

Frequently Asked Questions about the LE Proposal

Note that the questions below are grouped into interpretation questions (e.g., “How does part X of the proposal work?”) and rationale questions (e.g., “Why was/wasn’t X required?”).

Questions on Interpretation of the Proposal

1. What is the total number of required credits under this proposal?
The total number of credits of GE [including DIVR] and FYS is 33-35. This does not directly count the other graduation requirements (Communication-Enhanced, STEM-enhanced, and Capstone), but we expect many if not all of these courses to be housed within the major. This is decreased from the 39-42 credits specified under GE III.
2. For the 2 Communication-Enhanced courses, 2 STEM-enhanced courses, and Capstone experience, isn't this effectively requiring 5 additional courses?
No, not usually – all capstones will be required by the major, and we anticipate that most majors will be able to adapt their courses to allow their majors to satisfy most or all of their Communication-enhanced and STEM-enhanced requirements within their major.
3. How does the total number of required courses in this proposal compare to GE III?
This depends on whether a student needs 1 or 2 FLNG courses under GE III and how many Communication- and STEM-enhanced courses fall within a student's major requirements. For a student who would have to take 2 semesters of FLNG under GE III (i.e., placed at the 102 or lower level) and who fulfills all Communication- and STEM-enhanced courses within his/her major, 4 less courses are required. For the student who would only need 1 semester of language under GE III and who meets, for example, 2 of the 4 “Enhanced” courses outside the major, 1 less course would be required.
4. Is “double-dipping” allowed for the graduation requirement courses?
A course may be both Communication- and STEM-enhanced. Likewise, a course could fulfill a GE category and also be Communication- or STEM-enhanced. However, the capstone experience does NOT count as an “enhanced” course even though it will, in many cases, meet or exceed the requirements for such courses. It serves as the top level of the scaffold.
5. What is a “Learning Object” as referred to in the FYS descriptions?
Some would call this a “common text,” but in addition to books, book chapters, articles, or essays, the common “learning objects” that all sections of the FYS use could include data sets, movies, pieces of artwork, field trips to a particular site, or other possibilities.
6. Was Composition 1 replaced by the First Year Seminar?

No. The *4 credit* Composition course, Eng 120, would NOT be either Composition 1 or Composition 2. It would be revamped to include the most critical foundation-level content covered in both semesters. Current learning outcomes for Composition 1 & 2 that are not met in the new Composition course would be met in either the FYS or in the scaffolded courses emphasizing writing. In this manner, students get more instruction and practice with writing in multiple courses throughout their time at New Paltz.

7. In what order should students take Composition 120 and FYS?

Both courses will be offered in both semesters and neither requires the other as a pre- or co-requisite. Therefore, students could take them in any order, including taking both in the same semester if desired. Students who feel their writing is weak may choose to take Composition first, followed by FYS, but this decision is up to the student and his/her advisor.

8. Won't changing the composition requirement result in *less* writing instruction and practice for students?

Under the proposal, students will receive writing instruction and practice in multiple courses throughout their study at New Paltz: the 4 credit composition course and FYS at the beginning level, the Communication-Enhanced courses at the intermediate level, and the Capstone course at the advanced level.

9. How do the proposed FLNG requirements work?

Students with prior experience - *but not college credit* - in a language will be placed into appropriate levels as they are currently. The student will have a choice whether to continue that language or to explore a new language at the 101/102 level.

10. What breadth of language outcomes can be expected from the proposed FLNG requirements?

Least language scenario: A student takes FL 101/102 at a community college or College in the High School. The student's requirement is complete, yet they have only achieved the 102 level of a single foreign language and have not taken any language classes at SUNY New Paltz.

Most likely scenario: A student enters SUNY New Paltz without any form of college credit in a language. That student may get placed into the 102, 201, or higher level of their high school language; regardless, they take two semesters of either their high school language or a new language.

Greatest language scenario: A student without credit places into the 301 or higher level. They continue with that language and achieve a higher level than originally stated in the *ad hoc* Committee's original proposal OR they choose a new language and start at the 101/102 level.

11. How many students currently take only one FLNG course when meeting GE III?

About one third of our students currently take only one FLNG course.

12. How many students currently place out of the GE III MATH requirement based on their high school transcript? What will be the effect on MATH enrollment and faculty needs?

About half of incoming freshmen place out of the MATH requirement under GE III. However, this does not translate into 500+ more students taking mathematics courses each year; rather, a large fraction of students who do *not* need MATH to fulfill their GE take it to fulfill major requirements (e.g., all students in SSE and Business and many students in the social sciences). The addition of one tenure-track faculty member plus 2-3 adjunct taught courses per year is expected to meet the extra need.

13. What about Transfer students who have taken Comp 1 elsewhere?

They will get credit for Eng110, which does not meet a graduation requirement but does count toward the 120 credits.

14. What about Transfer students who have taken both Comp 1 and 2 elsewhere?

They will get credit for Eng 110 and 120. Therefore, their Composition requirement is met.

15. What data supports the implementation of a FYS?

There is a wealth of data available from numerous sources. The most recent, from a study done in 2013, indicates that across the various kinds of seminar experiences, students experience both an increase in depth and retention of skills and content (Keup, Pascarella 145). Keys to effectiveness include seminars led by full-time faculty, the use of high-impact practices, and consistency in messaging (i.e., the reiteration of terminology used to convey the value of liberal learning).

16. What data supports the addition of oral communication to our current focus on written communication in the WI course?

There are many reports from a variety of sources (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *NY Times*, *Businessweek*, etc.) that indicate that the workplace increasingly demands oral competencies—and that new employees/recent graduates are not fully prepared. Whether it is presenting a proposal, defending an argument, dealing with interpersonal matters, or simply speaking off-the-cuff, young people require more practice and clearer rubrics to achieve the desired outcomes for oral communication competence.

17. How does this proposal align with the principles and curricular proposals voted upon by the Faculty in May 2012?

a. Principles:

i. AAC&U Essential Outcomes:

1. GE breadth addresses Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
2. The other 3 outcomes are addressed in the 2 week Liberal Education faculty development seminar. Since this seminar specifically devotes time for participants to incorporate the liberal education principles being

discussed into new student assignments, these principles will infiltrate a majority of classes students take as more and more faculty participate in the seminar each year.

- ii. Regular and repeated opportunities to practice critical thinking, oral and written communication, information literacy, and ethical reflection:
Although this proposal only requires [and assesses] multiple courses that focus on written and oral communication, nearly every course offered at SUNY New Paltz addresses Critical Thinking on some level. Information literacy will almost certainly be involved in each student's capstone experience as well as in several courses a typical student would take at the intermediate level. Ethical reflection will be addressed in the FYS and is encouraged at the intermediate and capstone levels as applicable. Ethical reflection is another topic addressed in the Liberal Education Faculty Development Seminar.
 - iii. Disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge: The FYS utilizes an interdisciplinary model.
 - iv. Active student learning: This is a key component of the Liberal Education Faculty Development seminar, and therefore we expect active learning techniques, many of which are already present in numerous courses at SUNY New Paltz, to be adopted with significantly greater frequencies. The FYS will be a model for this, and the capstone experience also reflects active student learning.
 - v. Creative learning: This dovetails with several of the topics previously discussed and addressed in the Liberal Education Faculty Development Seminar.
- b. Curricular Proposals:
- i. FYS: this curricular proposal is fully implemented in the Liberal Education Proposal.
 - ii. Global Knowledge: The Liberal Education Proposal requires that every New Paltz student take 2 consecutive semesters of a language. In many cases, this will fall short of the original proposal, although students that enter at the 202 level or above will either achieve deeper knowledge within their high school foreign language or learn a third language at the elementary level.
 - iii. Ethical Reasoning: This is incorporated as a learning goal for the first year seminar and encouraged at intermediate and capstone levels.
 - iv. Oral and Written Communication: These skills are specifically addressed (and assessed in some form) in Composition 120, the FYS, two Communication-Enhanced courses, and the Capstone experience.
 - v. Civic Knowledge and Engagement: There are three components of this curricular proposal:
 1. Student understanding of principles relating to this topic would be covered primarily in USST, SSCI, and WEST courses. Although students now have the choice to pick at least 4 out of 6 GE categories including these 3 categories, at the very least students will take one such course, and most students will most likely take at least two.

2. Global citizenship including diversity and ethical reflection: The first year seminar will address a topic of global concern; it will also provide students with opportunities for ethical reflection. New Paltz's local DIVR requirement has not been changed with respect to content.
3. Experiential community service component within a single 3-4 credit course: This is not included in the present proposal. Rather than requiring this for all, we seek ways to incentivize participation to make it more meaningful for all involved. The Liberal Education Faculty Development seminar will address this topic and encourage faculty to explore ways to embed this in their curriculum, and the co-curricular student transcripts initiative is showcasing more student opportunities in this area. Furthermore, we are aware that the college is trending toward enhanced service learning, so over time we expect that many of the obstacles we considered in this proposal will be overcome.

vi. STEM:

1. Meet GE III MATH and NSCI requirements: The MATH requirement, while still one course, is effectively stronger because students will not be able to pass out of taking a MATH course based solely on their high school transcript. However, the GE III NSCI requirement of 2 courses has been cut to one in order to keep the required credits from getting too high.
2. Take two additional STEM-enhanced courses: This is fully implemented in the Liberal Education Proposal.

vii. Capstone: This is fully implemented in the Liberal Education Proposal.

18. How do Competencies and assessment policies compare between this proposal and GE III?

This is addressed in detail in Appendix D. In brief, with the exception of written and oral communication, competency assessment has been eliminated except for the two categories required by the Board of Trustees. Written and oral communication will be assessed both at the beginning and intermediate level, although the latter will be assessed by departments rather than by a one-size-fits-all assessment.

19. How does this proposal align with the SUNY New Paltz Strategic Plan and overall SUNY mission?

There is a direct relationship between this proposal and campus-wide goals and learning outcomes described in the College Mission. Additionally, the proposal aligns with the first goal of the College Strategic Plan and the Liberal Education proposal. The first Essential Initiative (*Nurture Innovation and the Learning Environment*) states:

New Paltz has had a longstanding commitment to active, hands-on, collaborative, and inquiry-based teaching and learning. Such goals correspond with George D. Kuh's AAC&U report on "High-Impact Educational Practices" (2008). Kuh identified the following high-impact teaching and learning practices: first-year seminars and experiences; common intellectual experiences; learning communities; writing-intensive courses; collaborative

assignments and projects; undergraduate research; diversity/global learning; service learning, community-based learning; internships; and capstone courses and projects. High-impact practices improve rates of student retention and the level of student engagement. These are also among the experiences that enhance the ability of our graduates to succeed in and contribute to the complex societies and economies they will inherit.

Rationale Questions

20. Why not keep Composition 1 and 2 as they are currently? Our students need all the writing practice they can get.

Many majors currently lack the flexibility to allow first year students to take two semesters of composition *and* a FYS.

21. There are numerous studies showing that today's graduates need more STEM education, yet the second NSCI requirement from GE3 was eliminated. Why was this done?

The two primary reasons for dropping the second NSCI requirement were that we were constrained to maintaining or reducing students' required credits and that it was difficult to justify keeping both courses when three courses within the humanities, arts, and social sciences were being dropped *and* two STEM-enhanced courses were being added. We recognize that in most cases, 2 STEM-enhanced courses do not give a comparable experience to one NSCI course, but student retention is expected to improve when the student finds the content more relevant and applied to his/her interests. Moreover, a student could choose to fulfill the STEM-enhanced requirement by taking extra NSCI or MATH courses since all courses offered through the School of Science and Engineering would be STEM-enhanced by default. To offset the losses a student experiences by only being required to take one rather than two NSCI courses, we encourage those who offer NSCI GE courses to reexamine them and make sure that students get the most out of their experience.

22. Why are there no specific rules mandating Ethical Reasoning?

We highly recommend that students be given opportunities to engage in ethical reasoning during the first-year seminar experience and in intermediate level courses and capstone experiences where possible. Defining meaningful and explicit learning outcomes is problematic with a topic so steeped in value judgments.

23. Why is the service learning requirement that was part of the Civic Knowledge and Engagement section of the curricular proposals voted on in May 2012 not included?

After considering the array of activities that would count as civic engagement broadened to include as many disciplines as possible, the committee found that this requirement became diluted. To achieve our goal of making the new Liberal Education proposal something that makes students and faculty excited to learn and teach, we seek to minimize "checkboxes" and maximize rich learning experiences. We note that civic engagement is an excellent way of creating such a rich learning experience, but rather than requiring a civic engagement component for all, we seek ways to incentivize participation to make it more meaningful for all involved. The

Liberal Education Faculty Development seminar will address this topic and encourage faculty to explore ways to embed this in their curriculum, and the co-curricular student transcripts initiative is showcasing more student opportunities in this area. Furthermore, we are aware that the college is trending toward enhanced service learning, so over time we expect that many of the obstacles we considered in this proposal will be overcome.

24. Why is “Global Knowledge” interpreted as language?

Even at the 101 and 102 level, all of our language courses incorporate geography, social norms, and cultural heritage. At the 201 and especially 202 level, students get even deeper exposure by reading plays, history of the country or region, and short stories. Moreover, the second Curricular Proposal passed by the Faculty in May 2012 explicitly referred to language learning.

25. Why was the language requirement watered down from the Curricular proposals voted on by the faculty in May 2012?

This part of the proposal, when originally presented in accordance with the Curricular proposal (i.e., all students must achieve through the 202 level) received the most negative feedback from faculty and staff. One of the strongest arguments against the original proposal addressed the disparity of student experiences: some students would need to take four semesters of language to meet this requirement, whereas other students would pass out of the requirement completely. Other common concerns were that it would adversely affect students’ decisions to attend New Paltz and that students in certain majors would find it very difficult to take a course outside their majors for four semesters in a row.

26. Why take so much language when you might not use it again?

The same question can be asked of any other GE course. One of the purposes of a liberal education is to expose students to a diverse array of topics and ways to learn. In addition to the cultural knowledge that students derive, the following positive outcomes apply:

- By learning syntax, verb conjugation, etc. in another language, students learn more about English structure.
- At the 202 level, students write several short papers. The act of writing in a foreign language helps students become better writers in English as well.