussion of the consequences of these advantages, and examine ways to achieve greater group and personal equality.

Comparative Values in the Arts

This area offers students a broad understanding of the role of the arts and of the personal and cultural values reflected in a variety of forms - from visual art to music, theater to film, literature to dance – across a wide range of time periods and cultures. Understanding the values of others promotes more informed communication and appreciation of one's own values. The ability of the arts to both engage with and

reflect upon their own historical moment and the contemporary world is uniquely useful in helping students to think, write, and speak thoughtfully about the world around them, and how that world has been perceived and interpreted by other cultures and earlier generations. Courses in this area combine an examination of the visual, written and performing arts – through direct contact with works of art, music, literature, theater, and film – with an emphasis on thoughtful and creative written and spoken communication. There could develop interdisciplinary courses spreading the focus among several or all of these areas.

Ethics and Social Responsibility

Courses in this area will give students two types of related opportunities to reflect and build upon their previous three experiences with better understanding the formation and role of values in our lives. Ethics is concerned with the processes and reasons by which people decide what actions to perform, while our social responsibility further includes both how these actions affect others and also how to make these actions most effective in our world. Understanding the variety of approaches to determining ethical values both in history and across various cultures and belief systems today will help students better examine, develop and ground their own ethical values as well as understand, articulate and constructively discuss the values held by others. Helping students become more knowledgeable and competent agents in their social and civic lives enables them to more effectively and responsibly participate in their local, national and global environments. Both of these approaches will help students better understand and act upon their own values and be able to respect and discuss the values of others.

Values in Action

In this *recommended* course the examination of values and their consequences reaches its fruition in the application of one's values in various personal, professional and civic life situations either within or outside of one's major. Many different experiential educational opportunities are encouraged, for example internships, study abroad, civic engagement, service learning, etc. Majors may organize projects for the consideration of value issues in the application of the discipline's skills to real career situations. If the major so chooses, students may select an interdisciplinary approach to these issues combining several disciplines in a common project. Credit bearing courses will include a discussed and written reflective component.

III. Global Connections (3 courses total, 3 Foundations and 1 Application- optional)

“Many of the questions shaping higher education today arise from an interdependent world community in the midst of profound social, political, economic, and cultural realignments. Systems are being redesigned, relationships renegotiated, and modes of commerce and communication transformed. The problems we face—as individuals and societies—are urgent and increasingly defined as global: environment and development, health and disease, conflict and insecurity, poverty and hopelessness. Similarly, the goals of democracy, freedom, equity, justice, and peace are increasingly understood to encompass the globe and play out across multiple and complex cultures. Such global challenges cut across academic disciplines and require multidisciplinary perspectives.” (From the AACU Global Learning Project) The three Global Issues courses will each be in a different discipline.

Note that *the Non-Western requirement* will continue as it is, that is, a course that can either be stand-alone or double-counted in either the USP or major curriculum.

Second language requirement (0-6 credits)

All students will take a placement test and be placed in their appropriate level from Basic-I through Intermediate-I. Successful completion of the Intermediate-I level fulfills this requirement. Students who place at the Intermediate-II level will be encouraged to continue their language studies but will not be required to do so. Students continuing a language from high school will continue these studies in their freshman year.

The University is considering whether proficiency in a second language will be a graduation rather than a USP requirement. Pending resolution of this issue, these credits may not be included as part of the University Studies Foundations.

Approaches for Understanding Global Issues I : Historical

Many global issues today are deeply interdisciplinary with complex histories of lands and peoples, political systems and religions, economies and culture, mixing with the natural distribution of resources (or the lack thereof) and the local applications of technology to create dozens of different accounts and approaches on almost any issue that is raised. Understanding as many of these dimensions as possible about an issue is necessary in order to be an active participant in our personal, professional and political lives. Students will select two of these foundations for greater competency and then apply these approaches to an actual global issue as described below. The first approach course emphasizes the significance of historical context and is taught from the perspective of a discipline that extensively uses historical method and analysis.

Approaches for Understanding Global Issues II

This is the second of the two required foundational approaches for understanding and working upon major global issues. This must be taken in a discipline other than that for Global Approaches I.

Approaches for Resolving Global Issues

There are many Big Problems in our world today, which span both national and disciplinary borders. This course area will use the foundational skills students have previously acquired and practiced to examine how such issues can be approached, why they are resistant to resolution and what sort of strategies might work in the future. Courses in this area will use a number of approaches in the examination of its topic problem beyond the home discipline of the instructor, including quantitative approaches in reading graphs and interpreting statistics. This course must be taken in a discipline other than those chosen for Global Approaches I and II.

Majors can choose to offer this course within the major or not.

IV. Effective Communication (5 courses total, 3 Foundations and 2 Applications)

The development in this area is based on building effective communication skills through repeated guided experiences and practice. The intensive courses will explicitly address and incorporate writing and communication processes and projects. All writing and/or communication intensive courses after the first term University Writing course can be double counted, that is, combined with another course in or out of the USP curriculum to fulfill two requirements with one course. This can happen both with the two Intensive courses in the Foundations section and the two in the Applications section in the major. Intensive courses will be defined by the amount of time on task both in terms of class time and student productivity. It is suggested that faculty spend the equivalent of at least 15% (4 sessions = 300 minutes) of class time on writing issues and students must produce at least 20 pages of reviewed material for the course. Similar requirements will be developed for the communication intensive courses.

University Writing

This is the first semester English composition course. The material used for writing assignments in this course could vary with the teacher's interests, so long as the primary emphasis is on developing students' skills to make them better writers. All students will acquire and keep an English Usage Handbook for reference throughout their undergraduate career and beyond. Interested and appropriately trained WPU faculty from any discipline can apply to the Director of Freshman English to discuss participating in this course. This course cannot be double counted.

Writing Intensive

This course can be offered through any discipline and can also meet one of the other USP requirements. Any course determined to be writing intensive must meet the standards identified for that designation, including requiring a commitment to drafts of papers, timely feedback, use of writing as a learning as well as evaluation tool, developing sense of writing as appropriate to a particular audience, etc.

Writing and/or Communication Intensive

One Intensive course at the foundations level may also include broader issues about communication, either in connection with writing or by itself. Such issues may include oral forms of communication, the use of communication technology in presentations and methods for other career situations, etc.

Writing and/or Communication Intensive in the Major

One Intensive course at the Applications level may also include broader issues about communication, either in connection with writing or by itself.

Writing Intensive in the Major

For many majors this may be the capstone course with the requisite amount of class and student time involved with writing issues in the major and its media of communication.