

Report of the General Education Committee On Phase II BRIDGE Proposals

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Preface. This report reflects the considered mutual opinion of the General Education Committee regarding the Phase II BRIDGE Proposals. The Committee bore in mind the following questions in undertaking this examination and comparison: do the proposals preserve the spirit of General Education at SIUE, and do they reflect the goals and values of the University?

We would like to start by expressing our appreciation for the enormous effort the design teams expended in the creation of their proposals. We would also like to say that all of the proposals are well-crafted and represent realistic models for the redesign of a strong general education program. All three proposals seem easy to understand and often require fewer hours to complete than our current program.

Proposal One:

Students' Integrated and Universal Essential Education (SIUE Education)

This design proposes a **Foundations Requirement** consisting of Written Fluency (ENG 101, ENG 102), Quantitative Literacy (QL 101, new course), Reasoning and Argumentation (RA 101), and Oral Communication (SPC 105). In addition, there is a **Breadth Requirement** that divides a distribution requirement into six distribution areas, requiring the completion of one course from each area: Fine and Performing Arts (**FPA**), Human Experience, Literature, & Philosophy (**HELP**), Language & Communication (**LC**), Life & Earth Sciences (**LES**), Physical Sciences (**PS**), and Social Sciences (**SS**). There is also an Interdisciplinary Studies requirement, except that, unlike the present IS courses, IS courses are limited to 25 students and must include both an analytical reading and a writing component.

This is a very thorough proposal, and may be one of the easiest to implement. It should not present significant difficulties in practical application for advisors or students. One of its strengths is that every student will be required to take a lab science and a public speaking

course. By the same token, the proposal may not represent a significant improvement on the program currently in place.

The program recognizes the distinction between the BA and the BS that is built into our current program and strengthens it. The BS would no longer be a mere default degree, an excellent and long-overdue recommendation, which will play a role in any of the reforms that are adopted.

This proposal has an emphasis on smaller class sizes and experience outside the traditional classroom. The proposed requirements for the New Freshman Seminar seem reasonable and will provide a common experience for all freshmen (a similar feature is to be found in Proposal Three). We also appreciate the proposed inclusion of a writing component for all IS courses. Information literacy is a proposal that will strengthen the education of the students. The proposal expands on the current guidelines for the New Freshman Seminar (which it envisions as being met by NFS configured courses in any of the six areas of the Breadth distribution requirement) by mandating an out-of-classroom component.

A BA requires eight (8) courses in fine arts or humanities, including a two-semester sequence in a foreign language. Importantly, two foreign language courses must actually be taken, regardless of where students begin, as indicated by the placement exam. The BS requires eight (8) courses in sciences, including two lab courses. There is also a health/wellness requirement, but it is a no-credit graduation requirement that can be satisfied by approved courses, workshops, or some other option. Finally, there is an ethics requirement, which can be satisfied as part of major programs.

Proposed oversight by the office of the Associate Dean for Student Development and General Education provides a good means of managing the program and assessing student learning, sure to be a challenge in such a wide-ranging program.

The proposal would implement a more clearly defined prerequisite structure. This would encourage and require the acquisition of basic skills courses before advancing to other coursework, which is pedagogically desirable. Many students spend a significant period as undeclared majors; therefore, students may not benefit from the extensive choices offered. Students who are pursuing a professional-type degree, such as in engineering or nursing, need more, rather than less guidance in their general education. It is not clear how we can

ensure that Foundations courses would be completed in the first 30 credit hours of a student's program.

Adjustments to the scheme will have to be made, however, to reflect the field-specific knowledge of faculty and their knowledge of the current course offerings of their departments: such problems were noticed in connection with suggested courses in English and CMIS.

The finer classifications will ensure that students get a broader exposure to areas outside of their intended majors, although we have reservations about the goal of "exposure to diverse subjects" and the choice of courses from six disciplinary "Breadth Areas." The goal is a good, one, to tailor courses to student "major" interests. Yet this may run counter to the "generalist" goal of a "general" education program. Significant overlap is possible between general education courses and major/ minor courses which seems to work against providing students with a strong and broad background outside their area of expertise (with maximum overlap, a student would only need 10 general education courses). Integration of knowledge and the application of skills is not maintained throughout the curriculum and throughout the four-year degree program.

Overall, this is an elegant program that would, for the most part, use existing courses. Like the other two proposals, it would certainly satisfy the "Objectives for the Baccalaureate Degree" and is likely to find acceptance in the General Education Committee, the Curriculum Council, and the Faculty Senate.

Proposal Two: Integrated Core

The Integrated Core proposal features four new integrated core courses: Investigation and Expression of the Human Experience (**FAH 101**); Science and Human Endeavor (**NS 101**); Social Construction of Individuals and Society (**SS 101**); and Diversity, Global Engagement and Social Responsibility (**Global Citizenship 301**). Each of the first three new courses integrates and connects the subject matter of disciplines that make up the larger categories--fine arts and humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. And each of the new 101 courses will be linked with a skills course: Written Expression II, Critical Thinking, Communication Studies. Written Expression I and Quantitative Reasoning I will be taught as free-standing courses. Global Citizenship 301 will also be a free-standing course. The **quantitative reasoning requirement** will not apply to students who complete a higher level math course. Finally, there is a **Balance requirement** of six hours or two courses in liberal arts disciplines that are not reflected in students' major area of study. All students, under this plan, must have a **laboratory science** course (either in the major or as a Balance course).

This is the most radical of the proposals and probably the most difficult to implement. There is a practical concern about the logistics of providing for large classrooms and faculty needed to team-teach the FAH, SS, and NSM sections that are linked to Skills courses.

The proposal encourages team teaching, which is currently emphasized by CAS, and should be appeal to other units as well. We strongly approve this emphasis on team-taught, cross disciplinary courses. Team-taught foundations courses linked to skills courses would provide integration of knowledge early in the students' academic experience.

The proposal would create community between entering students through the links between foundations courses and skills sections—in addition to sitting in a large foundations course, students in one of the break-out skills sections would also benefit from the personal and educational connections and communication possible in small groups.

The idea of linking the four required integrated, team-taught courses with 100-level "skills" courses might prove to be unwieldy and require extensive planning and extra time spent by instructors. This raises

questions of faculty development, balance of work-loads and compensation.

It is clear that this program will do even less than our current program to encourage students to take a Foreign Language. In our current General Education program, at least, there is Option A and Option B.

The following oversights also seem significant: the New Freshman Seminar is not addressed as thoroughly as other proposals; health/wellness objective not addressed with a requirement; information literacy not part of the requirement structure.

The descriptions of the perspectives, benefits, and approach of the various disciplines and courses are in some cases seem antiquated, argumentative, or inaccurate. These should be rethought and some of the goals (and titles) restated.

The proposal states that the New Freshman Seminar requirement is retained, but can be fulfilled by a required skills course. This is an error. The wording should probably indicate that, in place of UNIV112, for example, or some other Freshman Seminar course, students can substitute an LAS course that is linked with a Skills course.

The main strength of this proposal is its emphasis on integration and connection of different fields of study. Linking skills courses with "content" courses will help students gain an understanding of how the knowledge and skills connected to various disciplines can enrich their education and their lives. However, it might be difficult to achieve this laudable goal if students have little knowledge in these areas of study. Also, the integration of knowledge explored in the first year is not maintained through the rest of the academic experience.

This proposal appears to meet the University's "Objectives for the Baccalaureate Degree." It is likely to be found acceptable by the General Education Committee, the Curriculum Council, and the Faculty Senate. It is integrated and interdisciplinary, and addresses the New Freshman Seminar, Interdisciplinary Studies, Intergroup Relations, International Issues/Culture, writing proficiency, quantitative literacy, and the issue of transfer coursework (all requirements can potentially be met with transfer courses except the Global Citizenship course).

Proposal Three Learning Communities

This proposal reflects a social constructionist viewpoint: "Translating experience into meaningful understanding happens through social interaction in a context where students explore, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize knowledge" (Lev Vygotsky). This well-planned design features the use of a **learning communities** approach to teaching and learning. A signal virtue (unique among the designs) is the fact that this general education program encompasses all four undergraduate years. Two kinds of learning communities are envisioned: **Type A**, which are linked, fully integrated courses based on a single theme and team-taught by two full-time faculty; and **Type B**, which features linked courses that meet separately but have some coordinated content. Significantly, the LC plan requires a **laboratory science** course, a **quantitative literacy** course, a **health and wellness** course, a revamping of introductory (111) courses, a **gateway** course at the 200-300 level, a discipline-specific skills course that emphasizes ways of knowing and ways of communicating (the ethos) that characterize particular disciplines, an **ethics and social issues in professional practice** course, and a **service learning** component.

This proposal offers tangible improvements in a couple of key areas of General Education. The program seems to be a more complicated model for students to follow and for advisors to implement. Limiting the size of IS courses is a good idea. The current discrepancy between the BA and BS degrees is clarified and rectified, since the course hour requirement difference is reduced to only one (39 vs 40). General Education would extend throughout the undergraduate experience and not concentrate solely on the beginning years of education. While not as extensive in its recommendations as the other two proposals it probably would be fairly easy to implement.

The principles guiding general education are carried out over each year of a four year program through the Gateway course (in second year), IS course (in third year) and Ethics course (in fourth year), leading up to the Senior Assignment, a capstone experience. This nicely addresses the value of integration and application of knowledge and could serve to create community not only among first-year students but also among older majors.

The idea of "learning communities" is well supported in the pedagogical literature. The proposal suggests that this desirable element is already present in the General Education courses currently

in place, since the University already has CIV, IS, and NFS courses in place, but this is inadequately demonstrated.

The proposal calls for “Gateway” Courses that “will create community among majors or similar majors.” This concept would contribute to an effective linking of student’s General Education curriculum with major studies and more advanced curriculum.

On the other hand, many departments already offer such courses and also require them of their majors. The result will be that in many cases, many “gateway”-type courses would count toward the major as well as toward core requirements.

While advocating the idea of learning communities, the proposal emphasizes skills courses, perhaps at the expense of content-based courses. The quantitative reasoning course is an attractive feature of the proposal. This would provide useful skills, valuable in later life, but without overwhelming students not interested in mathematics.

The idea of discipline-specific ethics courses is another attractive feature, although such courses may not be as important from one discipline to the next. The ethical implications of various disciplines are widely divergent (engineering vs. study of literature, for example). The Global Citizenship course of Proposal One seems to address this issue in a more holistic manner.

This proposal has an overall vocational emphasis, which may appeal differently to members of the various disciplines.

This proposal includes a health and wellness requirement.

The main strength of this proposal is the fact that general education is carried through all four years rather than serving as a hurdle to be gotten over before taking major’s courses. The idea of building community among students of similar majors may help in retention since students will have a built-in support group. The idea of having a gateway course in the sophomore year would provide students who have not chosen a major an opportunity to examine their options.

Overall the LC plan is attractive because it is comprehensive and because recognizes the role of pedagogy as a factor in student learning. The LC proposal clearly addresses the learning objectives listed in “The Statement of Objectives for a Baccalaureate Degree” (General Objectives Steering Committee, 2003). It would be easily

acceptable, I would think, to the General Education Committee, the Curriculum Council, and the Faculty Senate.

General Conclusions:

The Integrated Core and the Learning Communities proposals both require commitment from faculty to team teach or teach linked courses. This is not necessarily a weakness but more of a practical/logistical concern from some units. It is worth noting that all three proposals recommend reviewing the important components of the design every five years. This is the point at which the General Education Committee would be likely to play a significant and long-term role in whatever proposal is ultimately adopted. Such a process can help to ensure that there is no drift from the original intent as well as to make sure that we have a dynamic model. The structure of the Gen. Ed. Committee may have to be examined to make sure that there is enough manpower to accomplish this task of reviewing every five years.