

DRAFT FOR EPCC

(REVISED WITH FAQs)

Learning Programs Working Group
Report to the EPCC
February, 2008

Introduction

The Learning Programs Working Group (LPWG) is composed of faculty elected by divisions, and faculty and staff appointed by the academic dean. The purpose of the group was to review academic practices and policies at Simpson College in light of the report of the Summer Working Group. This document serves as the final report of the LPWG. Its purpose is to bring forward proposals to be discussed and refined by EPCC before forwarding it to the faculty for approval.

Background

The LPWG used the report of the Summer Working Group as the basis for its discussions. The ideas outlined in this document represent those the LPWG believes need campus-wide discussion. Individual members gathered information from a variety of sources and telephone conferences were held with the registrars at Coe College and Wartburg College. Information from Luther College was gathered during a campus visit by John Bolen, and the registrar at Roanoke College responded to a series of questions.

Principles

The working group affirmed the following principles created by the Summer Working Group:

Principle #1: Simpson students need to be more engaged in and responsible for their learning than is currently the case. This can be accomplished in many ways. One way to engage students is experiential learning. The use of experiential teaching methods (service-learning, research, internships, etc.) is growing rapidly at Simpson College and other good colleges.

Principle #2: The academic calendar, course credit system, and daily schedule should support the academic objectives and overall mission of Simpson College.

Principle #3: The academic structure at Simpson College should be informed by the practices at other high-quality institutions of its type.

Principle #4: Any changes in academic structure need to support the quality and rigor of the traditional undergraduate and adult learning programs.

Proposals and Ideas

LPWG Proposal #1: The number of regular semester courses required for graduation should be 32 + 2 May Term courses for the Bachelor of Arts and 36 regular semester courses + 2 May Term courses for the Bachelor of Music.

Background and Rationale for Proposal #1

After discussion, it was agreed that the total number of courses required for graduation should be based on full-time students at the college completing a regular load of four courses per semester for eight semesters, for a minimum of 32 courses for the B. A. degree and 36 for the B. M. degree. The LPWG agreed with the summer group when it reported,

“The Working Group found that Simpson College is an outlier among excellent institutions in terms of the total number of courses required for graduation. A majority of the “top 100” liberal arts colleges require fewer courses to graduate than does Simpson. Our 128-credit requirement translates into roughly 42+ courses required for graduation. Many excellent liberal arts colleges require around 32-36 courses to graduate. This is accomplished by either using the four credits per course or one course/one unit model. Even among institutions that assign three credits per course, Simpson’s 128-credit requirement is on the higher end of the scale. The “standard” at institutions like Simpson College is typically closer to 120 credits to graduate.”

In addition, the LPWG agreed with the Summer Working Group that reducing the number of courses required for graduation would help students “focus their energies on fewer subjects and give them more time for engaged learning, including out-of-classroom work, service learning and experiential education.” It would also enable faculty to “strengthen or increase the rigor of existing courses.” In addition, reducing the number of courses students take each semester would have other benefits for the faculty and the college. The group agreed that it “would allow for a reduced average teaching load for faculty providing more time for class preparation, student advising and mentoring, faculty development, scholarship, and creative work.” It noted that Luther College has recently used this strategy for this very same purpose. A reduced average teaching load would help the college to continue to recruit highly qualified faculty. In addition, reducing the total courses required of students each semester would free up classroom space and possibly allow for longer class periods.

The LPWG found that it is in the number of courses required for graduation that makes Simpson College an outlier among other good schools. Locally, Luther College, Coe College, Grinnell College and Wartburg College all require roughly 32 courses for graduation (see the attached list for other schools.) With a student/faculty ratio similar to these other institutions, the LPWG believes that it is the number of courses required for graduation (and Cornerstone credit) that is driving the teaching load, not the total number of faculty members.

Q: How will it benefit students to take fewer courses?

A: The LPWG believes that students should be asked to take greater initiative in their education. This is the trend at other good institutions. By requiring fewer courses each semester, faculty will feel comfortable assigning more outside of the classroom assignments. Because the students will be taking one less course each semester, they will be expected to spend more time working on projects, doing individual work, reading and preparing for class. The LPWG found that requiring four courses per semester is very common among high quality institutions of our size and type. (See Addendum A)

Q: Will students be able to take more than four courses per semester? What happens if a student falls behind and needs to catch-up?

A: Yes. Institutions with four courses per semester as the normal load often allow students to take more courses per semester than four, although there is usually a cap beyond which a student must receive approval and/or pay additional tuition. At St. Olaf College, the normal student load is four courses, but the maximum load is 4.50 courses. At Luther College, the normal load is four courses per term, but students who fall behind in one semester may catch-up in a second semester. On the unit system, students who drop below the normal load in a semester may get caught up by taking fractional courses, taking an additional May Term, evening class, or summer school class. The exact policy for Simpson College will be part of the implementation plan.

Q: What about eligibility for financial aid and sports?

A: Institutions where the normal load for students is four course per semester use three courses as the minimum for financial aid and athletic eligibility, but normal academic progress is defined as an average of eight courses per year.

Q: What about double majors? Many of our students want to take double majors. Won't reducing the number of required courses preclude double majors?

A: Almost all of the institutions that currently require 32-36 courses allow students to double major. The number of double majors at Simpson College is about the same as those at other institutions requiring fewer courses to graduation. The LPWG does not anticipate a significant change in the number of double majors. It may be that students will need to be more intentional if they wish to double major. The LPWG also anticipates reducing the number of required Cornerstone courses, which will open some time in a student's schedule.

Q: What impact will reducing the number of courses for graduation have on faculty?

A: Reducing the number of courses required for graduation and the number of courses taken by students in a semester will allow a reduction in the number of courses departments offer. It will also necessitate a reduction in the number of courses required in the Cornerstone program. Some departments will also likely reduce the number of courses for their major. This means that the number of courses offered in any given semester will likely be reduced and so faculty will

need to teach fewer courses. Regular teaching loads of 6 or fewer courses per year are common at institutions requiring 32+ courses for graduation with similar student/faculty ratios. The LPWG believes that this suggests that the high course load is being driven at least in part by the number of courses required in the Cornerstone program and the number of courses required to graduate.

Q: What about teaching load? Will all faculty teach six courses each year? What about faculty in the sciences who teach labs? If labs don't carry credit, how will teaching load be determined?

A: Although the LPWG does not believe the way teaching load is determined will change, the LPWG recommends that each division work with the dean to develop normal teaching load expectations for faculty within the division. This is the approach taken by other high quality schools using the unit system. The LPWG recognizes that there are disciplinary differences and that currently exact parity does not necessarily exist across divisional lines. Science faculty have labs, performance faculty have rehearsals, and many faculty in the humanities have more papers to grade than faculty in other disciplines. The LPWG believes that equity within the division is achievable and that generally the way load is determined in the sciences and the fine arts will continue to be the way load is determined in those areas. The best practices at other high quality institutions will be our guide.

LPWG Proposal #2: The number of hours a course meets per week should continue to be determined by the academic department in consultation with the course instructor. Credit for each course should be expressed in units, one course = one unit.

Background and Rationale for Proposal #2

The LPWG reviewed much of the data seen by the Summer Working Group and agreed that many high quality institutions have credit assigned based not on seat-time but rather on the academic expectations for the course. In reviewing the credit system here at Simpson, the group realized that our current structure already allows flexibility between seat time and credit. This happens with internships, study abroad and courses taught in the evening and weekend program. The LPWG recommends that the college continue this practice and allow faculty members and departments even greater leeway to determine the actual number of class hours each course will meet. The group agreed with the summer working group that it would “give faculty members more flexibility to select the number of class hours based on the pedagogy that is best for student engagement and learning.” The group found this to be the case at other high quality institutions. The one course = one unit system is in place at a variety of colleges including Coe College, St. Olaf College, Rhodes College, Gustavus Adolphus College, and Roanoke College. (See Addendum A)

The LPWG considered moving to four credits per course as Luther College has recently done, but believes the simplicity of the unit system allows students to more readily understand the relationship between courses taken and graduation. The LPWG recognizes that in some disciplines (music and physical education for example) partial courses would still be needed. Partial courses would be assigned .25, .50, or .75 credits by the department and EPCC. The

LPWG recognizes that the difference between a four credits per course system that allows partial credit determined by 1 credit unit is not substantially different than a one unit system that allows partial credit using fractions. The LPWG found that institutions that require 32 courses for graduation and use a credit system award four credits per course for a total of 128 credits. Institutions that use a unit system count courses and typically require about 32 courses. A majority of the LPWG members believes the unit system is simpler and that making a change to units would signal to the academic community that we had made a change in approach and would not simply be adding one more class hour onto each class.

It is important to note that at colleges that have a unit system, student credit for a course and faculty load for the course are not necessarily the same. At such institutions, it is not unusual to recognize that faculty in the sciences and certain other disciplines have lecture and multiple lab components for a single course. Additional lab hours may be recognized in determining faculty load, but not in student credit load. The determination of equitable distribution of faculty teaching load is made by the affected departments and the academic dean.

Q: If the unit system is approved, does this mean that all courses will have the same number of class hours?

A: No. This proposal suggests that the number of class hours for a course is set by the department. It is likely that the number of hours for a class will fall within the existing range, 3-6 hours per week.

Q: If instructors get to decide how many hours a course meets each week, what happens if one instructor wants to teach three hours a week and another instructor teaching a section of the same course decides to teach five hours a week? Isn't this unfair? Won't students flock to the section with fewer hours?

A: The department will set the number of hours per week and monitor the parity between instructors. That said, the LPWG encourages departments to focus on course outcomes in determining the number of class hours required each week, not seat time. The LPWG also has not seen any data to suggest the number of course hours per week is a factor in student enrollment.

Q: If faculty and departments set the number of class hours for a class, how will the academic integrity of the course be preserved?

A: The proposal assumes that the faculty and departments themselves are concerned with the integrity of the course and the number of seat time hours will be appropriate to accomplish the objectives of the course. Although implementation details are incomplete, it is likely that the number of course hours will be stated when new courses are approved. Rather than requiring a cumbersome re-authorization process for all courses to check for academic rigor, it may be that the faculty decide to allow departments to make their own decisions about the appropriateness of class hours. It may make sense to allow the APRC to include a review of these decisions as part of the regular department review process.

Q: What about classes that now require a lab component? Will the students get more credit for the lab? If not, isn't it unfair to the students?

A: Not necessarily. The one unit = one course system assumes that all courses, no matter how many class hours get the same amount of credit, one unit. The proposal recognizes that currently the amount of work performed by students in classes varies from class to class. These decisions will be made through normal procedure (EPCC, dept and divisional input, etc).

Q: Won't students taking labs feel that they are doing more work for the same amount of credit than students taking courses that meet fewer hours per week?

A: It should be noted that parity doesn't exist today. Not only are the number of meeting hours not the same across all courses, but expectations for outside of class work vary from course to course. The LPWG believes that students already understand that seat time is not directly linked to credit. Faculty will need to help students understand that courses focus on certain outcomes and sometimes more structured time is needed to accomplish the goals set for the course.

Q: If we reduce the number of courses normally taken by students to four and move to a one course = one unit system, will there be a system in place to insure that faculty members "add" something to the course to increase the rigor and expectations?

A: The LPWG assumes that all faculty and departments are concerned about academic rigor and the integrity of courses. It anticipates that departments will regularly review the learning objectives for all of the courses they offer and how successful they are at meeting them. This will not change in the new system. It is anticipated that most courses will follow the same format in the new system as in the current system, but that there will be a greater expectation for students to work outside of class time. The proposal does allow faculty members to add class hours based on the department's identified learning objectives. In reviewing the offerings at other institutions, it was noted that the number of seat hours for courses is roughly the same as at Simpson College. The change is in increasing the faculty expectations of students. In addition, by reducing the course load for students, it may be possible to add experiential activity (lab or field assignments, service-learning, group projects, etc.) that are difficult when students are taking five courses.

Q: How do credits transfer from institution to institution in a unit system?

A: The unit system has been in place for more than forty years at many institutions. Generally speaking, a formula is used to translate an academic unit into the credit system. Typically, the course transfers out as four credits. The LPWG has reviewed the transfer system at other institutions and is satisfied that sound methods are available for transferring credit both into and out of the institution.

Q: If faculty add class hours and require more of students, even though the teaching load is reduced to six courses, isn't my work load the same?

A: Faculty work load is comprised of a variety of things. How much time is spent in formal classroom teaching, advising, supervising students in labs and in performances, serving on committees, et al. varies from person to person and discipline to discipline. The teaching load at Simpson College is too high. This has been pointed out in recent NCA reports and confirmed by reviewing the faculty teaching load at other good institutions. By reducing the number of courses required for graduation and reducing the number of courses required for general education, it will be possible to reduce the number of courses required of faculty to six courses per year.

The LPWG does not suggest that a specific link between the “extra time” created by the reducing the number of courses taught each year and additional hours or extra work assignments be made. National studies suggest that faculty say that they work about 55 hours per week. This is across disciplines and does not substantially change based on the number of courses taught. Some departments have suggested that they would like to meet with their classes four days per week, rather than the current practice of three days per week. Other faculty members have said that they would like to add a service-learning component to a course but they don’t have the time to prepare and plan. Still others have said that they just need more time each day to meet with students in advising.

The LPWG believes that if faculty are not in the classroom, they are likely working with students in other ways. The amount of work for faculty will not be reduced if the teaching load is reduced to six courses per year, but the belief is that faculty will have more time to do what they feel is necessary for their students and themselves. There is no intention on the part of the LPWG to suggest that expectations on faculty will be increased with regard to research, scholarship or creative activity, although for some faculty a reduction in teaching load might provide more time for these activities. If the proposal is approved, faculty will not regularly teach more than three courses per semester. Faculty who do not teach in May Term will teach 3-3. Faculty who choose to teach in May Term will teach 2-3-1 or 3-2-1. The LPWG believes that by any reasonable interpretation, reducing the average teaching load to six courses from eight courses represents a reduction in teaching load and will allow more time for faculty to do what they are doing now, and/or things they want to do but feel that they do not have the time to do.

LPWG Proposal #3: The curriculum should continue to follow the “1/3-1/3-1/3” model now in place for the Bachelor’s of Arts degree and “1/3-2/3” model for the Bachelor’s of Music degree.

Background and Rationale for Proposal #3

The LPWG believes that as a general rule for the Bachelor’s of Arts degree, about one-third of the courses required for graduation should be in general education. About one-third should be in a major and one-third should be considered electives. This has been the traditional pattern at high quality liberal arts colleges and offers the student an opportunity for breadth and depth as well as some freedom for exploration. Although this is not a change from current practice, the LPWG

believes that the proposed reduction in the courses required for graduation might suggest to some a movement away from this accepted standard. This is not the case.

It was agreed that some majors would need to be exempt from the rule and that a process must be put into place to review such requests. It was also agreed that about one-third of the courses for the Bachelor's of Music degree should be in general education, with the remaining two-thirds in music courses.

Q: Will there be a “hard cap” placed on the number of courses a major can require or the number of courses that must be taken out of the division of the students’ major?

A: This has not yet been discussed by the committee. These issues will be discussed as we look at general education requirements and will require detailed analysis of all the issues.

Q: If we accept the 1/3-1/3-1/3- idea, does it mean that all majors will be limited to 10-11 courses?

A: No. The 1/3-1/3-1/3 breakdown has been used to describe a liberal arts-type education in the United States for over 50 years. Many faculty at Simpson use it to describe our current program, although it is not stated in the Handbook or part of our major approval process. In affirming this as a general rule, the LPWG affirms this as a general understanding, but realizes that in some majors (especially those with outside certification) meeting this general rule will be difficult. Having faculty affirm the 1/3-1/3-1/3 concept will help provide the LPWG as it develops proposals for general education, and it provides direction for departments in thinking about the size of their existing majors and those departments contemplating new majors. It is likely that the final proposal from LPWG will recommend that majors at Simpson will normally be in a specified range. At other similar institutions, this is normally 9-13 courses, including all prerequisites. This would put the most majors at Simpson within the range of other institutions of its size and type.

Although the LPWG has not started the process of designing implementation strategies, it does anticipate that all departments will be asked to review the number of courses required for majors. Departments who feel that outside certification or good practice in their discipline demand a number of required courses that exceeds the agreed upon range, will be asked to provide a rationale for the exception.

It should be noted that the LPWG understands a major to be the minimum courses required of a student for depth in a discipline. LPWG found that it is relatively common practice at other similar institutions to offer a basic major and then advise students seeking entry to graduate school or certification to take a set of additional courses.

Q: What about “hidden” requirements? Will the number of courses counted toward the major include those required in other departments and lower level courses required as prerequisites?

A: The LPWG believes this is an important implementation question that will need to be answered by the faculty. It is generally believed that at other good schools, hidden requirements usually are not allowed.

Q: What about departments that just cannot reduce the number of courses required for their major?

A: Last year, President Byrd authorized 10 new faculty lines to help departments with the transition to a six course regular teaching assignment. Five of these positions have been awarded to departments as they anticipate a reduction in teaching load. The final five positions will go to help departments with the transition. It should be noted that several departments already have formulated plans to reduce to six courses per year.

Q: If a major is 9-13 courses, how many courses will be required for a minor?

A: The number of courses required for a minor will continue to be determined by the department. At similar institutions, a minor is roughly half the number of courses required for a major. The exact number depends on the discipline.

Q: Won't reducing the number of courses drive class size up?

A: Class size is determined by the department. Departments will be encouraged to rethink the outcomes of courses and determine what courses are needed for the major, what courses might be electives, etc. It might be that a department determines that the number of multiple sections may be reduced by increasing average class size, but this would be a departmental decision.

LPWG Proposal #4: When possible, align Spring Break with local public schools.

Background and Rationale for Proposal #4

The data in Iowa shows that university and town breaks are synchronized (i.e. Ames, Iowa City, Cedar Falls and Waterloo). Simpson faculty and staff have children in a variety of school districts. At the current time Indianola, Des Moines, Carlisle, Martensdale-St. Mary, Norwalk and Waukee schools all have the same break, routinely the week after Simpson's break. Some school districts now have no spring break; other districts are often a week later than the college in their area.

Spring breaks at our athletic conference schools range from the first week in March (Dubuque, Wartburg) to the last week in March (Cornell); Coe, Luther and Simpson fall in the middle. The most popular week is March 17-24 (Central, BV, Loras and Morningside plus Iowa, Iowa State and UNI), a week after Simpson and the same as Indianola Schools. Looking outside of the state, other colleges (St. Olaf and Oberlin) have the same break weeks as their community schools.

It was agreed that when it is practical the college calendar should be synchronized with the local school districts. This would be of significant benefit to faculty and staff with children. At the same time, it was recognized that calendar decisions for the college need to be based primarily on the academic program needs of the institution.

Q: Won't linking with the area public school systems mean that we will have a really long stretch in the spring, before spring break.

A: The faculty will have to decide the parameters it wants the administration to use in scheduling breaks, the start and end of school, etc.

LPWG Proposal #5: The academic calendar should include a May Term, the number of May Terms required for graduation should be reduced to two, and a break from classes be inserted between the end of spring semester and May Term.

Background and Rationale for Proposal #5

The LPWG agreed with the summer group that having a May Term allowed the flexibility for teaching pedagogy that is not available in the regular semesters. These opportunities are well known and include study abroad, internships, job shadowing, student research, and time for extended creative arts activity.

At the same time, the LPWG recognized that some disciplines may not be well-suited to take advantage of the unique opportunities presented by such an intensive term. In addition, it is clear that some faculty do not wish to teach in such a one-month intensive term. For this reason, the LPWG recommends May Term should be optional for faculty. Courses offered in the May Term will be those determined by the department to be best suited to take advantage of the opportunities the term presents.

The LPWG discussed other alternatives for the calendar including a January Term and a year with two 16-week semesters, each composed of two, eight-week sub-semester. It was agreed that despite the advantages identified by the summer group with January Term (provides a continuity of learning throughout the year, opportunity to carry January learning into the spring semester, a significant break between semesters for those not teaching, etc.) a change to January Term would be too disruptive to the activity of the college at this time. Similarly, a shift to 16-week semesters with sub-semesters would mean that every course would need to be adjusted and that it was unlikely that enough 8-week courses could be devised to allow the system to work.

In addition, it was clear that a break must be inserted between the end of the spring semester and the start of May Term to allow faculty to prepare. The specific length of the break before May Term is yet to be determined.

Q: Will teaching in May Term really be optional?

A: By reducing the number of May Term courses required of all students, the demand for May Term courses will be reduced. Assuming that a significant number of faculty choose to

teach in May Term and classes are offered that students wish to take, the LPWG believes that only faculty who choose to teach in May Term will need to do so to meet demand.

The LPWG discussed many options for May Term including requiring all students to take a May Term in the first year, requiring seniors to take a May Term, requiring all May Term courses to meet an experiential standard, etc. It decided that it was best to allow flexibility in May Term. Several members of the LPWG suggested that their department might develop required May Term courses for their majors. Others had ideas for electives in the major. Faculty members who wish to teach a May Term as an overload may continue to do so, depending on the need for added courses.

Q: Why not just get rid of May Term altogether?

A: The LPWG, like the summer working group, believes that the trend towards hands-on learning (international study, internships, career explorations, field work, labs, student research, domestic study trips, etc.) is growing. The recent strategic planning effort clearly identified integrative and applied learning as an area for growth. Several faculty members of the LPWG suggested that their departments might wish to develop May Term courses specifically for their majors. The admissions office believes that May Term is one of Simpson's unique advantages. By having a May Term, the college preserves the unique pedagogical opportunity May Term presents. Faculty who choose not to teach in May Term will essentially have a two term academic year.

Q: If only two May Terms are required, will it still be possible for students to take more than two?

A: The LPWG is still exploring the possibilities. Since faculty teaching load and the enrollment in May Term is linked, some way of keeping the demand for May Term equal to the number of seats available must be put into place. At some institutions, students are prohibited from taking more than two May Term courses. At others, students must pay extra for more than the required number of May Terms.

The LPWG believes that a significant number of students will continue to fulfill the May Term requirement by studying abroad, domestic travel courses, independent study, career explorations, internships, directed research, etc. In fact, it hopes the number of students participating in such activity increases and the full pedagogical potential of May Term will be realized as faculty design experiential courses that can only be taught during the May Term.

Q: How many May Terms will be required for transfer students?

A: Our current practice requires students to complete a May Term for every year in residence. This is an implementation decision that will have to be made by faculty. One option would be to follow current practice and require a May Term for every year in residence. Another would be to require one May Term for every two years in residence, which would seem to be the case for students spending four years in residence.

LPWG-Proposal #6: Graduation should be moved to before May Term with a break between graduation and the start of May Term.

Background and Rationale for Proposal #6

Institutions which do not require all May Terms (Roanoke College and Coe College, for example) often have commencement at the end of spring semester and then take a break before May Term. This would represent a shift in practice at Simpson College. The LPWG discussed the option of requiring first-year students to take May Term. It also considered requiring seniors to take May Term. In the end, the LPWG felt that it would be best to allow departments to design courses for May Term that met their own needs would be better than focusing May Term on a particular subset of students. A substantial number of seniors wish to do internships in their last May Term and are not on campus. Having graduation before May Term allows seniors to go into the job market a bit earlier.

Having graduation before May Term may present challenges for our campus culture, but the committee feels these could be overcome. The LPWG believes that strategies for addressing potential concerns should be a part of the campus-wide conversation.

Q: Does a reduction in the number of required May Terms necessitate a shift in the timing of commencement? Are there other institutions that do this?

A: The LPWG believes that it is unlikely that students will wait to take their second required May Term in their senior year. This means that most seniors will appreciate graduation immediately following spring term and the opportunity to enter the job market a bit earlier than students at other institutions. It is likely that a few seniors will complete their May Term requirements in their senior year. These students will be able to march in graduation one course short, as they are allowed to do under the current system. Since final grades may not be in by commencement, students will likely have their diplomas mailed to them. The LPWG has reviewed the calendars of several institutions that have May Term and found that having commencement after spring semester is common among colleges who require fewer than four May Terms to graduate. Coe College here in Iowa and Roanoke College in Virginia are examples.

Q: What about athletes in spring sports? Will they need to take classes in May to be on campus? What about the campus climate in May Term?

A: The LPWG recognizes the challenges spring time on a college campus presents with regard to drinking and student behavior. All students who are on campus, including those on campus to participate in spring sports will be held to the same high standards. The LPWG interviewed the registrar at Coe College (they have a totally optional May Term) who indicated that they took a very pro-active approach to addressing behavioral issues and had few problems with excessive drinking, etc. Having graduation before May Term does not seem to be detrimental to enrollment in spring sports at Coe College.

Q: How long will the break be between the end of the spring semester and May Term?

A: The LPWG sees this as an important detail that will need to be finalized before implementation. It depends in part on when the semester begins, the placement of mid-term break, etc. The LPWG recognizes the challenges a long break between the end of spring term and the beginning of May Term may represent with regard to student behavior. These issues will have to be considered as the final decisions regarding the length and placement of the break are made. It should be noted that Coe College, Wartburg College, Roanoke College and Concordia College-Moorhead are institutions that have a break after spring semester and before May Term.

LPWG Proposal #7: TO BE DECIDED

Daily Schedule

The LPWG believes that a daily revised schedule may allow more flexibility in scheduling courses, better address the growing need for longer class sessions, and provide more options for service learning and other hands-on pedagogy. The LPWG has not come to agreement on a proposal for daily schedule and intends to continue its discussion. The LPWG recognizes that although there may be some advantage to making changes to the daily schedule simultaneously to the other changes proposed in this document, Proposals 1-6 do not depend on a change in the daily schedule.

The LPWG believes that the shape of the daily schedule will be more clear once more is known about possible revisions to the Cornerstone program.

Q: Won't allowing departments to determine the number of hours classes meet make it more difficult to schedule classes? Won't there be more overlaps and schedule conflicts?

A: Although departments will determine the number of hours each class meets, the classes will need to be scheduled within the agreed upon daily schedule. There are several daily schedules in use at other colleges our size. Once the proposals for curriculum have been approved, the LPWG will work with the registrar to determine if a change to the daily schedule is needed.

Other Questions

Q: What is the timeline for implementation?

A: The timeline for implementation will be determined by the EPCC and the faculty as they act on the proposals. Dean Griffith has stated that he believes that if the faculty achieve consensus on the outline of the structural issues and the shape of the Cornerstone program by the end of the current academic year, it will take two years of preparation before the new curriculum can be in place. If consensus is reached this spring, the 2008-2009 academic year will be spent finalizing implementation details and creating the criteria for the general education courses. The 2009-2010 academic year will be spent developing courses, re-arranging

curricular offerings and making final preparations. A transition period between the old and the new curriculum would begin in the fall of 2010. Final and full implementation would begin with the class entering in 2013. Care will be taken to not disadvantage students already enrolled

Q: Will there be a phase-in period, or will everything happen at once?

A: The timing of the change will be determined by faculty. Should faculty wish to do so, it may be possible to phase-in components of the new structure. It will depend on what changes are approved.

Q: Why should Simpson College copy other institutions? What's wrong with being unique?

A: The LPWG sees nothing wrong with being unique and believes that the changes it is proposing will strengthen the college, helping the institution and faculty focus their efforts on one of the most unique things about the institution, the relationship between the student and faculty. The LPWG sees the proposals as building on historic strengths of Simpson College and addressing the ideas presented in the recent strategic planning process. Higher education, business leaders, alums, students and faculty all indicated a belief that education should be integrated, interdisciplinary and applied. The increase in service-learning activity here at Simpson is an indicator of this shift in pedagogy.

There has not been an attempt to copy any particular institution, nor does the LPWG see any inherent value in making changes for the sake of making changes. It has attempted to learn from other institutions and to test its own ideas against what is being done at other fine institutions. In some measure, knowing that other institutions have made many of the changes being suggested in its proposals has strengthened the LPWG's belief that the ideas it is proposing can be made to work and that they will benefit students. All of the ideas being proposed are currently in use at similar institutions. Thirty two courses for graduation has been the standard at many fine institutions for years. Luther College just made a similar reduction in the number of courses required for graduation. As suggested earlier, the unit system has been working for high quality institutions like Simpson College since the 1960s and, in fact, Simpson College had the unit system for several years before returning to the three- credit system in the mid-1970s.

The LPWG believes that by looking to other institutions and making these proposed changes, Simpson College can take advantage of the experiences of other institutions to ease the difficulty of the transition here.

Q: What about the financial impact of these proposals?

A: Should the proposals be adopted, there will need to be extensive analysis to make sure that the changes will not adversely impact the college. In that other good schools, many in our own Iowa market have made similar adjustments in their curriculum, it is believed that Simpson will be able to do so. This analysis will happen next year, once it is clear what changes are being proposed.

Q: What about faculty development? Won't faculty need time and support for revising courses, majors, etc.?

A: Yes. The LPWG believes faculty will need support for making the proposed changes. This will be especially important in preparation year one and year two as departments rethink their courses and prepare for implementation in year three.

Q: What about the details? There are a lot of questions that haven't been answered. How can we vote on something when we don't know the details?

A: The LPWG has attempted to answer the questions faculty have raised about the proposals in as much detail it feels is practical at this point in the process. Until decisions are made about the overall shape of the curriculum, many of the implementation questions cannot be fully answered.

Q: What decisions will faculty be asked to make this year? Can the decisions made this year be rescinded if the implementation details cannot be resolved?

A: In order to stay on the timeline discussed earlier, faculty will have to approve the general outline of the structural changes and the general shape of any changes to the Cornerstone program by the end of the current semester. If this cannot be done, it is likely that the implementation date will be pushed back by a year. Practically speaking, the curriculum of the college is in the hands of the faculty. Should the final implementation details not be to the liking of the faculty, it has the authority to stop the implementation of the changes. A positive vote this spring will mean that a consensus has been reached on the general shape of the changes and will allow the EPCC, the LPWG or its successor to develop the details to implement the changes. The faculty, likely working through the EPCC, will determine when the proposals are complete enough to move towards implementation.

Summary

The LPWG believes student graduation requirement and faculty loads are excessive and out-of-line with other high quality institutions. The proposals reduce the number of courses and hours that are required of students and reduce the course load of faculty. The LPWG believes the proposals will maintain the current rigor and quality of the education at Simpson College and also open up time for faculty to increase the out of classroom expectations for students, including the possibility of experiential learning activity such as service-learning, student research, etc. As such the proposal:

1. Reduces the number of "hours" and courses required for graduation to 32 courses plus two May Terms for the B.A. instead of the current 42+.
2. Changes the current course hour designation from 3.0 credit hours for most courses to 1 unit per course. 32 = 32 units required for graduation. It is understood that some departments/courses will have to use a slightly modified system such as .25 units.
3. Courses (currently 3 hours per course) will become the equivalent of a 4 hour class. This will give students time and credit for the experiential activities in which they are

- currently involved and allow for some faculty to begin to include these activities in their courses. It will also recognize the increased expectations for out of the classroom assignments and learning.
4. Streamlines course offerings and requirements in some departments and for general education.

The LPWG believes that the proposals and changes will strengthen the Simpson Experience for students and faculty.

Addendum A

In the spring of 2006, work-study students under the supervision of John Bolen used a list of the “top 100” liberal arts colleges in the United States institutions found on the U.S. News and World Report website for the purpose of seeking information about course credits and the number of classes required for graduation at high quality institutions. The following colleges and universities are among those thought to be on the unit system where one course equals one academic unit.

Wesleyan University (CT)
 Bryn Mawr College
 Bates College
 Bucknell University
 Lafayette College
 College of the Holy Cross
 Colorado College
 Union College
 DePauw University
 Wabash
 Pitzer College
 Reed College
 St. Olaf College
 Wheaton College (MA)
 Kalamazoo College
 St. Lawrence University
 Illinois Wesleyan University
 Willamette University
 College of Wooster
 Hobart and William Smith Colleges
 Muhlenberg College
 Birmingham Southern College
 Gustavus Adolphus College
 Knox College
 Mills College

University of Puget Sound
Hanover College
Albion College
Ohio Wesleyan College
Transylvania University
Lake Forest College
Coe College

It should be noted that the information was collected from institutional websites and may have changed since its gathering. The LPWG does not vouch for the accuracy of the data and encourages those interested to check the information directly with the institutions listed. The LPWG used the list only for reference purposes as it discussed course credits and the number of the courses required for graduation. It should also be noted that it is believed that all of the institutions listed above require fewer courses for graduation than does Simpson College. Most require in the range of 32-36 courses. In the list of institutions provided to the LPWG, roughly 60% require fewer courses for graduation than does Simpson College. The complete list of institutions is available from John Bolen.