

SUNY New Paltz Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee  
Resolutions for Presentation to the Faculty  
May 9, 2012

This document is a revision of the Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee April 27<sup>th</sup> Resolutions. The Committee has deliberated about concerns and suggestions raised at the April 27<sup>th</sup> faculty meeting. As a result of that deliberation, we have revised this document in the following ways:

- The Introduction now includes a fuller rationale for proposing changes to undergraduate education at New Paltz.
- We have revised the proposal for Civic Knowledge and Engagement.
- The final **Resolution** includes the additional phrase “to the greatest extent practical.”
- We have expanded our understanding of the relationship between the Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee and the committee that will be charged with proposing reasonable means of implementing our principles and proposals.

## **Introduction**

In accordance with SUNY policy, our campus adheres to a regular schedule for revising its general education program. In the fall of 2010, the faculty approved the “SUNY New Paltz Action Plan” (**Appendix B**) to set this process of revision in motion. The Ad Hoc Committee was formed in compliance with this Action Plan. As the committee began its review of GE III, several recurrent concerns came to light. These concerns prompted the Ad Hoc Committee to emphasize the importance of a widely shared understanding of the goals and philosophy of general education as well as of undergraduate education. Both our experiences as educators and our research furthermore convinced us that undergraduate students at New Paltz should build on the knowledge and skills to which they are first exposed in general education courses. This conviction was one of several that ultimately led to the four-year liberal education proposal before you.

The Committee is in unanimous support of the Liberal Education principles articulated below; we believe they will lead students to develop strong skills, establish connections between learning experiences, and initiate learning in a variety of active modes.

The Ad Hoc Committee has been researching, deliberating, and meeting with members of the college community for almost two years. Our research has included subcommittee and plenary study of recently published books on the contemporary state of student learning and higher education; subcommittee and plenary study of

more specific and disciplinary topics in higher education, especially LEAP [Liberal Education: America's Promise] documents; consultation with on-campus experts; examination of curricular models on other campuses; focus groups to understand the perception of General Education III; and consideration of recent NSSE [National Survey of Student Engagement] data.

To shape a plan that is responsive to the diverse experiences and perspectives of the campus, the Ad Hoc Committee sought ideas and responses from the campus community in forums held last fall and earlier this spring. We benefited from student, faculty, and administrative feedback. In addition, we thank the Futures Committee (described in the Action Plan) for their work, and we append their observations and recommendations (as **Appendix A**).<sup>1</sup> We further note their concurrence with many facets of our proposal, for example, their recommendation for a first-year seminar, and their call for efforts to ensure faculty understanding of the benefits of liberal education.

The Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee composition and subcommittee reports may be reviewed at our website:  
<http://www.newpaltz.edu/leahc/>.

### **Guiding the Next Committee**

In accordance with the approved SUNY New Paltz Action Plan (**Appendix B**), the Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee seeks faculty approval **of the set of principles as well as the curricular proposals** articulated below. If the Ad Hoc Committee plan is approved, we anticipate that a new committee will flesh out the logistical and administrative dimensions of these proposals to the greatest extent practical, and will submit its proposals to the faculty for ratification. Approving the Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee Resolution makes it possible for this next committee to begin its work and to establish reasonable means by which these ideas can be implemented. The next committee must secure support from the Provost for appropriate faculty professional development, stipends, and release time for the faculty tasks required to bring the proposals into being.

### **Philosophy**

Our liberal education proposal grows out of our experience with students, especially our experience teaching at New Paltz. Our proposal seeks to build on the traditions and successful practices in place. It is also shaped by our research to determine what kinds of pedagogic practices have the most significant, beneficial, and enduring effects on student learning and development. (See for example, **Appendix D: Components of High-Impact Practices**.) Finally, the Committee has sought to respond to the changing dynamics of the communities in which our students will

live and work: to empower students to act productively and positively and to foster their prosperity.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities delineates the benefits of liberal education. Liberal education:

- Equips students with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and cultivates social responsibility and a strong sense of ethics and values;
- Prepares students to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world;
- Fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions;
- Liberates students to explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and service to their communities.

### **Essential Principles**

The Ad Hoc Committee believes that general education objectives should be enfolded into a four-year liberal education plan. As students advance through their undergraduate education, they should develop skills, build on bodies of knowledge, and integrate and apply their learning in new contexts. As they progress from fall to spring and from year to year, students should not envision themselves entering and exiting a series of discrete chambers, but should imagine themselves at the center of an ever-widening circle.

This diffusion of liberal education goals across the four-year curriculum does not necessitate the addition of requirements. We envision the continuation of courses and programs that reflect the principles articulated below and a reconception and revision of other courses and programs to incorporate these principles.

Nonetheless, this proposal does anticipate that faculty and students will do things differently. Indeed, the success of this proposal will depend on widespread engagement with its ideas and substantial support for its realization. We enjoin the campus community to engage in dialogue about this liberal education plan; and we urge that faculty be supported as they seek to broaden their disciplinary expertise, acquire proficiency in new pedagogic practices, and work more collaboratively with one another. This shared culture will benefit students, who will perceive that our diverse areas of expertise do not prevent us from teaching skills in consistent ways.

## Ad Hoc Committee Principles

The Ad Hoc Committee asks the faculty to endorse the following **five principles**:

1. Undergraduate education at New Paltz should fulfill the AAC & U “Essential Outcomes”:
  - Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
  - Intellectual and Practical Skills
  - Personal and Social Responsibility
  - Integrative and Applied Learning

**Appendix C** provides a more detailed outline of the Essential Outcomes.

Students can meet general education objectives as they fulfill these outcomes.

2. The four-year liberal education plan should give students regular and repeated opportunities to practice critical thinking, oral and written communication, information literacy, and ethical reasoning.<sup>2</sup>
  - These skills should be steadily developed in consistent and measurable ways.
  - Wherever possible, these skills should be infused in all disciplines at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels.
3. Students should become familiar both with disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge. Students are better able to integrate knowledge, retain it, and apply it when they have learned to approach it through multiple and often complementary perspectives. The proposed **first-year seminar**, described below, illustrates a curricular structure for interdisciplinary learning.
4. Curricular structures should support **active student learning**, such as:
  - Seminar discussion
  - Critical and creative writing
  - Creative activity
  - Collaborative work
  - Experiential learning

- Service learning
- Fieldwork
- Capstone projects

5. Creative learning, and the cultivation of creative dispositions and skills, should be infused throughout the four-year liberal education plan.

Creative individuals:

- Engage in open and flexible inquiry that leads to innovative, distinctive, or inventive problem-finding and problem-solving;
- May work outside conventional boundaries and conceptions, but evaluate their work and accept evaluation by others;
- Are committed to the creative process as well as to generating excellent results.

Because creative thinking and doing is integral to many kinds of learning, including aesthetic expression, understanding, problem solving, and innovation, the Ad Hoc Committee encourages professional development to prepare and support faculty as they design classroom work and assignments that entail and foster creativity. This professional development might take a simple form, such as the development by faculty in multiple disciplines of a bank of sample activities and assignments.

### **Ad Hoc Committee Curricular Proposals**

The Ad Hoc Committee asks the faculty to endorse the following **seven curricular proposals**.

1. **First-Year Seminar:** taught mostly by full-time faculty, limited to 20 students, and offering faculty opportunities to co-teach.

Objectives for Students:

- Engage in inquiry, debate, and collaborative learning with their instructor, their peers, and members of the campus community
- Develop the habits of mind of curiosity and creative thinking
- Explore through multiple disciplinary approaches the global nature of an enduring question

- Practice oral and written communication, critical thinking, information management, and ethical reasoning and reflection

Several formats for a first-year seminar are possible.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Global Knowledge**

- Students should achieve intermediate-level proficiency in a single language other than English.<sup>4</sup>

## **3. Ethical Reasoning:**

- Students should engage in ethical reasoning in the first-year seminar experience, at the intermediate level in courses across the disciplines, and, where possible, in a capstone experience raising complex issues that promote ethical learning.

## **4. Oral and Written Communication:**

- Most courses should be contexts for practicing oral and written communication in a variety of modes.
- Students should increase their proficiency in oral and written communication progressively across disciplines throughout all four years.
- Oral and written communication skills should be infused in all disciplines at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels.

## **5. Civic Knowledge and Engagement**

Students should understand bodies of knowledge and cultivate skills and dispositions to become active American and global citizens.<sup>5</sup> Coursework should foster:

- Student understanding of principles of American government, political philosophy, economics, and American engagement in world affairs;
- Global citizenship, including global knowledge and competencies, diversity education, and ethical theories and reflection.

Within a single three- or four-credit course, all students should apply disciplinary or classroom learning to address a human or community need. This opportunity to apply and test knowledge should in turn be followed by an academic activity that enables the experiential learning to inform or test academic learning.

The experiential component must be broadly conceived, giving students with diverse skills and across all disciplines an opportunity to explore, define, or clarify their values, interests, and goals. Examples of students applying their learning to social, civic, and public problems include:

- Holding a public debate about an issue faced by the campus or town
- Writing a letter to a legislator about a topic studied in class
- Working under faculty on grant-funded research to address a local environmental concern
- Staging a public performance, mounting an exhibition, or organizing a poster session to raise awareness about a documented need
- Working with Campus Kitchens to solve the problem of distributing excess dining hall food.

## 6. **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math**

- Students should meet the current SUNY New Paltz (GE III) MATH and NSCI requirements, and also take two “STEM-enhanced” courses. In a STEM-enhanced course students regularly apply STEM skills to course content or they apply STEM skills to a major project. Examples of STEM skills include quantitative skills, the application of scientific knowledge, and the ability to use technology to generate and analyze data.

## 7. **Capstone Experience**

- All majors should require students to complete a capstone experience in which they demonstrate:
  - ❖ depth of knowledge and integrative and applied learning in their discipline;
  - ❖ advanced intellectual and practical skills such as written and oral communication and critical thinking;
  - ❖ where possible, personal and social responsibility such as ethical reasoning and action.

## **Resolution**

The Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee asks that the faculty endorse its **five principles and seven curricular proposals** as delineated above. In accordance with the Action Plan, we further ask that the Provost and faculty governance groups form a new committee to devise a plan for implementing these principles and proposals to the greatest extent practical. The new committee will also stipulate

how the SUNY General Education requirements will be met within the proposed Liberal Education framework.

Respectfully submitted,

Stella Deen  
for the Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The members of the Futures Committee are Karanja Keita Carroll, Megan Ferguson, Amy Forestell, Don Furman, Ken Goldstein, Morgan Gwenwald, Kate McCoy, Lauren Meeker, Jessica Poser, and Heather Whalen Smith.

<sup>2</sup> The Committee is grateful to Bruce Milem for unraveling some of the ethical reasoning tangle. We anticipate that faculty will help students identify and analyze ethical matters using the formal ethical perspectives that may be important in their disciplines, e.g. utilitarian, political, situational, dialogic.

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1. Clustered courses for which students co-register, along the lines of our FIGs.
  2. A 4-credit course that meets once or twice per week with an interdisciplinary team of instructors and twice or three times for a seminar with a “core” instructor.
  3. A cluster—two or three classes—taught by instructors from different disciplines and scheduled during the same time slots; faculty members would each be responsible for a single class, but all faculty members in a given cluster would be free to switch classes to provide a second or third disciplinary perspective on the topic.
  4. Individually taught seminars linked only by the topic and by one or more common texts.

<sup>4</sup> New Paltz has a longstanding reputation as a center for international study and language learning. In an era of increased international competition and collaboration, language study holds a pivotal place in liberal education. Research demonstrates that those who learn languages with a focus not only on the ability to read, write, speak, and listen, but also on the culture or cultures of the places where that language is spoken, come to higher-order capacities of interpretation and understanding, recognize and value traditions, and gain the ability to be aware of and work within a framework of cultural understanding.

<sup>5</sup> This goal is also a component of the SUNY New Paltz mission:

Our goal is for students to gain knowledge, skills, and confidence to contribute as productive members of their communities and professions and active citizens in a democratic nation and a global society.