

REPORT

Working Group for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Charge to Working Group

Impaneled on March 21, 2005 by Academic Governance and the Office of the Provost, the Working Group for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education (WGIUE) consisted of twelve faculty members and student representatives, five faculty consultants, and two university representatives with academic advising expertise.

WGIUE's charge:

- Provide commentary on the goals, proficiency and standards included in each of the reports,¹ specifically as to whether or not these articulate our intended outcomes of general education.
- Provide commentary and reactions to the principal recommendations made by the three groups, with particular attention as feasible to the importance, priority, and practicality of the recommendations.
- Consider the major recommendations across the three reports and whether some priority should be given to some of the recommendations (weighing both importance to undergraduate education and feasibility) in any next planning and implementation steps that might follow.
- Identify ways in which enhancements to (1) writing, (2) quantitative literacy and (3) integrative studies might be accomplished by interconnecting structures and learning activities across the three.
- Expand the purview beyond the final reports of IS, QL, and Writing as necessary to meet the broad charge.

II. Recommendations from the Working Group

A. "Goals for Liberal Learning"

WGIUE responded to the charge by a) reviewing each task force report in detail; b) outlining a framework in which liberal learning might be pursued at MSU; c) developing a set of goals to define liberal learning across all aspects of undergraduate education; d) developing exemplars for how these goals would unfold in the context of University, college, and discipline specific requirements; e) affirming that the Office of the Provost should disseminate, reinforce, and strengthen the goals of liberal learning across all aspects of undergraduate education (curricular and co-curricular opportunities); f) recommending a structure for faculty consultation in implementing programs and courses designed to address the goals of liberal learning and to foster an atmosphere of sustained reflection upon liberal learning and scholarly approaches to program assessment; and g) seeking campus-wide feedback.

We unanimously urge speedy adoption of the following goals of liberal learning:

¹ The "reports" are the 2004 reports from the "Integrative Studies Task force," the "Quantitative Literacy Task Force," and the "Writing Task Force."

Goals for Liberal Learning²

The total effect of the knowledge and skills described in the following goals for liberal learning results in the MSU graduate having the potential to be an outstanding leader – perceiving and developing opportunities, actively fostering and guiding change, and applying skills and knowledge to understand and articulate complex issues of work, community, and public life.

INTEGRATED JUDGMENT

- The MSU Graduate will effectively synthesize specialized discipline-based knowledge with a broad-based liberal arts education, understand the importance of life-long learning, and make decisions that reflect humane, social, ethical, and aesthetic sensibilities developed through coherent curricular and co-curricular activities.

ADVANCED COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- The MSU graduate will be a competent writer and speaker, able to write and speak effectively in a variety of situations and to a variety of audiences, able to write and speak with authority within a professional area, and able to write and speak effectively and persuasively as a citizen in the public arena.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

- The MSU graduate will have explored global, cultural, social, and intellectual diversity and will value the experiential and intellectual diversity of the academic community.

ANALYTICAL THINKING

- The MSU graduate will be a critical user of knowledge, adept at using current technologies to access information and having the ability to analyze complex information critically, using multiple modes of inquiry (i.e., scientific, artistic, literary, and information methodologies).

LITERACY IN SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS

- The MSU graduate will demonstrate ability to formulate, evaluate, and communicate conclusions and inferences from quantitative information, employing analytical arguments and reasoning built upon fundamental concepts and skills of science, mathematics, statistics, and computing.

EFFECTIVE CITIZENSHIP

- The MSU graduate will have a sense of responsibility for a dynamic, democratic society that offers broad opportunities and requires the ability to function in an interdependent world.

B. “Actions that Need to Be Taken”

1. **Identify a clearly established University voice on liberal learning and tie it to a faculty/student advisory voice dedicated to reflection on liberal learning.**
 - Empower the Dean for Undergraduate Studies to oversee implementation of a program of liberal learning.

² See detailed explanations in the “Final Report”.

- Create an *interim* faculty/academic specialist/student advisory task force to coordinate implementation initiatives and policy development until such time as long-term oversight provisions are implemented.
- We strongly recommend establishment of a dedicated, permanent undergraduate Council for Liberal Learning (See explanatory comments below). Alternatively, the University Committee on Curriculum should speak to the broad planning and advisory functions concerned with the curriculum in liberal learning, in addition to its role of providing governance approval for curriculum.

2. INTEGRATIVE STUDIES

WGIUE agrees with the Integrative Studies Task Force that its original charge was too narrow. MSU needs an assessment of Integrative Studies from the perspective not only of its program goals but also of its relationship to the goals of liberal learning.

- a. The Dean of Undergraduate should ensure that we sustain the focus on Integrative Studies, including support for distinct centers to develop teaching opportunities and approaches. WGIUE recognizes MSU's evolving understanding of integrative studies, as a unique approach to liberal learning, and we recommend directing that process with an aim to preserve its principal values.
- b. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies should assess the criteria for "common experience" in core/foundation classes. WGIUE recommends increased coordination among the Centers to heighten common experience and to explore improvement in the verticality/sequencing of course offerings within and among the centers. Within this context, WGIUE further recommends that the original assumptions upon which the "Alternate Track" experience in science was based be revisited in order to determine the degree to which students in science and technology fields have attained the knowledge and abilities encompassed by the liberal learning goals.
- c. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies should assess the dynamics of unit/disciplinary participation in integrative studies. We recommend that specific attention be paid to the contributions that can be made from within the disciplines to further the goals of liberal learning, particularly with respect to Integrative Studies, Quantitative Literacy, and Writing. Additionally, a review should include an assessment of staffing requirements for ISGS, IAH and ISS in the context of class size imperatives (especially as it relates to "communication goals").
- d. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies should receive on a recurring basis resources, such as those in the Quality Fund, to promote innovation and increased coordination of integrative studies course development, staffing, and assessment.

- e. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies should provide for obtaining suitable data for an intensive review of IAH/ISS/ISB/ISP courses. Existing resources provide uneven bases for assessment across the program.

3. WRITING

- a. WGIUE endorses the recommendations of the Writing Task Force Report. We highlight priority recommendations that are feasible to be carried out immediately. Specific details can be found in the Task Force Report.
- b. We recommend sustaining strong commitment and support across the University to strengthen the students' undergraduate writing experience and to integrate writing more thoroughly into the curriculum. "Advanced Communication Skills" is one of the six major "Goals for Liberal Learning" endorsed by WGIUE as a key goal of undergraduate education, and writing ability is a critical "advanced communication skill." Students should develop it throughout their entire undergraduate experience.
- c. We are persuaded that the University should sustain its commitment to the Tier I-Tier II model of writing instruction for the general student body.
- d. Moreover, we agree that no change is required in the direct administration of either Tier I or Tier II writing.
- e. WGIUE strongly urges increasing the Tier I writing requirement from one 4-credit course to two 3-credit courses. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies should submit a proposal to this effect to Academic Governance, buttressed by evidence drawn from the study recommended in the following provision.
- f. We recommend that a placement methodology be devised to enable advanced students to complete only one of the required two 3-credit writing courses. The Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures should be charged to prepare such a plan and to report on the anticipated effects of its implementation.
- g. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies should be provided resources to support Tier II writing instruction across campus, aiming to enforce practicable class size limits and to provide faculty development support for the design of Tier II courses that offer explicit instructing in writing.
- h. The Registrar should undertake to increase the visibility of Tier II courses across campus, and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies should oversee the development of SIRS components that can enable students directly to evaluate Tier II instruction.
- i. WGIUE recommends that the Dean of Undergraduate Studies should identify a university-wide writing committee and name a University Director of Writing to coordinate focused efforts to sustain writing instruction across the campus. Provision for

such an entity is described in the discussion on a Council for Liberal Learning at page 5 below.

- j. We recommend that the mission of the Writing Center should be enlarged to incorporate providing support for writing directed to Tier II students and faculty.

4. QUANTITATIVE LITERACY

- a. WGIUE recommends University adoption of the QL definitions and standards reported by the QL Task Force and implementation of these definitions and standards as the basis of student assessment relative to quantitative knowledge and ability.
 - b. WGIUE endorses the QL Foundation and Applied QL curricular model and recommends that once in place (see the Task Force Report for transition issues) it replace the existing mathematics exit requirement.
 - c. WGIUE strongly endorses a Quality Fund investment focusing on a data-driven approach to the implementation of the QL Task Force recommendations. The current Quality Fund proposal should serve as a blueprint for deliberations about QL in the University-wide faculty/academic specialist/student forum that has been proposed.
- C. In addition to the foregoing specific recommendations, WGIUE further recommends approaches, responsibilities, and proceedings to ensure that the Goals of Liberal Education are understood throughout the University, consistent with CRUE objectives, as provided both through integrative studies and normal progression through the majors.

University Council for Liberal Learning/University Committee on Curriculum:

WGIUE recommends an organizational structure for University wide oversight and assessment of liberal education that combines portions of several options proposed in the Integrative Studies Planning Committee report, and also incorporates key structural features recommended by the Writing and Quantitative Literacy Task Forces. WGIUE recommends a preferred approach of a Council for Liberal Learning.

Issues of Academic Governance:

Within the existing University governance system CLL should have the ability to initiate both new ideas and policies relative to the Goals of Liberal Learning, making recommendations to UCC or UCAP, and reviewing and making recommendations on courses, programmatic requests, or policies referred by UCC or UCAP relevant to the Goals of Liberal Learning insofar as they affect Integrative Studies, Quantitative Literacy, and Writing.

WGIUE envisions the establishment and support of a group of faculty, academic specialists, and students who will, in effect, constitute a community of learners with an interest in advancing the goals for liberal learning at MSU. **The primary intention is to establish and maintain a campus wide dialog focused on advancing the goals of liberal learning among University, College, and Disciplinary academic requirements.** We unanimously recommend that the Dean

of Undergraduate Studies direct the work of the Council (or UCC in that alternative) in this respect. Budget and clerical support would be necessary to support the work. Moreover, the Director of University Assessment should be charged with assisting the Council and its subcommittees with the development of measures of learning outcomes. If a council is preferred, it should consist of a core “executive” group that includes:

- The Directors of the Integrative Studies Centers (ISGS, ISS, and IAH)
- The University Director of Writing
- Chair of the Quantitative Literacy subcommittee

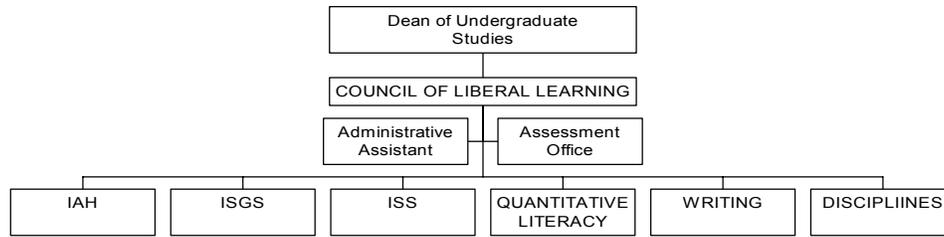
WGIUE acknowledges that this task may be accomplished by modification of the mission of UCC as well as by the institution of a **Council for Liberal Learning (CLL)**. The purposes in either case are to further consultation, advice, and discussion. If UCC should be the preferred approach, its Subcommittee D should fulfill the executive function, but it should also engage the above named directors and chair to complete the executive group.

In consultation with the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Council should have the authority to bring together such faculty, academic and advising staff as necessary to accomplish the goals of liberal learning.

The following are examples of the type of work that the Council should engage in:

- Promoting the goals of liberal learning across the campus.
- Promoting benchmarks for liberal learning goals to faculty, staff, students, administration, and external stakeholders through such things as seminars, workshops, outreach to industry and the community, etc.
- Furthering assessment practices through design and implementation of learning outcomes relative to the benchmarks and educational goals that further delineate the benchmarks
- Oversight of implementation of the recommendations of the Integrative Studies, QL and Writing Task Forces (see below)
- Procuring external resources through grants and development activities.
- Assisting administrative units as appropriate to develop and implement courses, programs, co-curricular, and experiential opportunities that address the knowledge and skills defined in the goals of liberal learning.
- Fostering development of integrative courses within majors in order to promote liberal learning goals
- Encouraging the extension of integrative courses through upper division as well as lower division courses to the extent realizable (i.e., this is highly dependent upon the major), reflecting the oft expressed desire to avoid confining integrative study to elementary instruction.
- Implementing a comprehensive and systematic means of assessing students’ writing competencies.

We endorse the possibility of a campus-wide electronic portfolio system as a mechanism for collecting and assessing student writing from matriculation to graduation. This portfolio could also double to assess competency in other areas, such as general liberal learning, quantitative literacy, and disciplinary knowledge in the student’s major.



If a council is established, it should be constituted according to the following criteria: An associate dean or director, under the authority of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, should convene the council and oversee its programming. In its advisory capacity, it shall develop programmatic recommendations for Governance (including UCC and UCAP) review and approval.

The council's staff should include an administrative assistant and an institutional research officer, with special competence in assessment, reporting to an associate dean or director.

CLL should consist of the:

- Directors for Integrative Studies (ISGS, ISS, and IAH) (3)
- University Director of Writing (1)
- Quantitative Literacy Representative (1)
- Student Representatives (2 from ASMSU)
- Faculty at large (One from each college offering undergraduate programs)
- A Continuing system academic specialist whose major function is advising (1)
- Assistant Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies (1 *ex officio*)
- Representative from International Studies and Programs (1, *ex officio*)

WGIUE recommends that, in their role as a community of scholars, the CLL should consider the goals and standards as living documents that will evolve, through assessment, as our community deepens its understanding of the knowledge and abilities that comprise post-secondary education.

WGIUE recommends that subcommittees of the CLL be established composed of faculty representatives drawn from the Task Forces areas (Integrative Studies, Quantitative Literacy, Writing). For example, QL members could be drawn from Mathematics, Mathematics Education, Statistics, Computer Science, with at least one non-quantitative discipline, to be charged with design of the foundation courses, design and implementation of placement and assessment tools, and, in consultation with the Director of Faculty and Organizational Development, the implementation of a QL support infrastructure for faculty and academic staff involved in designing and implementing courses that address the standards for Applied Quantitative Literacy. The Writing subcommittee and an Integrative Studies subcommittee would function similarly. In Writing the subcommittee would fulfill the recommendation to create a University-level writing committee, responsible for coordination of effort across the University and representing the interests of general education writing at the University level. This small group of four or five members would coordinate instructional support for writing across Tier I and Tier II and across WRAC and the Writing Center; it would, for example, take the lead in developing grants and representing the interests of writing on and off campus. Each of the CLL subcommittees should be charged to prepare for council review final recommendations concerning the remaining implementation issues from the 2004 Task Forces Reports.