Sent (3-30-04) to Gretchen Schuette, Chair
Working Group on Excellence in Delivery and Productivity

Proposal for Transferable General Education Core Certificate

Introduction

A core of general education is an essential part of most associate and baccalaureate degree programs, and it has two principal aims: (1) to introduce students to the richness of human experience and accomplishment and (2) to hone fundamental skills, such as reasoning and effective communication. Clearly, there is more than one way to reach such broad goals, and Oregon colleges and universities presently build on local expertise to offer students appealing variety. This variety is a strength, but it can clash with students' desire to transfer seamlessly while in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree.

To continue to encourage innovative and creative approaches to general education on individual campuses, and at the same time respond to the actual patterns of student progression, the Joint Boards Articulation Commission proposes statewide agreement on a transferable body of coursework that would not be identical at each institution, but would be widely recognized as fulfilling the essential goals of general education.

This draft document provides a discussion outline for a proposal leading to a fully-transferable, lower-division, general-education core curriculum for the state of Oregon. The proposal includes the recommendation that the completion point for the general education core be a certificate to appear on the student's academic transcript.

Proposal

The starting point for the proposal is the design of the Associate of Arts/Oregon Transfer (AA/OT) degree, which allows students who earn the degree at any Oregon community college to meet the lower-division general education requirements at any Oregon University System campus. Since a substantial fraction of the AA/OT coursework is general education (minimum of 55 credits out of the total of 90), this degree provides a model for transferable general education. The essence of our proposal is to allow students to use the general education subset of the AA/OT degree requirements to fulfill the corresponding general education requirements at any Oregon community college or university.

Implementation of the proposal would require answers to these questions:

1. **How would completion of the transferable general education core be recognized?** Completion of core general education coursework would represent significant accomplishment for a student, and should be recognized with a special designation – a certificate, for instance. Such a designation would also help Oregon colleges and universities quantify student progress before degree completion. Each campus would retain the capacity to set its own degree requirements, which could include general education courses in addition to those identified in the core. The body of work represented by the certificate, however, could be assembled at multiple campuses and would satisfy the lower division general education requirements of any Oregon college or university in the areas covered by the certificate.

2. **What subject areas should the general education certificate include?** Agreement on broad subject areas and fundamental skills should not be difficult, since there is already consensus here. (See comparative chart of general education requirements at Oregon schools: http://www.ous.edu/aca/gened03.htm). The common elements of the AA/OT are: courses that develop skill in writing and other forms of communication, courses that develop the capacity for mathematical reasoning, and courses that introduce students to the 3 traditional areas of human knowledge: 1. Humanities/Arts, 2. Social Science, and 3. Natural/Laboratory Science. The form of these components varies among campuses, but they are clearly recognizable. Differences in the number of credits presently required by different schools exist, but the AA/OT, agreed upon and recognized by all OUS institutions, provides a proven solution to this problem.

3. **How would courses appropriate for each area of general education be identified?** The faculty at each college and university are in the best position to decide whether individual courses meet general education goals and are congruent with local curriculum design. What is needed is consensus on a set of "criteria," that general education courses should meet. Within the framework of these criteria, each campus would have the ability to decide which of its courses should be included in each area of the general education certificate. Although state-wide criteria of this kind do not yet exist in Oregon, useful starting material has been created on individual Oregon campuses and in other states. As the attached examples

suggest, we would not have to re-invent the wheel. Our collective Oregon ingenuity should readily yield criteria that will allow campus autonomy, but maintain the connection to our common general education goals.

4. **Could transfer among 2-year schools with different general education designs be accommodated?** Transfer of a completed general education certificate would be automatic, analogous to transfer of a general education package for students who have earned the AA/OT. Moreover, transfer at any time before completion of the core would be straightforward because students and advisors would know which courses on each campus count toward the certificate.

Possible Steps to Implementation

The ultimate success of statewide transferable general education depends on effective collaboration among faculty and on leadership by chief academic administrators across the state. Therefore, the Academic Council and the Council of Instructional Administrators should oversee the implementation process and consult regularly with any group that is given responsibility for the practical aspects of implementation.

(Note: Time estimates are rough approximations.)

1. **Convene faculty representatives from Oregon universities and colleges to decide on the disciplinary areas to include in the core curriculum. (Perhaps JBAC could suggest committee members.) The goal would be to stay close to what is commonly included in general education curricula throughout the state.** (Time required: 1 or 2 meetings – assuming that the faculty invited are familiar with general education and are provided in advance with relevant background information.)

2. **Convene (and/or connect electronically) groups of faculty in each disciplinary and skill area to draft course criteria.** (Time required: ~4 meetings over 1-2 terms)

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3. **Decide on the overall structure of the certificate and the number of courses/credits in each area. It would likely resemble the writing/communication, mathematics, and distribution areas of the AA/OT. Then, ask campuses to articulate their courses to the certificate, guided by the criteria developed in Step 2.** (Time required: 1-2 terms)

5. **Ask admissions office representatives to identify current general education courses that are not universally transferable outside the AA/OT. Establish a faculty committee, representing system institutions and appropriate disciplines, to evaluate the match between these courses and the course criteria**. (Time required: ?? Estimate possible after number of such courses has been determined.)

6. **Establish a standing committee (perhaps continue the one in Step 4.) to serve as consultants when new courses are proposed or the appropriateness of existing courses is challenged.**

Possible Areas to include in a General Education Certificate

Introduction to broad areas of human knowledge

1. **Humanities/ Arts** **(10 credits)**
2. **Social Science** **(15 credits)**
3. **Natural/Laboratory Science** **(15 credits)**

Fundamental skills

. 1. **Writing/Communication** **(11 credits)**
2. **Mathematics** **(4 credits)**

Examples of criteria for general education courses

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Humanities/ Arts

Colorado has developed a complete set of state-wide general education course criteria that you can see at:

http://www.state.co.us/cche/gened/competencies.html

As a sample, here's what they've done in Arts and Humanities:

State-level Goal: Collectively, the general education requirement in arts and humanities is designed to help students:

- Recognize the different ways in which humans have perceived their world
- Deepen their understanding of how social, linguistic, religious, philosophical and historical circumstances shape the human environment
- Enhance their appreciation of the creative world
- Explore fundamental questions of value, meaning and modes of expression and creativity
- Investigate the cultural character and literatures of the human experience
- Learn to approach problems with greater awareness of their moral dimensions and ethical consequences

Criteria for designing a Humanities Course as State Guaranteed: The content of a "state guaranteed" humanities course shall be designed to provide students experiences either to:

1. Respond analytically and critically to cultural artifacts, including literature, music, and works of art by:
    a. Describing the basic elements and their effects on meaning in a work of art.
    b. Relating the effects of geography, economics, politics, religion, philosophy and science on the values of a culture and stylistic features of its arts.
    c. Determining how a work reflects or rejects the major values or concerns of a historical era or culture.
    d. Interpreting themes or major concepts.

OR

2. Compare and contrast attitudes and values of specific eras (e.g. the past to the present), or cultures (e.g. non-Western to Western culture).

OR

3. Understand ways of thinking, including logic and ethics, or obtain a broad understanding of the different questions dealt with by leading philosophers and their positions on those questions.

AND

4. Develop competency in critical thinking
5. Develop competency in written communication
6. Develop competency in reading or technology

Source: Colorado Commission on Higher Education

Courses meeting the AA/OT Arts and Letters requirements shall have as their main focus the broad exploration of traditional liberal arts. Courses qualifying for the Arts and Letters requirement shall also meet these criteria:

1. Build upon already established basic skills
2. Be grounded in theory, which in forms practice
3. Develop critical thinking or creative application of ideas
4. Emphasize the value of artistic expression and human creativity
5. Incorporate interactive learning activities, including performance or studio experiences
6. Require learning at the level of: analysis, synthesis, evaluation
7. Require substantial out-of-class learning, related to course content, on the student's part
8. Require readings and research within experiential courses
9. Develop students' information literacy skills (use of library, internet, etc.)
10. Connect course skills to other disciplinary learning
11. Foster recognition of diverse humanity and build respect for human diversity

From Lane Community College

Group-satisfying courses in arts and letters must create meaningful opportunities for students to engage actively in the modes of inquiry that define a discipline. Proposed courses must be demonstrably liberal in nature and broad in scope. Though some courses may focus on specialized subjects or approaches, there must be a substantial course content locating that subject in the broader context of the major issues of the discipline. Qualifying courses will not focus on teaching basic skills but will require the application or engagement of those skills through analysis and interpretation.

From University of Oregon

Following completion of the requirements in humanistic studies and fine arts, MU students should be able to:

a. Understand the development of the Western tradition (in history, literature, art, music, philosophy, etc.).

b. Examine the nature of research in the humanities and the arts.
c. Understand the impact of non-Western nations, women, and minorities on the cultural traditions of the U.S. and the world, and examine the positions taken by those who attack the canon (in literature, history, music, etc.).
d. Demonstrate an understanding of the creative and artistic processes.
e. Interpret and evaluate artistic expression.
f. Become more sensitive to the implications of the arts and the humanities for the life of the individual.
g. Develop an understanding of ethical principles in the arts and the humanities.
h. Develop an understanding of the institutions and ideas of our shared humanity.

From University of Missouri

Each course in the general humanities category of the general education Requirements will provide instruction and guidance that help students to:

1. Understand and engage in the human experience through the interpretation of human culture and artifacts (this objective must be the central focus of each humanities course); and
2. Become aware of the act of interpretation itself as a critical form of knowing in the humanities; and
3. Make academic arguments about the human experience using reasons and evidence for supporting those reasons that are appropriate to the humanities.

From N.C. State University

Social Science

Courses meeting the Social Science requirement shall have as a main focus the exploration of a social science department discipline. In addition, courses that qualify for the Social Science requirement shall do at least five of the following:

1. Provide opportunities to develop information literacy in the social sciences (the ability to critically analyze, synthesize, and evaluate various forms of information including written texts and other media)
2. Encourage the use of effective communication skills, such as active listening and the clear expression of ideas in speaking and writing
3. Raise awareness of diversity issues and encourage respectful communication across cultural differences
4. Use multiple theoretical approaches of a social science discipline to critically analyze problems and to develop recommendations for problem solving.
5. Use multiple methodological approaches of a social science discipline to critically analyze problems and to develop recommendations for problem solving
6. Encourage students to examine individual experiences and perspectives in relationship to course material
7. Encourage multidisciplinary thinking.

From Lane Community College

A liberally educated person should be familiar with the methodology, practice, and controversies regarding the academic study of human behavior, both individual and within groups. Students will choose from specifically designed coursework in a variety of disciplines. Upon completion of course work in this category, students should be able to employ basic terminology and concepts of the specific discipline(s) or sub-discipline(s) studied, analyze and interpret data, analyze and evaluate primary and secondary sources, identify resources for continued research, characterize competing sub-paradigms within the social sciences, identify key figures and events, critique social and economic institutions and analyze their historical context, argue effectively based on available evidence and in a way reflective of the modes of research and argumentation in a specific discipline studied.

From Eastern Oregon University

Social Processes and Institutions courses shall:

1. be lower division and at least three credits;
2. emphasize elements of critical thinking;
3. place the subject(s) in historical context;
4. demonstrate interrelationships or connections with other subject areas;
5. focus on methods, concepts, and theories for understanding the structure and change of major social institutions, and for understanding individual behavior as part of a social dynamic;
6. examine the nature, value, and limitations of the basic methods of the social sciences, and discuss the interaction of the social sciences and society; and
7. provide a perspective on the evolution of the theories and ideas emphasized in the course.

Human beings are inevitably social, influencing and being influenced by social groups. The social sciences study social institutions and processes and deal with the human behaviors and values that form and change them, and are essential for an understanding of contemporary society.

From Oregon State University

Each course in the social science category of the general education requirements will provide instruction and guidance that help students to:

1. Understand at least one of the following: human behavior, mental processes, organizational processes, or institutional processes; and

2. Understand how social scientific methods may be applied to the study of human behavior, mental processes, organizational processes, or institutional processes; and
3. Use theories or concepts of the social sciences to understand real-world problems, including the underlying origins of such problems.

From N.C. State University

Following completion of the requirements in the social and behavioral sciences, MU students should be able to:

a. Take an experiment/investigation reported in the popular press and examine the extent to which it reflects the methods of social or behavioral science, the ethics of inquiry, etc.
b. Examine competing perspectives within disciplines. For example, in the social sciences students could be asked to examine both functionalists and conflict theorists, positivists and poststructuralists. In the behavioral sciences, students could look at the assumptions that support both quantitative and qualitative research or competing explanations of behavior.
c. Examine the nature of civic responsibility, issues of social justice, and the continued evolution of democratic processes.

From University of Missouri

Natural Science

Group satisfying courses in the sciences should introduce students to the foundations of one or more scientific disciplines, or should provide an introduction to fundamental methods (such as mathematics) that are widely used in scientific disciplines. Courses should introduce students to the process of scientific reasoning.

From University of Oregon

Science courses shall:

1. be lower division, at least four credits, and include a laboratory;
2. emphasize elements of critical thinking;
3. focus on the meaning of the fundamental concepts and theories that broadly characterize basic (rather than applied) physical or biological science;
4. illustrate, demonstrate, and analyze natural phenomena and systems;
5. provide historical perspectives and context on the evolution of major theories and ideas;
6. demonstrate interrelationships or connections with other subject areas; and

7. examine the nature, value, and limitations of scientific methods and the interaction of science with society.

Science seeks to develop a fundamental description and understanding of the natural world, from elementary particles to the cosmos, including the realm of living systems. Students should have opportunity to explore the insights of science, to view science as a human achievement, and to participate in scientific inquiry. This experience includes the challenge of drawing conclusions based on observation, analysis, and synthesis. To ensure a broad perspective, the science requirement consists of two parts: physical science (including earth science) and biological science.

From Oregon State University

Each course in the natural sciences will provide instruction and guidance that help the student to:

1. Use methods and processes of science in testing hypotheses, solving problems and making decisions; and
2. Articulate, make inferences from, and apply to problem solving, scientific concepts, principles, laws and theories.

From N.C. State University

After completing requirements in the physical and biological sciences, MU students should be able to:

a. Apply the scientific method to real world problems, specifically:
    1. Recognizing what is and what is not a scientific problem in the physical and biological sciences
    2. Asking critical questions
    3. Developing working hypotheses
    4. Designing appropriate experiments to gather data
    5. Using appropriate quantitative skills to analyze, interpret, and evaluate data
    6. Developing reasonable conclusions and applying them to new situations
b. Take an experiment/investigation reported in the popular press, and explain the extent to which it reflects the methods of science, the ethics of scientific inquiry, etc.

From University of Missouri

Skills: Writing/Communication

Courses in this area help students communicate effectively, that is

- Demonstrate understanding and use of effective and respectful listening, interpersonal, small group/collaborative, and public communication skills among diverse populations

- Demonstrate effective writing skills through principles of clear thinking; awareness of audience; appropriate conventions of format, structure, and language; and clear thesis development
- Be able to read critically for information; develop new ways of seeing and understanding the world; understand points of view and multiple perspectives
- Demonstrate general information literacy: critically analyze, synthesize, and evaluate various forms of information including written texts and other media
- Develop understanding of another culture through language study

From Lane Community College

Basic Skills Requirements:

- the student will construct sustained and coherent discourse
- the student will synthesize ideas and document secondary sources
- the student will understand the dynamics of oral communications in large or small groups

From Central Oregon Community College

Goal: Students will understand the complexities of dynamic human exchange and learn to effectively express their responses in a variety of communication media.

2.1 The ability to read, view, and listen critically in order to extract the intended meaning of a communication.

2.2 The ability to understand and apply complex means of literary expression (e.g., humor, irony, paradox, allegory, and simile) in textual and other modes of expression.

2.3 The ability to process communications actively, aesthetically, and critically in order to engage in the thought and world of someone else.

2.4 The ability to speak with confidence and competence in a variety of communication settings, ranging from the personal and extemporaneous to the more formal, employing a variety of rhetorical modes and technological tools.

2.5 The ability to appreciate and understand verbal and non-verbal communication across social and cultural boundaries.

2.6 The ability to express ideas in writing with clarity, directness and simplicity, employing a variety of rhetorical modes and technological tools.

From Concordia University

Skills: Mathematical Reasoning

Basic Skills Requirements:

- the student will understand quantitative and analytical skills at a level beyond Intermediate Algebra in an interdisciplinary and/or civic context

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From Central Oregon Community College

Each course in mathematical sciences will provide instruction and guidance that help students to:

1. improve and refine mathematical problem-solving abilities; and
2. develop logical reasoning skills

From N.C. State University

Mathematics courses shall:

1. be at least three credits;
2. emphasize elements of critical thinking;
3. develop problem solving strategies; and
4. include at least one significant mathematical model.

Everyone needs to manipulate numbers, evaluate variability and bias in data (as in advertising claims), and interpret data presented both in numerical and graphical form. Mathematics provides the basis for understanding and analyzing problems of this kind. Mathematics requires careful organization and precise reasoning. It helps develop and strengthen critical thinking skills.

From Oregon State University