

Dear Colleagues,

This document is the final proposal from the Learning Programs Working Group (LPWG) for a new general education program at Simpson College. The LPWG believes that after reviewing it, the EPCC should send it to the full faculty for a vote on its adoption. At this time, the LPWG would also like to bring to the attention of EPCC several important issues.

First, the proposal has been revised to address various concerns expressed by faculty members in the division meetings. The embedded skills required of the Simpson Seminar courses have been widened out to include two chosen by the instructor. Although the LPWG believes that students would be well-served by having their Simpson Seminar be a writing intensive course, it recognizes that making this a requirement might decrease the number of faculty who wish to teach such a course. In that the LPWG believes that all students in their first semester should take a writing intensive course so that it may serve as a diagnostic for possible future focused writing support, the LPWG recommends that all students in their first semester be required to take such a course. It may or may not be their Simpson Seminar.

Second, the LPWG recognizes that good faith disagreements continue to exist among faculty about the basic definition of a liberal arts education. For some, a liberal arts education must include a mandated exposure or *breadth* component. This sentiment was expressed in the original discussions within LPWG, during the open meeting in August of 2008, and again during the division meetings in January of 2009. The LPWG acknowledges the concerns of the faculty who hold this view and has respectfully declined to change the proposal. Although such a breadth mandate could be layered onto the current proposal, the LPWG believes strongly that the proposal as it stands represents a better approach. The LPWG uses engaged citizenship as the overarching organizing element rather than exposure. The LPWG believes that sufficient exposure and breadth to meet the concerns of faculty who would prefer exposure as an organizing principle will happen through student course selection and advising. The LPWG does not wish to impose a mandate on the curriculum to accomplish a goal it believes to be secondary and something that will happen without a mandate. One clear message the LPWG has heard from faculty throughout the process is the need to make the new curriculum easy to understand and transparent. It believes it has achieved this goal with the current proposal. (see Addendum A for more information.)

Another area where complete agreement cannot be reached among faculty is in the area of the language requirement. Here again, the LPWG recognizes that a significant number of faculty believe advanced language study to be a necessary component of a liberal arts education. They believe a language requirement more stringent than the current language competency would be detrimental to attracting quality students. The committee itself wrestled with the issue. As the reader may recall, no language requirement was included in the first draft of the proposal

discussed by the faculty in August of 2008. After hearing the concerns of faculty in August, the LPWG crafted what it believes to be a unique and exciting approach to college language study.

The current proposal includes a required course in culture and language. Such a course would be uniquely designed to link the study of language with the study of culture. As such the course might well be an advanced level language course for students who have had significant language study. As likely however, the course would be a course in a new language. Given that a general agreement exists that it is not realistic to expect competency to be gained in a language after only two semesters of study, the LPWG believes that novice language students would be better served by taking a single course that links both language and culture. This approach would allow students who have advanced language skills and are interested in language to take an advanced course in the language they had in high school, or explore a new language. Students without language study in high school would take one course, designed not to provide competency (something even our language faculty recognize is not now happening), but rather to help them understand language and culture. (see Addendum B for more information.)

Finally, the LPWG recognizes that it will take much more time to draft final language for the criteria necessary for faculty to create and approve courses to implement the new curriculum. The LPWG believes that the focus of the discussion and faculty vote on the proposal should be on the structure as outlined, and not on the specifics of the criteria. It makes little sense to spend the time to create final criteria if a majority of the faculty do not support the structure of the proposal. For this reason, the LPWG asks that the criteria and accompanying documents previously circulated be accepted by EPCC and the faculty as the groundwork and starting point for the final drafting of the criteria. The LPWG suggests that if the framework is approved, the final criteria come back to the faculty for approval before implementation begins.

Although this may be disconcerting to some faculty who will argue that it is impossible to vote to approve the structure of the general education without knowing the specific criteria, the LPWG believes that to ask faculty to spend the time to refine the criteria without knowing that the general education framework has been approved is simply unreasonable. The LPWG remembers that last year the same argument prevented a final vote on the academic structure proposal. The argument at that time was that it was not possible to vote on the academic structure proposal without knowing the shape of the general education. Now the same argument is being extended to the criteria. Should the EPCC and faculty agree, the logical extension of the argument would be to then claim that a final vote on the structure, general education, and criteria is impossible unless the faculty were presented with the actual courses that would fulfill the criteria. This of course would mean that faculty would be asked to spend at least another year re-working dozens if not hundreds of courses and create dozens more, all in the hopes that someday the new curriculum would pass. This is not reasonable. The LPWG feels that it has provided the faculty with enough definition for all to understand its good faith intention. It admits some refining is necessary to make the various criteria clear and consistent. It believes this can best be done by small groups of interested faculty working over the summer of 2009 so that the final criteria can be approved by faculty in the fall of 2009.

The LPWG believes it has accomplished its charge. It presents the faculty with a proposal for general education that addresses many of the concerns regarding the current Cornerstone

program, is grounded in the mission of the college and the strategic plan, is exciting and innovative in approach, and will enhance the Simpson Experience for generations of students.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Learning Programs Working Group (LPWG)

## **The Proposed New General Education Curriculum**

### **I. Simpson Seminar (1 Course)**

An autonomous seminar for all students that is focused on a big question and in the interest area of the instructor. It should be noted that the Simpson Seminar will be required of all students, those coming from high school, those transferring from other institutions, and adult students entering through the evening and weekend program. The Simpson Seminar would therefore have at least three iterations.

Purpose: To provide an entry into the academy and a solid foundation for future work. The course will generally meet the criteria for the following embedded skills.

- Critical Thinking
- One additional embedded skill selected by the instructor

In most cases, the second embedded skill would be Written Communication.

### **II. OURSELVES, CIVILIZATION, AND THE WORLD (8 courses)**

Purpose: To prepare students to be engaged citizens by exploring enduring questions about ourselves, civilization, and the world.

- World Language and Culture (WL)
- Global Perspectives (GP)
- Diversity and Power (DP)
- Ethics and Moral Reasoning (EM)
- Civic Engagement (CE)
- Scientific Reasoning (SR)
- Historical Perspectives (HP)
- The Arts (AR)

### **III. EMBEDDED SKILLS**

Purpose: To provide an opportunity for students to work on important life and professional skills throughout their college experience.

- **Four** Written Communication experiences (WC)
- **Two** Quantitative Reasoning experiences (QR)
- **Three** Critical Thinking experiences (CT)
- **Two** Information Literacy experiences (IL)
- **Two** Oral Communication experiences (OC)

- Two Collaborative Leadership experiences (CL).

#### IV. SENIOR CAPSTONE IN THE MAJOR (1 Course)

Purpose: To afford the student opportunity to reflect on the ideas and skills experienced during the college years within the context of the major. All departments will be asked to provide information on how the important issues and skills present in the general education program are addressed within the senior major capstone.

#### NOTES:

Required courses in Component II (Ourselves, Civilization and the World) may carry an Embedded Skills designations. For example, a Global Perspectives (GP) course might carry a Written Communication (WC) designation. An Ethics and Moral Reasoning (EM) course might carry a Critical Thinking (CT) designation. It is the hope that students will fulfill the majority, if not all, of their Embedded Skill requirements through courses that they plan to take anyway.

Although faculty would be encouraged to include the various ideas and skills expressed in the embedded skills criteria in all courses, an individual course will not be allowed to receive designations for more than two Embedded Skills experiences. The Simpson Seminar will usually receive the designations of Written Communication (WC) and Critical Thinking (CT).

All courses receiving a general education designation (both in the area titled Ourselves, Civilization and the World and as Embedded Skills) will meet specific criteria established by faculty. The specific criteria for each element of the general education requirements will be approved by the faculty before implementation begins.