

**FINAL REPORT:**  
**WEINBERG COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES**  
**AD HOC COMMITTEE ON DEGREE REQUIREMENTS**

**Submitted on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**to Dean Adrian Randolph**

**by Ann Bradlow, chair,**

**and members of the Committee for Degree Requirements (CDR)**

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 CDR Background, Charge, and Procedures

In February 2016, Dean Adrian Randolph convened the Weinberg Ad Hoc Committee on Degree Requirements (CDR) to conduct a comprehensive review of the College-wide degree requirements, and to recommend revisions that best serve the needs and interests of today's students. While the educational philosophy and implementation strategy that underlie the current Weinberg degree requirements have proved remarkably durable over the past four decades, the varied backgrounds and future directions of today's undergraduate students call for a careful re-examination of our College-wide requirements. The timing of this undertaking also coincides with the publication in December 2015 of the final report of the [Faculty Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Experience](#). Finally, a major impetus for this committee's formation was the clear call from students and faculty at Northwestern (and across the USA) for a requirement in the area of social inequalities and diversities.

In response to these developments, the Weinberg dean appointed the CDR with the charge as specified below (see also, [here](#)).

1. Engage with faculty, students, College leadership, and others to review the College's curriculum and degree requirements.
2. Develop a set of learning outcomes that capture the skill-set and mind-set that should characterize a Weinberg College graduate.
3. Closely examine the current Weinberg College curriculum and degree requirements, and recommend revisions that address curricular deficiencies or opportunities for strengthening that come to light as requirements are mapped to desired learning outcomes. Particularly close attention should be paid to the general education requirements and to the proposed social inequalities and diversity requirement.
4. Submit a report of the committee's findings and recommendations to the dean at the end of this process of examination, engagement, and deliberation.

The CDR was chaired by the Weinberg Associate Dean for Academic Initiatives (Ann Bradlow, Professor of Linguistics), and included 12 Weinberg faculty members and two Weinberg students. In addition, the CDR included three ex officio members from the Weinberg Office of Undergraduate Studies and Advising (OUSA). The three Weinberg divisions, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, were equally represented on the committee. The committee membership included both tenure-line and teaching-track faculty, as well as one College adviser and one faculty member holding a joint appointment with another Northwestern school (the School of Education and Social Policy). The two student members were both members of the Weinberg class of 2017, a natural science major (Chemistry) and a double major in the humanities and social sciences (English and Latino/a Studies). Overall, the CDR membership covered a healthy distribution of diverse backgrounds and perspectives. (See [here](#) for the full list of CDR members.)

As an ad hoc committee, the CDR functioned independently of the two standing Weinberg College curriculum committees, namely the Curriculum Policies Committee (CPC) and the Curriculum Review Committee (CRC). The CDR reported directly to Dean Adrian Randolph, and its

recommendations will ultimately be brought before the CPC for consideration and possible submission for vote by the College faculty.

Over the course of the winter and spring quarters of 2016, the CDR met approximately monthly. In the initial meetings, the committee examined the structure and history of the current Weinberg degree requirements. We took some time to understand how our system fits into the broader context of liberal arts educational systems at universities across the USA, and examined the current degree requirements at peer institutions. We also took a close look at the curriculum-related recommendations presented in the report of the Faculty Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Experience.

Towards the end of the spring quarter of 2016, the CDR formed three working groups, each charged with reviewing and recommending changes to one of the three major components of the current Weinberg degree requirements, namely, the writing requirement, the foreign language requirement, and the distribution (“distro”) requirements. (See [here](#) for the composition and charge to each subgroup.) We chose to structure our work around these three main topics because we agreed that they function quite well as broad organizing categories. Moreover, we expected that College-wide familiarity with these categories would provide a good basis for discussion with students and colleagues across the College.

Over the course of the spring and summer, the writing, language, and distro sub-groups focused their attention on the portion of the current Weinberg curriculum in their purview, including conducting interviews with members of the Weinberg community most closely aligned with their respective areas. Towards the end of the summer, the groups continued their discussions and began to articulate specific recommendations. Then, in September 2016, the full committee came together for a day-long meeting at the Chicago Botanic Garden to discuss and synthesize the outcomes of the sub-group interviews and deliberations.

Over the course of the fall quarter of 2016, the CDR developed an interim report in which a preliminary vision and set of draft recommendations were presented. The committee also discussed a plan to communicate our initial ideas to Weinberg faculty and students in order to gauge reactions as we continued to grapple with several open questions. At the end of the fall quarter, the CDR met for a half-day meeting at the John Evans Center to prepare for presentation of the interim report to the broader Weinberg community. The winter quarter was then devoted to meetings of individual CDR members with groups of colleagues organized approximately according to Weinberg academic units (departments and programs). All Weinberg faculty members, both tenure-line and teaching-track, were invited to attend one of these meetings. Some units were combined (e.g. the Anthropology Department and the Global Health Studies Program) for a single meeting, and a separate meeting was held with the group of Weinberg College Advisers. We also met with various non-Weinberg-based groups, including representatives from other Northwestern schools, the University Registrar, and Weinberg staff members. Finally, the student members of the CDR invited all Weinberg students (through a Facebook event) to attend a student-focused meeting. The primary aim of these meetings was to facilitate constructive discussion with colleagues and students across the College, the outcomes of which would inform the process of refining and revising the preliminary proposals. A full list of these winter quarter meetings is provided [here](#).

The format of the winter quarter meetings involved an oral presentation of approximately 20 minutes followed by open discussion. As noted above, the primary aim of these meetings was to facilitate constructive discussion with colleagues and students across the College through which we could gauge reactions and identify the points of contention in our proposals. Accordingly, careful notes were taken at all meetings that could inform the process of refining and revising our proposals. In addition, at the very beginning of the quarter, the presentation documents, which included a deck of slides (see [here](#)) with an accompanying narrative (see [here](#)), were posted on the publically-accessible CDR website (see [here](#)). This website included an online form where questions, comments, and suggestions could be posted.

All notes and comments were gathered and organized, with minimal editing, into a table that allowed for comprehensive and coherent consideration of comments on all aspects of the interim proposals. These responses were then distilled into a summary table that listed all of the concerns, notes, clarifications, and suggestions in a format that could be easily connected to specific elements of the developing recommendations. This summary table (see [here](#)) has been very carefully checked for comprehensiveness (all points from the unedited comments are represented in the summary), and accuracy (all comments are expressed in this table in a way that accurately reflects the unedited comments). The main differences between the summary and the minimally edited tables are (1) the summary avoided repeated statement of the same point, and (2) the summary aimed for very succinct phrasing to enhance readability.

Finally, at the end of the winter quarter, the CDR met for another half-day meeting at the John Evans Center where we discussed the feedback received over the course of the preceding quarter, and considered various options for refining and revising our proposals.

This final report of the CDR reflects the outcomes of this process of examination and deliberation within the CDR in combination with College-wide engagement through the CDR website, individual meetings, and group discussions, as just described. We present specific proposals even as we acknowledge diversity of opinion within the CDR and across the College. This report should thus be viewed as a sign-post, or pause for reflection, in an ongoing process of considering how best to capture the skill-set and mind-set that should characterize a Weinberg College graduate.

## **1.2 Our current curriculum in context**

The CDR began its work with an overview of the Weinberg curriculum in relation to broad trends in higher education in the USA. A key distinction that guides general education systems across American universities is between distribution and core systems (for extensive discussion, see Menand, Louis. *The Marketplace of Ideas Reform and Resistance in the American University*. W.W. Norton, 2010). Briefly, the distinguishing feature between these two systems rests on the philosophical stance that Colleges take regarding the ultimate goal of a College degree. The key idea behind the core model is that there is a body of knowledge to which all College students, regardless of area of concentration, should be exposed. In prototypical core systems, this goal is achieved through a set of required general education courses that are extra-departmental and designed specifically for non-specialists. In contrast, the key idea behind the distribution model is that a liberal education aims to develop ways of thinking and intellectual approaches that can be applied to all areas of specialization. Accordingly, in distribution systems, the specific courses

through which students develop these skills can be in any academic discipline. Distribution systems typically require all students to take a prescribed number of department- or program-based courses with an even distribution across the major academic divisions of the College (typically, natural science, social science, and humanities).

The current Weinberg curriculum, like that of many of our peer institutions, combines elements of core and distribution systems. Like typical distribution systems, ours requires all Weinberg students to take two department-based courses in each of six areas (the “distros”). The Weinberg First-Year Seminar Program bears some resemblance to a core model of general education in that these courses involve some degree of central (i.e. extra-departmental) administration and are specifically designed for non-specialists. Nevertheless, the current Weinberg system is aptly described as a system that is quite closely aligned with the underlying philosophy and implementation strategy of the distribution model of general education.

In a series of three articles published in *Cross Currents* (now *Weinberg Magazine*) in the mid-2000s, Bill Haarlow (Director of College-Admission Relations, Senior Lecturer in American Studies, and ex officio member of the CDR) traced the development of the Weinberg curriculum from 1855 to 2008 (see [here](#)). Of particular interest for the CDR is the context in which the current Weinberg system of distribution requirements took its present shape. Not unlike concerns that we face today, major concerns at the time of the last major revision of the College curriculum revolved around uncontrolled growth in the list of courses available to students in the divisionally-based distribution areas, and the need for courses that would provide a distinctive and supportive first-year experience. An ambitious process of restructuring the general education requirements was undertaken in the early 1970s, and by the mid-1970s the current system of two required Freshman Seminars (now called First-Year Seminars), demonstrated proficiency in writing and foreign language, and two required courses in each of six distribution areas was in place. Notable changes in the Weinberg curriculum in the four decades since then have largely revolved around the development of a distinctive approach to inter-disciplinarity. Since the 1980s, the number of inter- and multi-departmental programs has grown dramatically, allowing students to pursue majors, and minors that demonstrate familiarity with more than one traditionally defined area of knowledge.

While the broad structure of the Weinberg degree requirements has proved remarkably robust, there are new developments to which we must now respond. In particular, the changing demographics of our student body, the broad impact of the data and computing revolution, and the social-political-environmental crises that define our time and place all point to a need for reconsideration, and possibly substantial updating and revision, of our degree requirements. Moreover, a relatively recent trend in curriculum development at all levels emphasizes the importance of clearly articulated learning goals and goal-aligned assessment. External accreditation requirements reinforce this general outcome-driven approach to curriculum development. Accordingly, the charge to the CDR explicitly asks the committee to develop a set of College-wide learning outcomes and to recommend revisions that are guided by these desired outcomes.

With this background on the formation of the Weinberg College’s CDR, our procedures over the past year, and the general history and current context of the current Weinberg degree requirements, we now turn to the second part of our report, namely our overall vision and recommendations for revision.

## **2. Overall Vision and Recommendations**

### **2.1 Three inter-connected “levels”**

In the CDR’s examination of the curricula of peer institutions we noted that, despite broadly similar degree requirements, colleges of arts and sciences across the country differ in relating college-wide learning outcomes to particular degree requirements. Some institutions articulate their college-wide learning outcomes as distinctly skills-based rather than discipline-based, and present their degree requirements (categories of disciplinary defined courses) as serving the purpose of development of these skills/competencies (e.g. Stanford’s [Ways of Thinking/Ways of Doing](#) curriculum). Others articulate their College-wide learning outcomes in terms of both skills and disciplines, and present integration of these skills and disciplines as the over-arching goal of the undergraduate degree (e.g. [Washington University’s Integrated Inquiry \(IQ\) Curriculum](#)).

In our approach to the task of developing a set of learning outcomes that capture the skill-set and mind-set that should characterize a Weinberg College graduate, the CDR found it useful to describe our curriculum in terms of three inter-connected “levels.” Level 1 represents the broadly defined learning outcomes that characterize the “Weinberg Way.” At Level 2, we specify the College-wide requirements, in terms of both skills/competencies and disciplines/content areas, that encompass the broadly-defined goals specified in Level 1. Finally, Level 3 identifies particular courses, majors, and minors that challenge Weinberg students to develop and practice the skills that characterize the Weinberg academic experience. The work of the CDR focused on Levels 1 and 2, leaving Level 3 for departments and programs to address.

### **2.2 Level 1 -- The “Weinberg Way”**

We approached the task of developing a set of College-wide learning outcomes by articulating a key question: What should a Weinberg graduate know and be able to do upon graduation?

We sought answers to this question from various sources. We looked at the university-wide learning goals proposed by the Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Experience, and at the curricula of various peer institutions with particular attention to Duke University, Harvard University, Stanford University, and Washington University in St. Louis, all of which had recently undergone or were in the midst of similar processes of curriculum review. Additionally, we gathered direct responses to our key question from numerous conversations with faculty and students across the College, and from a web-based form that was publicized to all Weinberg faculty via email during the winter quarter of 2016. Quite lengthy conversations on this topic were held with the Weinberg Student Advisory Board, at a meeting of Weinberg College Council of Chairs, and during numerous interviews conducted by the CDR sub-groups. Responses to our key question were combined and then grouped into broad categories, which were then distilled into four proposed learning goals: Observe, Critique, Reflect, and Express (see Figure 1 below).

Rather than representing distinct skills or competencies that can be clearly delineated from each other, we view this set of four imperatives as characterizing the active process of understanding, or intellection, that Weinberg students develop in their undergraduate studies and continuously throughout their lives. They form a set of guiding foundational principles for the College-wide



degree requirements, each of which variously emphasizes these four aspects of the “Weinberg Way” – Observe, Critique, Reflect, Express.

Figure 1: Level 1: The Weinberg Way

<i>Weinberg students learn to...</i>	<i>This means...</i>
<b>Observe</b>	Weinberg students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultivate curiosity</li> <li>• seek encounters with the world, both on campus and beyond</li> </ul>
<b>Critique</b>	Weinberg students develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the ability to make reasoned decisions</li> <li>• the ingenuity to develop hypotheses based on empirical evidence</li> <li>• the critical skills to become informed interpreters of information</li> <li>• an understanding of how to approach a moral problem</li> <li>• the capacity to differentiate between trustworthy and unreliable information</li> </ul>
<b>Reflect</b>	Weinberg students gain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a consciousness and understanding of their place in the world that is both historical and global</li> <li>• an understanding that one’s perspective is the product of interconnected webs of people, ideas, and events</li> </ul>
<b>Express</b>	Weinberg students improve their ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• articulate their ideas in oral, written, visual, digital, and other media</li> <li>• assemble narratives, explanations, data, and arguments that navigate carefully ordered evidence</li> </ul>

These learning goals are presented here with only minor adjustments to their explanatory blurbs following our winter 2016 discussions. In general, those discussions with faculty and students revealed positive or neutral reactions to these learning goals, with some expressions of skepticism. Some colleagues objected to the perceived branding conveyed by repetitive reference to the name of the Weinberg College. (“We should put more emphasis on the idea of liberal arts; discomfort with the *Weinberg Way*, which as stated, is a statement of the obvious.”) Several comments pointed to noteworthy omissions, including not enough emphasis on disciplinary knowledge (depth, i.e. a major), reduction of the “Critique” learning outcome to “reasoned decision making,” and absence of “Problem Solving” and “Create/”Innovate” as learning outcomes. There was also some objection to a perceived emphasis on humanities and de-emphasis of science.

For the purpose of this report, we present the learning outcomes in Figure 1 as a considered starting point for further discussion and specification. We envision a broad-based iterative process in which the specification of learning goals for the various components of the College-wide degree requirements (at Level 2, as discussed below) are both guided by and feed back into these overarching Level 1 learning goals for the Weinberg degree. Ways to incorporate the omissions and

points of contention noted above may become clearer as the specific degree requirements are formed.

### **2.3 Level 2 -- The Weinberg Degree Requirements**

The committee sought carefully-considered and creative ways to capitalize on the successes of the existing Weinberg degree requirements, while simultaneously making the curriculum more meaningful and flexible for today's students. From our discussions with members of the Weinberg community, we understood that the current system of degree requirements has many strengths. We did not sense a desire for total overhaul; instead we saw a need for substantial, though not radical, updating and adjustment. In particular, the three CDR sub-groups identified the following points as needing particular attention. First, in the current system, the First-Year Seminar Program is the primary vehicle for Weinberg students to demonstrate writing proficiency. While this program is a strong Weinberg asset, the CDR saw a need to create a larger space within the system of College-wide requirements to address the full range of advising, writing, presentation, and research experiences that twenty-first century students at institutions such as Northwestern expect and deserve. Second, the current foreign language requirement is purely proficiency-based. Students must demonstrate foreign language proficiency equivalent to two years of College-level instruction. The CDR viewed this proficiency-based requirement as falling short of the broader goal of developing "global citizenship." Finally, though balanced and comprehensive in their coverage of the disciplines represented in the College, the current system of distribution requirements (the "distros") tends towards insulated disciplinary silos with little opportunity for inter-disciplinary integration. Moreover, the current distro areas do not directly address the recent call for a requirement in the area of social inequalities and diversities, to which the CDR was explicitly charged with responding.

#### *2.3.1. The foundations-and-overlays framework*

With these considerations in mind, the CDR proposes a system of degree requirements that introduces an updated and integrated framework for a flexible curriculum. The overall structure of the proposed curriculum has three main components, namely foundational competencies, foundational disciplines, and interdisciplinary overlays. The first two components, the foundational competencies and foundational disciplines, are traditional categories of requirement that seek to expose students to the skills and broad areas of knowledge that we view as essential for today's complex world. Similar to the current system, courses within these two main categories may be taken in satisfaction of only one requirement (i.e. there can be no double-counting of courses within each of these foundational categories); however, these courses may be applied to requirements for a major or a minor. Added to this foundational structure is a set of interdisciplinary overlays that can be understood as a series of lenses through which the foundational academic disciplines can be viewed. Critically, the interdisciplinary overlays do not add to the number of requirements, but are instead themes that can be included in courses across the curriculum. Each overlay will be defined by a specific set of learning outcomes. Courses taken across a student's program of study could satisfy that overlay requirement provided that the course addresses the overlay's learning outcomes. This includes courses taken in either of the foundational categories, as well as courses taken for majors, for minors, or as electives.

The foundations-and-overlays structure of College-wide degree requirements recognizes a distinction between competencies (also known as approaches, skills, or ways) and disciplines (also referred to as topic areas, methods of inquiry, or sectors of knowledge), while at the same time attempts to encourage development of courses that include integrative curricular elements. By articulating learning goals that address highly general themes, the interdisciplinary overlays aim to transcend traditional academic divisions. Moreover, by sitting somewhat apart from the foundational requirements, the overlays introduce an opportunity for flexibility in the curriculum. One can envision modification to the overlays on far shorter time-scales than modification to the foundations (as often as every few years rather than every few decades) because adjustment to an overlay's learning outcomes would not necessitate development of large numbers of new courses. Instead, an overlay's learning outcomes can be accommodated by adjustment to existing courses. That is, overlay learning outcomes should be articulated at a level of detail and generalizability that make it possible for existing courses to undergo rather modest adjustment in order to satisfy a newly introduced or modified overlay requirement. It is in this sense that overlays are intended to function as lenses that direct focus in courses across the curriculum to the dynamic issues and values that are central to our time and place.

As a basic structure for the curriculum, the foundations-and-overlays approach was generally well received in our winter 2016 meetings with colleagues and students. Concerns that were raised identified the system as too complicated, the division between "competencies" and "disciplines" as arbitrary, and the overall model as not in line with future directions of education (too "archaic"). Positive reactions to the notion of overlays mentioned that they may help prevent marginalization of certain issues and concepts; however, to this particular point, others noted that overlays could have the undesirable effect of "watering down" critical issues and concepts.

Overall, the CDR remains committed to the general concept of the foundations-and-overlays structure, even though we vacillated somewhat in our ideas of what aspects of the curriculum are best suited to each element. Perhaps most important, in the end, is the general idea that by introducing overlays as a new type of requirement, we introduce the possibility of greater flexibility. As noted above, adjustments to overlay learning outcomes can be accommodated significantly more easily than adjustments to learning outcomes for foundations. Level 2 adjustments (i.e. adjustments to either foundations or overlays) will always require accommodation at Level 3 (i.e. accommodation in specific course offerings by departments). But we hope and anticipate that the introduction of overlays will function as an incentive for faculty to experiment with the incorporation of highly generalizable, cross-disciplinary concepts and approaches into courses across the curriculum.

### *2.3.2. Proposed Weinberg Degree Requirements*

Figure 2 provides an overview of the CDR's proposed implementation of this structure, with explanatory notes below.

Figure 2: Schematic of the proposed Weinberg degree requirements

<b>Proposed Weinberg Degree Requirements</b> Total of 45 credits 17-20 College-wide requirements and 3 overlays		<b>Overlays (3)</b>					
<b>Foundational Competencies (5-8)</b>	First-Year Fall Quarter Seminar (1)	Advanced Expression (1)	Social Inequalities & Diversities – USA (1)	Social Inequalities & Diversities – Global (1)			
	First-Year Writing Seminar (1)						
	World Languages and Cultures (3-6)						
<b>Foundational Disciplines (12 credits)</b>	1. Natural Sciences (2)						
	2. Quantitative Data Analysis & Formal Reasoning (2) *						
	3. Social & Behavioral Sciences (2)						
	4. Historical Studies (2)						
	5. Literature & Arts (2)						
	6. Cultures of Thought and Belief (2)						
<b>Major &amp; Electives (25)</b>							

\* Special note: Courses that satisfy this distribution requirement that are classified as courses on quantitative data analysis are separately marked with an asterisk. At least one of the two courses that students take to meet this requirement must be classified as a course on quantitative data analysis.

### 2.3.2.1. Foundational Competency: First Year Fall Quarter (Q1) Seminar

The CDR proposes a dissociation of the writing requirement from the First-Year Seminar (FYS) requirement. In particular, we envision First-Year Fall Quarter (Q1) Seminars modeled after the current FYS requirement but with the critical difference that the proposed Q1 seminars would not have an obligatory focus on writing. Like current FYSs, the Q1 seminars would be topic-based with small enrollments, and they would preserve the current advising relationship between the fall quarter seminar instructor and first-year students. Q1 seminars would vary in format and emphasis depending on the topic and expertise of the instructor. Crucially, regardless of whether instructors chose to include a heavy writing component, they would no longer be obliged to assess writing proficiency at the end of the seminar. By removing the required writing focus (and assessment) from the first quarter course, we aim for a more satisfactory experience in this crucial first quarter course, one that delves deeply into a specific topic while at the same time allowing some room to explicitly address transition-to-College skills, general well-being and work/life balance within the quarter system.

The rationale behind this Q1 seminar proposal is to remove pressure from faculty and students to address an exceedingly vast range of course goals – College level writing, general transition-to-College skills, and the course topic – all in the span of one quarter. Our discussions indicated that this range of goals presents a significant challenge to some (though certainly not all) faculty and

students. We opted for this de-coupling of writing and advising in the first quarter as a strategy for relieving this pressure.

Reactions to this proposal in our preliminary report revealed concern about (a) the suitability and willingness of faculty to serve as effective instructors for the transition-to-College component, and (b) the academic rigor of these courses. Related to the latter is the concern that these seminars might be too removed in focus from academic disciplines, and might therefore affect the ability of many departments to recruit first-year students. (“There will be no intellectual “pointing” to disciplines that don’t appear in high school.”) Addressing the former concern (suitability of faculty as transition-to-College instructors) would require significant new faculty training (enhancement to current FYS faculty orientation). Finally, we note that these Q1 seminars hold some potential for introduction of a “common experience” course into the Weinberg curriculum (a recommendation of the Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Experience).

#### *2.3.2.2. Foundational Competency: First Year Writing Seminar*

As a complement to the Q1 seminar, students would be required to take a second seminar, a First-Year Writing Seminar, typically in the winter or spring of the first year. These seminars would be developed and taught by faculty with an interest and training in the teaching of writing, typically, but not exclusively, faculty in the Cook Family Writing Program. Like the Q1 seminars (and current FYSs), First-Year Writing Seminars would be topic-based with small enrollment. Importantly, these seminars would include a rigorous introduction to College-level writing.

A noteworthy reaction to this proposal was that the proposed first-year seminar structure shifts primary responsibility for the writing-intensive first-year seminars from departments and programs to the Writing Program. This was viewed by some as ceding intellectual ownership and potentially treating writing as an isolated form of competence. Others noted that the proposed first-year seminar structure might provide an opportunity for graduate students (e.g. in English) to obtain more teaching experience as instructors of record.

#### *2.3.2.3. Foundational Competency: World Languages and Cultures*

The CDR proposes retaining the current requirement of demonstrated proficiency in a second language at the intermediate level (equivalent to two years of College-level language study). This proficiency requirement can be satisfied by completing course work or by placement upon arrival at Northwestern. In addition, we propose the introduction of a minimum number of language courses to be taken at Northwestern. We recommend that this minimum be 3 courses, but leave open the possibility of a minimum of fewer than 3 courses. For example, just as all Weinberg students, regardless of AP credit, must currently complete at least one course in each distribution area at Northwestern, all students, regardless of prior knowledge and coursework, might be required to take at least one Northwestern language course. Students who achieve intermediate proficiency (equivalent to two years of study) of a non-native language upon arrival at Northwestern or after taking fewer than this minimum number of courses at Northwestern, would have the option of taking lower level courses in another language or of taking advanced courses in their previously-studied language.

This course minimum aims to shift the emphasis of the proposed World Languages and Cultures requirement from non-native language proficiency to a wider focus in which language proficiency is a component of a broader global cultural competence. Language study at all levels, particularly through university language departments where language courses are offered within their broad literary and cultural contexts, involves a significant degree of cultural exposure. This exposure, even when limited to language study at a level of limited communicative proficiency, inevitably imparts a broader sense of one’s place in the world and in history. As such, language study offers a rich path to becoming a responsible, empathetic world citizen.

While we acknowledge that this proposal is quite controversial and will need substantial clarification for the many “special” cases that will inevitably arise (e.g. how to handle life-long bilingual students, the growing population of international students, credit for study abroad, etc.), the CDR as a whole remained committed to an enhanced global cultural competence that includes significant academic exposure to one or more non-native languages. We acknowledge in particular the concerns that the proposed 3-course minimum imposes additional constraints on students’ courses of study, particularly for science majors and double majors, and that the focus on language courses might displace other courses and topics, particularly in other areas of the Humanities. We also take to heart the remark that, if enacted, significant additional teaching resources would be needed for some languages (e.g. Spanish). At the same time, we appreciate the observation that the proposed minimum could potentially help “level the playing field” for students from high schools with limited language study opportunities.

As an indication of the impact of this proposed change, table 1 below shows the number of 2016 Weinberg graduates who would have had to take additional language courses had a proposed minimum of 3 language courses to be taken at Northwestern been in place. As shown in this table, 75% (13% + 62%) of 2016 graduates would have had to take no additional language courses, while 25% (6%+9%+9%) of 2016 graduates would have had to take up to 3 additional language courses. Table 2 shows the distribution across non-language Weinberg majors of the 25% of 2014-2016 graduates who took fewer than three language courses at Northwestern.

Table 1: Number of language courses taken at Northwestern by 2014-2016 Weinberg graduates

<b>Number of foreign language courses taken at NU</b>	<b>% graduates</b>
0	6%
1	9%
2	9%
3	13%
>3	62%

Table 2: Percentage of 2014-2016 Weinberg graduates who took fewer than 3 foreign language courses at Northwestern in each non-language major

<b>Non-language majors</b>	<b>% graduates with &lt; 3 foreign language courses at NU</b>
Integrated Science Program	58%
Computer Science	44%
Materials Science	40%

Chemistry	37%
Physics	35%
Latina & Latino Studies	33%
Environmental Sciences	30%
Mathematics	29%
Cognitive Science	29%
Psychology	28%
Statistics	27%
Biological Sciences	27%
Economics	27%
American Studies	27%
Art History	24%
Anthropology	20%
History	18%
Political Science	17%
Sociology	17%
Art Theory & Practice	17%
Philosophy	16%
Earth & Planetary Sciences	15%
Linguistics	15%
African American Studies	10%
Comparative Literary Studies	10%
English	10%
Religious Studies	8%
Neuroscience	0%
Jewish Studies	0%
Gender & Sexuality Studies	0%
Asian Studies	0%

#### 2.3.2.4. Foundational Disciplines

The CDR proposes a set of requirements in the foundational disciplines that maintains the current 6-by-2 structure. Like the current system, we propose two required credits in each of six areas with even distribution across the three College divisions, natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. We propose no change to four of the six areas: Natural Sciences, Social & Behavioral Sciences, Historical Studies, and Literature & Fine Arts. For two of the current areas, Area II: Formal Studies and Area V: Ethics & Values, we propose some significant modification (described more below). As explained further below, our initial proposal saw some problems with the current Area V distro and suggested eliminating it. However, after consultation with faculty colleagues during winter 2016, we determined that the 6-by-2 structure best represents the distribution of disciplinary knowledge across the divisions.

For all areas, we strongly recommend that a detailed and comprehensive review of current course listings be undertaken as a collaborative process between departments, programs, and the two

standing Weinberg College curriculum committees, the Curriculum Policies Committee (CPC) and the Curriculum Review Committee (CRC). This process should involve the articulation of clear learning outcomes for each foundational discipline, which can then be used to guide the process of assigning specific courses to appropriate foundational disciplines, as well as for existing course revision and new course development. As discussed above (end of section 2.2), this process should be guided by the broad learning goals that define the Weinberg Way (the Level 1 goals) – Observe, Critique, Reflect, and Express.

Quantitative Data Analysis and Formal Reasoning. Our proposal includes the stipulation that students should be required to take two courses in an area entitled “Quantitative Data Analysis and Formal Reasoning” (to replace current Area II: Formal Studies). This foundational discipline area would include both courses that cover quantitative data analysis (such as statistics courses taught by the statistics department as well as statistics, and data science courses taught by various other departments) and formal reasoning (such as mathematics courses, logic courses taught by the philosophy department, certain linguistics courses, and certain computer science courses). On the list of courses that meet this requirement, courses that are classified as courses on quantitative data analysis will be separately identified (e.g. by an asterisk). At least one of the two courses that students take to meet this requirement must be classified as a course on quantitative data analysis. Critically, this stipulation responds directly to the need that colleagues across the College have identified for a requirement that provides all students, regardless of eventual area of specialization, with a forum in which to develop an understanding of how scientific information is generated (e.g. fundamentals of study design and sampling and their impact on outcomes), evaluated (e.g. the distinction between correlation and causation, identification of conflicts of interest and biases), and presented (e.g. the use and misuse of charts and tables).

While we could break the “formal studies” distribution area into two areas, one for Quantitative Data Analysis and one for Formal Reasoning, the CDR felt that fragmenting the distribution requirements into too many small areas would introduce greater rigidity rather than flexibility into the system of degree requirements. Therefore we instead suggest that a single distribution area be retained for these courses, but that it be renamed as “Quantitative Data Analysis and Formal Reasoning” to provide more visibility to the fact that courses on quantitative data analysis are included in this area. And, importantly, at least one of the two courses that students take to satisfy this distribution area should be on quantitative data analysis.

Another alternative is to add an additional overlay requirement in the area of quantitative data analysis. Under this approach, quantitative data analysis skills would be introduced in courses in various disciplines rather than in courses that are dedicated to quantitative data analysis per se. This approach would require adjustment to the areas listed as foundational disciplines, specifically Area 2, in order to avoid a clash (redundancy) of the overlay requirement with the foundational competency course. Rather than over-burdening the overlay component of the system of requirements, which is already quite complicated, we opted for the two-part foundational discipline as just described.

Cultures of Thought and Belief. We propose a foundational discipline named “Cultures of Thought and Belief” (replaces current Area V: Ethics & Values), the goal of which will be to expose students to diverse ways of thinking – religious, philosophical, and cultural – about the environment, sentient life, and the nature of reality and human experience in the world. We view



the study of Ethics –a trained discipline of thought in its own right -- as an integral part of this more broadly defined foundational discipline. In particular, we envision learning goals for this foundational discipline that include asking students to think carefully about what it means to lead a good life, and about how various cultures and societies across history and across the globe tackle this question.

Our discussions over the winter quarter were particularly lively on this aspect of the curriculum, and ultimately brought to light several views regarding the proper placement of this area in the Weinberg curriculum. We had initially proposed an Ethics overlay requirement based on the idea that ethical concerns are important for all disciplines and we saw value in infusing such questions in courses throughout the curriculum. Our colleagues in the Philosophy Department, particularly those with training and expertise as ethicists, pointed out the crucial contrast between *descriptive inquiries* and *normative questions*. While the former seeks to understand *how* and *what* individuals and groups think, the latter addresses questions about how one might consider and engage in discussion about the way things *ought* to be. Importantly, normative studies as an academic area does not seek to teach students *what* to think about ethical issues (which could be construed as indoctrination), but instead aims to teach students *how* to think about ethical issues. As suggested by the proposed name for this foundational discipline, “Cultures of Thought and Belief,” the overarching aim of this requirement would be to provide students with the conceptual tools and methods to engage deeply with normative questions (as defined above) while at the same time exposing students to the diversity of approaches expressed in human cultures and scholarly traditions.

#### 2.3.2.5. *Interdisciplinary Overlays*

We proposed three overlay requirements, one in “Advanced Expression” and two in “Social Inequalities and Diversities.” As described above, overlay requirements do not add to the total number of required credits; instead, overlays introduce a nimble structural element to the overall curriculum with the aim of infusing a particular set of learning goals (to be defined for each overlay) across the curriculum. The overlay requirements are nimble in the sense that they can be continuously updated and adjusted without too much disturbance to the other components of the curriculum (the foundational competencies, foundational disciplines, majors, minors, and electives).

The proposed “Advanced Expression” overlay aims to provide students with at least one course that includes an explicit focus on the development of research and presentation skills. The aim of this overlay is to incorporate the essential skills of argument development, evidence gathering, and project presentation into courses across the curriculum. We envision courses that address these goals in a field-specific manner. For example, some courses may involve archival research and primarily written presentation, others may involve laboratory-based research and primarily oral presentation, and yet others may revolve around digital media. Many departments and programs already include courses that address these (or similar) goals and others may choose to incorporate these goals into existing courses. Since students may select courses in their major(s) or in other areas to satisfy this requirement, it is not necessary for all majors to offer courses that would satisfy this overlay requirement. Nevertheless, with the introduction of this overlay requirement, we hope to carve out a space in the curriculum that will encourage innovative teaching and student-led project development.

A crucial element of the proposed new curriculum is the introduction of two overlays in the area of “Social Inequalities and Diversities.” This designation was originally proposed in 2013 by the Academics/Education sub-group of the University Diversity Council, and Weinberg courses that address learning goals in this area have been developed (or, in some cases, existing courses have been modified) under the auspices of the [Hewlett Curricular Fellowship Program](#). Our proposed pair of overlays, one with a focus on the USA and a second with a more global outlook, reflects an ongoing discussion about how to navigate the local-global continuum amidst the complex and highly dynamic social and political movements that characterize the “here” and “now.”

Reactions to these overlays honed in on the name for the overlay, which clearly reflects the intricacy and complexity of the underlying issue that this overlay aims to address. Suggestions range from inclusion of “Justice”, “Environmental,” and “Sustainability” in the overlay name, to objections to the linking of inequality and diversity (“conveys a chauvinistic sense of diversity”). Concern was also raised regarding an implied conflation of social and economic inequalities, and questions were raised about whether the overlay as currently expressed would stand the test of time and whether its support in the College community is over- or under-estimated. In addition, some saw the overlay approach as weak (as potentially watering down attention to the issues at stake). At the same time, others voiced strong support for the general idea of one USA-focused and one globally-focused overlay in the general area of social inequalities and diversities.

Notwithstanding these comments and suggestions, the CDR remains committed to the proposed two-part overlay. As the process of articulation of learning goals and course development or modification unfolds, we expect the name and focus of each overlay to evolve in a way that best approximates the underlying goal which is to build attention to the critical issues of our time and place into courses across the curriculum.

### **3. Ancillary issues**

#### **3.1 Number of required credits**

One of the recommendations of the University Task Force on the Undergraduate Academic Experience (the UTFUAE) was that schools with a 45-credit graduation requirement should reduce the number of requirements to 42. The Weinberg degree currently requires 45 credits, and the CDR’s proposed set of degree requirements retains this total number of required credits. Nevertheless, the CDR’s discussions touched upon this issue. Without taking a stand on whether reducing the number of required credits would help, hinder, or remain neutral vis à vis the stated aim to reduce student stress and increase overall student satisfaction, we include some comments regarding reduction of the required number of credits for the Weinberg degree. These comments emerged from our own discussions as well as from written comments and personal communications with colleagues during the period of the CDR’s activities.

First, regarding the relation between the number of required credits and the overall undergraduate academic experience, the UTFUAE provides a detailed discussion of trends in the use of Advanced Placement (AP) and other non-Northwestern credits to meet the required credit total. The UTFUAE reports that over the period from 2010 to 2014, the average number of Northwestern credits per Weinberg graduate ranged from 42.2 to 43.3. The report also notes that the average

number AP credits for the first-year class of fall 2014 was 6.9. In view of changing student demographics, it is likely that there will be increasing disparities across students in access to opportunities for earning non-Northwestern credits, a change that could be taken as an argument for bringing the required total in closer alignment with the average number of credits taken at Northwestern (i.e. to the recommended 42).

Second, the current requirement of 45 credits sets an expectation of a typical load of four courses per quarter since a student can only afford three 3-course quarters over the course of the assumed 4-year undergraduate experience. A reduction to 42 required credits would allow students to take six 3-course quarters, thereby tipping the balance of the typical load from mostly 4-course quarters to an even distribution across 3- and 4-course quarters. This could encourage students (and faculty) to take a little more time for depth in individual courses. An even more dramatic move in this direction would be to a total of 36 required credits (i.e. to an expected 3-course load in all quarters); however, this would require extensive curricular adjustments that may not be entirely consistent with the current College climate and pedagogical culture.

Finally, even though the CDR does not propose a reduction of the total number of required credits, we recognize the merits of the arguments to do so, and therefore would like to point out some possible strategies for accommodating a reduction from 45 to 42. If such a reduction were to be accommodated by a reduction in the number of College-wide credits (rather than by a reduction in the number of courses devoted to the major and electives), one possibility would be to combine the foundational competencies into 3 more broadly defined divisions that align with the College divisions of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and to require a total of 3 (rather than 4) credits per division. This strategy could include the stipulation that students may not earn all 3 credits in a single sub-division where sub-divisions are specified as the currently proposed foundational competencies. Alternatively, 1 rather than 2 credits could be required in each of the 6 more narrowly defined foundational competencies, which would reduce the total to 39 credits.

Either of these strategies, or any other that reduces the number of required credits in either the foundational competencies or the foundational disciplines, would shift the balance of the curriculum away from the College-wide requirements, which currently accounts for 20/45 (44%) to 17/42 (40%) of the required credits. A final possible strategy for reducing the total number of required credits would reduce the credits slots available for the major(s), minor(s), and electives from 25/45 (56%) to 22/42 (52%). The effect of this strategy would vary substantially across the various majors and minors depending on the number of courses required for the major or minor, but it would retain the College-wide emphasis on breadth.

### **3.2 Variable-credit and thematically-connected courses**

Yet another approach to counting credits in an era of substantial disparities in pre-college academic experiences might be to expand opportunities for variable credit courses or thematically-connected course sequences. While this strategy would not necessarily reduce student work-load, it would add variety and an interesting opportunity for intellectual challenge to the overall undergraduate experience. It would also provide faculty with a forum in which to explore innovative teaching approaches.

Two examples of highly successful programs that take a step in the direction of breaking the one-course-one-credit mold are the Chicago Field Studies Program and the Kaplan Humanities Scholars Program. The Chicago Field Studies Program (CFS) connects coursework to internships, and offers students 1-4 units of credit for a quarter-long CFS experience depending on the amount of coursework and the number of hours per week that students work at their internship. The Kaplan Humanities Scholars Program is a highly selective and intensive four-course program in which first-year students take a sequence of four courses spread over two quarters. These thematically-connected courses are taught by a team of three professors drawn from different departments, and address a broad theme (e.g., Utopia, Capitalism, the Orient) from a variety of intellectual methods and perspectives.

Curricular opportunities such as these that break the strict one-course-one-credit mold would potentially be a challenge to accommodate within the proposed system of degree requirements, particularly in relation to the proposed modifications to the first year. (This challenge was pointed out to us with particular regard to the Kaplan Humanities Scholars Program.) Nevertheless, the success and continuing demand for these two programs suggests that allowing some flexibility and variation in credits earned by students (and faculty) for innovative courses and course sequences could have a significant positive impact on the overall academic experience.

### **3.3 Level 3 -- Majors and minors**

While the CDR proposals do not directly interact with the size and structure of the various Weinberg majors and minors – which we identify as Level 3 concerns to be addressed by departments and programs – this information is an important part of the context in which to consider our proposals at Level 1 (College-wide learning outcomes) and Level 2 (College-wide requirements).

Information about the number of courses required for the 48 Weinberg majors and the 52 Weinberg minors is provided [here](#) and [here](#), respectively. As seen in these charts and tables, there is substantial variation in the course requirements across majors and minors with a range of 10-24 for majors and 6-11 for minors. Moreover, the distribution of departmental and related courses within majors also varies greatly. For example, the Biological Sciences major requires 9 program courses and 10 related courses for a total of 19 courses, whereas the Political Science and History majors each require 12 department courses and no related courses. From the perspective of a student looking to construct a course of study, the Biological Sciences major (and several other similarly structured Natural Science majors) might appear approximately equivalent to, for example, a History and Political Science double-major. Similarly, some minors (e.g. Religious Studies with only 6 required courses) combine more easily than others (e.g. French or Computer Science with 8 and 9 required courses, respectively) with certain majors, particularly those with a high number of required courses. When we consider how students (and their advisers) construct their courses of study over the typical 12-quarter undergraduate experience, the number of required courses for the various majors and minors likely plays a significant role in determining the extent to which students feel empowered to indulge their curiosity and to explore the intellectual diversity that we so highly value as an essential characteristic of a liberal arts education.

For some additional context in which to consider the CDR proposals, the tables and figure below shows the distribution of majors and minors across the full set of 2016 Weinberg graduates. Figure 3 shows the distribution of majors across the three College divisions for students with a single major (66% of the total). Table 3 shows the proportion of students with various numbers of majors and minors. Note that, by the College's "Rule of Three," a student's total number of majors plus minors may not typically exceed three. (Rare exceptions to this rule are granted on a case-by-case basis.)

Figure 3: Distribution of majors for students with a single major

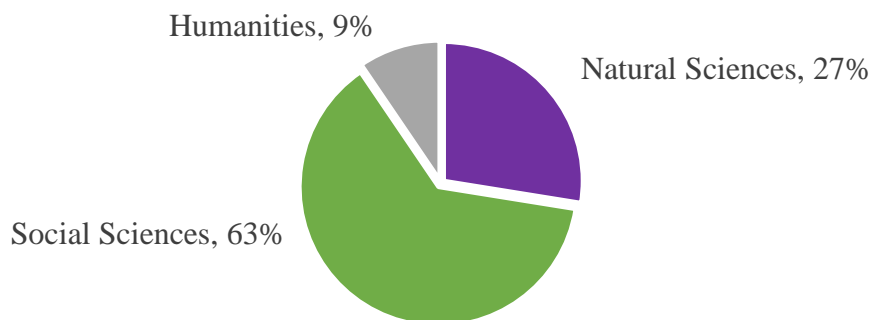


Table 3: Proportion of 2016 Weinberg graduates with various numbers of majors and minors

	1 major	2 majors	3 majors	<b>Total</b>
0 minors	26%	23%	2%	<b>51%</b>
1 minor	35%	8%		<b>43%</b>
2 minors	6%			<b>6%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Next, Table 4 shows the distribution of major combinations across the three College divisions for Weinberg students who graduated with more than one major. Within this system of classification, these data provide a very broad-stroked sense of the frequency with which students who graduate with more than one major select combinations of majors that emphasize depth of study within a single disciplinary division (60%) versus those whose selection emphasizes breadth across broadly defined disciplinary divisions (40%).

Table 4: Pairings of majors by division for 2016 graduates with more than a single major

	<b>Division areas of paired majors</b>	<b>Percent with this combination</b>
Within-division pairings	two social science majors	48%
	two natural science majors	11%
	two humanities majors	1%
Between-division pairings	one social science, one natural science major	24%
	one social science, one humanities major	13%
	one natural science, one humanities major	3%

Finally, Table 5 shows the distribution of major-minor combinations. These data show a more even distribution of within-division (52%) and between-division (48%) combinations compared to the 60-40 ratio of within-division to between-division double major pairings shown in Table 3.

Table 5: Major-plus-minor pairings for 2016 graduates with one or more minors

	<b>Division area of major</b>	<b>Division area of minor</b>	<b>Percent with this combination</b>
Within-division pairings	Social Science	Social Science	42%
	Natural Science	Natural Science	8%
	Humanities	Humanities	2%
Between-division pairings	Natural Science	Social Science	11%
	Natural Science	Humanities	1%
	Social Science	Natural Science	8%
	Social Science	Humanities	4%
	Humanities	Natural Science	5%
	Humanities	Social Science	19%

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The process that began with the appointment of the CDR in winter 2016 has led us to propose the changes to the Weinberg degree requirements detailed in this report. The many conversations that we had within the committee and across the broader Weinberg community underscored two main points. On the one hand, there is widespread pride in and commitment to the general curricular approach that has characterized the Weinberg degree for over four decades. Nevertheless, on the other hand, there is equally broad support for updating the curriculum to reflect the scientific, cultural, and social changes that characterize our time and place (the “here and now”). Notwithstanding the disparate points of view and multiplicity of opinions regarding exactly how we should adjust our degree requirements, our proposals have been guided by these two points of general agreement.

We conclude with three final comments regarding the next steps to be taken. First, a critical next step in this process of curriculum revision is to develop a carefully ordered strategy for vetting and submitting the various proposed changes to the standing Curriculum Policy Committee (CPC), and ultimately for a vote by the Weinberg faculty. Second, we imagine that the College will need to establish a procedure – possibly through the standing Curriculum Policy Committee – for carefully identifying and managing all conflicts and/or (un)anticipated consequences of any curricular changes that may emerge as this process of curriculum review progresses from the aspirational proposing phase to the planning and implementation phase. Finally, it is critical that the College is careful to consider, and commit to adequately support, all resource and development implications that any proposed changes might entail.

We hope that, as our work concludes and the committee disbands, the constructive conversations and innovative thinking that were sparked by Dean Adrian Randolph’s appointment of the CDR in winter 2016 will continue, and that we, the faculty of the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, will live up to the challenge of helping our “students develop into leaders with the knowledge and skills to navigate a rapidly changing world” (Weinberg College webpage).