

DRAFT LIBERAL EDUCATION PROPOSAL

Executive Summary

A Liberal Education Ad Hoc Committee, including faculty, professional staff, and students, was convened in January 2011 in accordance with faculty governance guidelines for the purpose of reconsidering General Education at SUNY New Paltz and how it could be reworked to reflect the University's commitment to Liberal Education. On May 9, 2012, the Faculty voted to implement the five principles and seven curricular proposals suggested by the Liberal Education *ad hoc* Committee to the greatest extent practical. In November 2012, a second Liberal Education Committee (LEC), also including faculty, professional staff, and students, was convened to plan the implementation of these proposals to the greatest extent practical. The following proposal is the result of this 3.5-year effort.

I. Process of Development

The Liberal Education Committee was charged with developing curricular structures to implement the five principles and seven curricular recommendations, engaging all sectors of the campus community during the drafting process, and keeping the requirements at or below the current GE III credit requirement (39-42 credits). In May 2013, the committee presented our progress and solicited feedback in a public forum. Five more public forums were held in Fall 2013 as we developed more details. Copies of the presentation were posted on the LEC website so that those who could not attend the public forums could still access the information. The committee collected email comments as well. Each comment was carefully considered, and many suggestions were incorporated into the current proposal. (*Visiting department meetings will go here in the final proposal.*)

II. The Proposed Program

A. Overview

In the last 10 years, the College has seen notable increases in selectivity and academic quality of admitted students, significant faculty turnover, and declining reliance on adjunct instruction, creating a markedly changed institutional context for general education. Moreover, there is now increased flexibility in SUNY general education requirements and assessment based on changes enacted in 2009-10. We now have this opportunity to profoundly change our general education and graduation requirements to better align with the values of liberal education.

Our liberal education program seeks to promote self-aware, reflective, and thoughtful citizens. We want to create the possibility of graduates liberated by their New Paltz experience to understand and fulfill their own human potential. Additionally, a liberal education prepares students for an increasingly complex world, focusing on critical thinking and analytical skills applied across a broad array of disciplines.

GE, and the curriculum overall, must transition from something to get through to *something to achieve*. This proposal reflects this goal by encouraging learning with intent, giving students

more choice in their education but also making the interrelationships between topics and courses more clear. It attempts to foster stronger connections between courses and all the individuals involved in SUNY New Paltz's learning environment: staff, faculty, and students. The proposal also scaffolds learning experiences, beginning with a first-year seminar and a reorganized 4-credit composition course, building on skills at the intermediate levels, and culminating in a capstone experience.

B. Student Requirements

General Education Requirements

Category	Courses	Comments
COMP	1	Students must have credit for our 4-credit English composition or an equivalent course.
MATH	1	Students must have credit for at least one MATH course.
NSCI	1	Students must have credit for at least one NSCI course.
FLNG	2	Regardless of placement, students must have credit for at least two consecutive courses in the same foreign language (unless they are native speakers of a language other than English).
DIVR	1	At least one of the GE courses taken at New Paltz must also have the Diversity designation.
ART HUM SSCI USST WEST WRLD	3 or more	In addition to the above courses, students need to have at least 30 credits total of GE courses, and need courses in at least 3 of these categories.

Other than the 2 courses specified in the FLNG requirement, no more than one course may be counted for each category. Transfer credits and credit given for AP, CLEP or IB count for these requirements. The number of credits per course varies.

Additional Graduation Requirements

Category	Courses	Comments
FYS	1	All freshmen will take a first year seminar in either fall or spring of their first year. Transfer students with sufficient credits will not be required to take this course (see Transfer section).
Communication-enhanced	2	Students must have credit for at least two Communication-enhanced courses. These courses are ideally embedded in the major but may be taken in any department. They may also fulfill a GE or STEM-enhanced requirement.
STEM-enhanced	2	Students must have credit for at least two STEM-enhanced courses. These courses are ideally embedded in the major but may be taken in any department. They may also fulfill a Communication-enhanced requirement or a GE requirement other than NSCI and

		MATH.
Capstone	1 or equivalent experience	All majors will incorporate a capstone course or experience. This requirement would not be tracked for students; rather, it is a requirement for departments. We include it here for completeness.

C. Description of Newly Proposed Course designations

a. **Composition**

The 4 credit Composition course, Eng 120, will include the most critical foundation-level content from Composition 1 and Composition 2 (Eng 160 and 180). Current learning outcomes for Composition 1 and 2 that are not met in the new Composition course will be met either in the FYS or in the scaffolded Communication-Enhanced courses.

The intent here is to give students instruction and practice with writing in multiple courses throughout their time at New Paltz: the 4 credit Composition course, the FYS, the Communication-enhanced courses, and the Capstone experience.

Under this proposal, Eng 160 and 180 will be discontinued, but two new courses will be created:

ENG 110 – Introduction to College Composition (3 credits)

This course is capped at 15 students, which is the same as our current SWW courses. Both standard and ESL versions will be offered, and both might still have an extra lab hour and/or tutoring for those who place into them.

This is *not* a required course; rather, it is provided for those needing additional work on their writing when they enter college. Students qualifying for ESL or SWW will be encouraged to take this course, which does not meet a graduation requirement, but does carry college credit. It will not be officially required for them.

AP test scores of 4 will give credit for this course. Composition I taken at other schools (including Composition in the High Schools versions) will also count as this course in transfer credit.

ENG 120 – Writing and Rhetoric (4 credits, BC-O, BC-W, IM)

This course, capped at 20 students, is the main course that nearly all students will take to meet basic communication initial requirements. ESL and SWW versions will be capped at 15 students, which will ideally still have an extra lab hour and/or tutoring as well as an in-class tutor for those who place into them.

AP test scores of 5 will give credit for this course. Composition II equivalent courses will also typically receive transfer credit for this course.

b. **FYS**

Sections of FYS will be limited to 20 students each to promote robust class discussions, active student learning, and full participation. The intent is to foster strong relationships between faculty members and students as well as facilitating camaraderie among students across class and year. This class size will translate to 55 sections/year, split equally between fall and spring.

Instructors will be primarily tenure-track faculty and will come from each of the Colleges based loosely on their proportion of majors. This will break down approximately as:

LA&S (43%): 23 per year
Education (17%): 10 per year
F&PA (14%): 8 per year
Business (14%): 8 per year
SSE (12%): 6 per year

College deans will be responsible for making sure that sufficient faculty from their college are available to teach the FYS. Faculty who have completed the Liberal Education professional development seminar will be preferred.

New seminar instructors will be compensated with course development funds in a fashion similar to those for the development of online courses.

Collaborative teaching: Although one faculty member will be responsible for teaching and grading his or her section, the FYS will be collaboratively taught by colleagues from different departments and ideally from different divisions. The rationale for this approach is to bring different disciplinary perspectives to bear on seminar topics, model academic discussion for students, open cross-disciplinary conversations among faculty, and create a culture of intellectual discourse across campus. To this end, multiple sections will meet jointly every other week. Moreover, faculty members from different disciplines will “switch” sections for the day at least twice per semester.

Common theme: All sections of the FYS will have a common theme exploring the global nature of an enduring question relevant to the human condition and living in the contemporary world. 2-3 common “learning objects” (texts, data sets, artwork, etc.) focused around that common theme will be used by all sections, but individual professors will offer their unique perspective on that theme and supplement with additional texts of their choice. The core learning objects will be determined on the basis of consensus by a proportionally elected standing committee (the Liberal Education Board, LEB) and will remain in place for four years absent significant problems. The LEB will also be charged with determining the seminar theme, which is revisable over time. The committee will strive for continuity. A sample list of possible themes and common learning objects is given in **Appendix A**.

Learning Goals: The primary learning goals for the FYS are to develop a benchmark level of written and oral communication skills, global knowledge, and to have opportunities to engage in ethical reflection.

Co-curricular components related to core texts:

1. General campus lectures. For each of the core texts under consideration, the campus will bring in an outside expert to talk about some aspect of the text for a campus-wide audience. Alternatives, such as a panel discussion, could also suffice. Some of these lectures could overlap with already-established lecture series at SUNY New Paltz.

The goals of these lectures will be to foster a campus-wide conversation and to point students in the direction of the wider dispersal of knowledge across colleges and universities.

The lecture series will be a task of the seminar coordinator and the Liberal Education Board.

2. Monthly faculty seminars. The seminar coordinator will convene a monthly series of meetings where the core texts will be discussed in terms of content and learning strategies. When applicable, experts in a particular text might be brought in to supplement the discussion. Faculty members teaching the FYS will be expected to attend.

Since all faculty members teaching in the seminar will be expected to work outside of their normal disciplinary boundaries, this will be an avenue where they can learn more about the texts and discuss teaching approaches with their colleagues.

Graduate student support: A graduate student in the English or English education program will be associated with a cluster of First-Year Seminars. These TAs will support the development of written communication in the seminars – by tutoring individual students, not as a grader – and will work with the seminar instructor, perhaps facilitating discussions on occasion.

c. Communication-Enhanced Courses

A Communication-Enhanced course is defined as a course that emphasizes *both* oral and written communication. Such a course will offer regular opportunities for speaking and writing in different contexts as well as opportunities to practice the revision process. These courses will be offered at the 200, 300 and 400 level and build on the basic skills of the First Year Seminar and Composition courses. Classes will have the option of being capped at 20 like current writing-intensive courses are to allow time for grading of written assignments as well as time for oral presentations and activities.

These are highly recommended within the major so that different departments can teach students the written and oral communication skills most pertinent to their field and so that students will fulfill this graduation requirement within their major, but the ultimate decision regarding which courses are suited to being Communication-Enhanced rests with individual departments. Students have the option to take Communication-Enhanced courses outside of their major if necessary.

d. STEM-enhanced Courses

A STEM-enhanced course is defined as a course that includes significant content or exploration of STEM topics and provides regular opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of STEM processes as well as skills in application. STEM-enhanced courses typically will include at least one learning goal related to a STEM topic and will devote at least 25% of course time or emphasis, by one of many metrics, to STEM topics. STEM topics should be integrated with the rest of the course. The technology component includes use of computer software or other technology in a nontrivial way; for example, applying Geographic Information Systems or digital media software to problems within the discipline (but not using Word or Powerpoint). Mathematics includes use of logic and interpretation of graphical data. Also included is nontrivial use of spreadsheets like Excel. Merely entering data would not be sufficient, but performing extensive calculations on the data would be appropriate. All courses offered through the School of Science and Engineering are, by definition, designated as STEM-enhanced.

The primary rationale for requiring each student to take two STEM-enhanced courses is to give students the opportunity to apply STEM in their major or other field of interest. Connecting the two will increase student motivation and retention.

In the *few* cases where a major is particularly credit-intensive *and* there are limited opportunities within the major requirements to take STEM-enhanced courses, a one-course STEM-enhanced waiver will be granted.

D. Competencies

- a. Board of Trustees Requirements:
 - i. Critical Thinking learning outcomes will be addressed and assessed in the First Year Seminar.
 - ii. Information Literacy will continue as part of the required Composition course (now Eng120).
- b. SUNY New Paltz competency requirements:
 - i. Communication (oral and written) will be assessed at both the beginning and intermediate levels. Since written and oral communication styles vary substantially by discipline, departments will create their own assessment rubrics for this competency at the intermediate level. This assessment data will be available for submission to Middlestates.
 - ii. All other non-required competency requirements will be dropped. GE courses will no longer be required to have a competency associated with them.

E. Transfer Students

Transfer students will be granted the following waivers:

Transfer student credentials	Waiver or placement
Less than 15 credits	None; still take FYS
15-30 credits	Placement into or place out of FYS by advisement
30-59 credits	FYS waived
Associates Degree or 60 credits	FYS waived
	One semester FLNG waived
	DIVR waived

Note that the Communication-enhanced and STEM-enhanced course requirements are upheld for transfer students.

Ideally, we would like to offer a transfer student seminar to mirror the FYS at a higher level. In addition to the benefits described for the FYS, this would help transfer students to feel more strongly integrated into SUNY New Paltz culture. However, implementing such a transfer seminar is not practical at this time due to the increased teaching load. This can be reconsidered after the FYS has been running for at least 2 years.

F. Support for Faculty Professional Development

Reorganizing New Paltz's curriculum to better support liberal education values can only succeed if faculty have the resources –with respect to both knowledge of liberal education approaches and time – to make meaningful changes to their courses. To meet this need, a 2-

week, full-time Liberal Education Faculty Development Seminar will be developed and offered on a recurring basis.

The goals of this seminar are to enhance the quality of teaching on our campus, increase faculty engagement with liberal education principles, and provide an avenue for faculty to make connections across disciplines. Over the course of the seminar, faculty will explore approaches to integrate oral and written communication skills, experiential learning, STEM concepts and skills, active & creative learning, critical thinking & problem-solving, and ethical reflection into their courses. This will be achieved by readings, discussions with colleagues, and presentations by experts. There will also be significant time devoted to constructing a tool-chest of in-class exercises and graded assignments that reflect liberal education principles, allowing faculty members to immediately and tangibly apply liberal education concepts to the specific courses they teach. Faculty will revise at least one syllabus from an existing course. More details on the projected seminar content are given in **Appendix B**.

Faculty participation in this seminar will be voluntary, and faculty will receive a stipend (\$2000) for their time. Participation will be limited to 20 faculty per seminar, and the seminar will be repeated annually for the first several years. A seminar during the winter session will also be held during the first year to maximize faculty exposure prior to offering the FYS.

G. Integration of Liberal Education at Student and Faculty Orientations

The LE principles, requirements, and advantages will be introduced at student orientation in a fashion similar to how GE III is presented now. At faculty orientation, new faculty will also be introduced to these topics and given guidance on how to advise students with respect to their liberal education. For courses meeting a graduation requirement under the LE model, a brief paragraph explaining how the course fits into the overall LE themes of scaffolding, integration, and breadth of content will be requested in the course syllabus.

III. Sustainability and Implementation

A. **Cost:** The implementation of this proposal will have certain set costs (e.g., new lines in LLC and Math; stipends for the Liberal Education Faculty Development Seminar) and other more variable expenses (e.g., savings due to offering less GE courses, but additional costs due to covering FYS sections). See **Appendix C** for further details.

B. Sustaining the Liberal Education program

Changes to General Education courses: During the transition, the Curriculum Committee will review proposals to jointly list current DIVR courses as a second GE category as well as current GE courses that apply to add the DIVR designation. Since the definitions of GE categories have not changed, no further reexamination of current courses will be necessary.

Liberal Education Board: The primary duties of the LEB will be to oversee certification of both STEM and communication-enhanced courses, select the theme and readings for the FYS, and be a driving force behind promoting and developing a culture of liberal education across campus. The Liberal Education Board will need to be well versed in the language, goals, and practices of promoting liberal education across the campus. The first group elected to the LEB will be given priority placement in the first Liberal Education summer seminar.

FYS Coordinator and LEB Chair: The LEB will choose a Chair who will be additionally tasked with coordinating the co-curricular components, coordinating with deans for the provision of instructors, and reporting annually to the faculty on the FYS. Due to the enormity of these tasks,

this person will be compensated in a manner similar to the chair of a large department (teaching reduction + stipend).

C. Proposed timeline of implementation

Component of Proposal	Time
Convene Liberal Education Board (LEB)	May 2014
First liberal education faculty development seminar	Summer 2014
Faculty submit proposals to LEB for approval of Communication-Enhanced and STEM-Enhanced courses	F14-S15
Departments submit their Capstone Experiences to the LEB	F14-S15
Departments submit paperwork to the GE committee to dually assign current DIVR courses as another GE category or to add the DIVR designation to a currently offered GE course	F14-S15
English department submits their reworked Eng110 and Eng120 courses to Curriculum Committee and GE Board	F14-S15
Second liberal education faculty development seminar	Winter 2015
Subsequent liberal education faculty development seminars	Summer, annually for first several years
Prepare new advising, progress report, and student/faculty orientation materials	F14-S15
Search for new FLNG and MATH professors	F14-S15
Entering students are subject to new LE graduation requirements	F15
First FYS is offered	F15

IV. Additional Information

- A. Frequently Asked Questions: The LEC has developed a series of “Frequently Asked Questions,” including clarification of procedural aspects of the proposal, comparison of this proposal to GE III as well as to the original proposals put forth by the Liberal Education *ad hoc* Committee, and justification of the more controversial aspects of the proposal.
- B. Appendices: These include the appendices directly referred to in this document as well as material supporting claims made in the Frequently Asked Questions document. A list of selected sources is also present (**Appendix E**).