Northern Illinois University

General Education and Baccalaureate Curricular Reform

Northern Illinois University Plus
Progressive Learning in Undergraduate Studies
Career Success

- Disciplinary expertise
- Creatively solve problems
- Communicate with understanding
- Flexibility across social, cultural, economic and scientific boundaries
- Engaged teaching and learning
- High quality undergraduate programs

- Our mission is not well served by general education requirements that encourage undergraduate students to think about their academic programs as sets of unrelated courses and unconnected requirements.
Curricular Reform

- Progressive Learning in Undergraduate Studies
- PLUS Task Force

http: www.niu.edu/plus
Background

- Benchmarked 20+ peer-institutions
- Reviewed national reports
- Administered student and faculty surveys (1200 participants)
- Given 14 presentations
- Solicited responses from all colleges
- Developed five key values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median number of undergraduate students</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Transfer rate (%)</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Program credits</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median program courses offered in the program</td>
<td>239</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employ a core curriculum</td>
<td>62%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employ a distributional system</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of upper division Gen Ed courses</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employ capstones</td>
<td>29%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Diversity Studies
- Ethics, Justice, and Policy Studies
- Food Studies
- Gender and Sexuality Studies
- Global Development Studies
- Great Books and Ideas
- Health and Wellness Studies
- International Studies
- Science, Technology, and Values
- Sustainability Studies

NIU
Progressive Learning in Undergraduate Studies
PLUS Task Force - Partners

Members

Anne L. Birberick, vice provost
Patrick Birk, business administration major
Terry Bishop, associate professor of management
Brianno Coller, associate professor of engineering
David Gorman, associate professor of English
Bernard Harris, chair, department of mathematical sciences
Antoinette Jones, certification assessment assistant
Edward Klonoski, associate professor of music
Michael Kolb, professor of anthropology and general education coordinator
Jeff Kowalski, professor of art history and presidential research professor
Christopher Parker, associate vice provost for assessment
Brandon Phillips, history major
Jeanette Rossetti, associate professor of nursing
Gretchen Schlabach, associate professor of kinesiology and physical education
Donna Smith, catalog editor and curriculum coordinator
Julia Spears, director of the office of student engagement and experiential learning
Joel Stafstrom, associate professor of biology
Amanda Thrun, family and child studies major
Beth Towell, associate dean of undergraduate academic affairs in the college of business
Josephine Umoren, associate professor and coordinator for nutrition and dietetics
Teresa Wasonga, associate professor of educational administration

College Senates
General Education Committee (GEC)
Undergraduate Academic Environment (CUAE)
Student Association

Financial and Institutional Research
Office of Assessment Services
Writing Across the Curriculum
P-20 Center
Academic Affairs
  First Year Experience
  Registrar
  Testing Services
Student Engagement (OSEEL)
Baccalaureate experience must be *integrated*
Integrated Pathways:

- The first- to fourth- year experience
- General education to majors studies
- One course to another
- Research and instruction
- Curricular to co-curricular activities
- Traditional course delivery to those that include high impact practices
Curricular Integration

Integrated Values:

1. The Baccalaureate Goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)
2. A Core Curriculum with Enhanced Writing Requirements
3. Content Exposure and Course Breadth
4. Curricular Flexibility
5. High Impact Practices
Round-Table Discussions

Discuss each of the five key values

- Brief presentation of each value
- Table discussion
- Worksheet

Guidelines

- Speak politely and concisely
- Respect each speaker
- Good Listeners
- Everyone’s input is equally valued

February/March

- [www.niu.edu/plus](http://www.niu.edu/plus)
- Additional round tables
1. The Baccalaureate Goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Background

• In its 2010 report, the Baccalaureate Review Commission identified the “Three C Goals” (Critical Thinking, Creativity and Communication) and eight Student Learning Outcomes as cornerstones of an NIU undergraduate education. Together, these Goals and SLOs articulate what an NIU graduate should know, value, and are able to do.

Goal

• *To consciously integrate university-wide learning goals throughout the entire program of study leading to the Baccalaureate*
1. The Baccalaureate Goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Possible Approaches

• 1.1. Map every degree program to the SLOs
• 1.2. Ensure courses explicitly develops student progress in primary SLOs
• 1.3. Configure General Education course distributional areas according to the SLOs
• 1.4. Modify and enhance current UNIV courses to ensure student awareness and progress in the SLOs
• 1.5. Develop a university-wide e-portfolio package
2. Core Curriculum with Enhanced Writing Requirements

Background

• Developing mechanisms to increase writing aptitude, both general and within one’s discipline, was identified by all colleges as an area for improvement in the Baccalaureate.

• Numerous national studies demonstrate that strong performance in more intensive writing classes enhances student retention and success.

Goal

• Increase writing requirements across the curriculum beyond the Core Curriculum
2. Core Curriculum with Enhanced Writing Requirements

Writing Across the Curriculum Model

Baseline for "Native" Students
1. Add first-year seminar in General Education writing

Assessment Path
Partner w/ 1st-Year Comp Electronic Portfolios

Support
• NIU Writing Center
• FYC readers

Mid-Career
2. Establish upper-level Writing Requirement

3. Create Junior writing portfolio graduation requirement

Major
4. Add a 4th-year “writing in the major” graduation requirement

Support
• NIU Writing Center
• WAC Workshops
• UWP Reading Team
• Gen Ed Committee

Gen Ed Seminar
Increased Writing
Third Year Element
4th year Element
2. Core Curriculum with Enhanced Writing Requirements

Possible Approaches

• 2.1. Increase in-course writing requirements
• 2.2. Add a writing-intensive General Education seminar
• 2.3. Create a third-year writing requirement
• 2.4. Add a fourth-year writing requirement
• 2.5. Archive some or all of these products in an e-portfolio
3. Content Exposure and Course Breadth

**Background**

- General Education is the appropriate vehicle for delivering academic breadth in specific domains of knowledge.
- A baccalaureate education that incorporates both depth and breadth, reflecting NIU’s traditional practices, national reform trends, and the existing definition of general education put forward by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

**Goals**

- *To enhance coherence and relevance of curricular offerings while ensuring that students receive an education that is both broad (often achieved through General Education courses) and deep (typically achieved through the major).*
3. Content Exposure and Course Breadth

Possible Approaches

• 3.1. Replace the existing disciplinary distributional areas with broader themed distributional areas

• 3.2. Assure that students achieve breadth in both content related to general domains of knowledge and skills as mapped out by the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

• 3.3. Organize thematically linked course clusters, which would likely cross traditional departmental and college boundaries

• 3.4. Allow students to earn a general education minor in specific themes
4. Curricular Flexibility

Background

- Responses from the curriculum committees of all colleges indicated a need for greater flexibility in the General Education curriculum.
- The NIU General Education curriculum currently consists of 144 courses, compared to a median value of 239 courses at 20 benchmarked peer institutions from across the country.

Goals

- *Expand options that make it easier for students to satisfy general education requirements*
4. Curricular Flexibility

Possible Approaches

• 4.1. Increase the number of courses that satisfy general education requirements
• 4.2. Allow some upper division courses to fulfill general education requirements
• 4.3. Allow departments to tailor a portion of the general education curriculum to address the specific needs of each discipline
• 4.4. Remove the course-for-course requirement for transfer credit
5. High Impact Practices (HIPs)

Background

• Critical learning through HIPs occurs both in and outside of the classroom
• Non-credit bearing co-curricular activities such as research, teaching, service, and internships
• National data indicates that HIPs contribute strongly to student retention, graduation rates, and career success

Goal

• To formalize student participation in high impact practices such as co-curricular activities and engaged learning opportunities.
5. High Impact Practices (HIPs)

Possible Approaches

• 5.1. Place HIPs on transcripts or in an e-portfolio
• 5.2. Add a co-curricular requirement for graduation
• 5.3. Expand credit-bearing course offerings in experiential learning
  – Students create a "learning contract"
  – Experiential activities meet general education requirements
• 5.4. Allow HIPs to document SLO achievement