

Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences
Ad Hoc Committee on Degree Requirements (CDR)
Summary of responses to the interim report of Winter 2017

Concerns, notes, clarifications, and suggestions

- in no particular order,
- not weighted by frequency or strength of response, and
- excluding general expressions of gratitude, support, or disdain.

| Writing | |
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| Concerns | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are faculty suitable instructors for the transition-to-college component of the proposed fall quarter seminars? (Consider a co-teaching model.) 2. Fall quarter seminars would be difficult to staff. (They would likely require a much more robust incentive structure for faculty than is currently in place.) 3. Academic rigor of the proposed fall quarter seminars will be compromised. (Is this suitable for an elite college such as ours? Will these be more, or possibly less, “remedial and babyish” than the current seminars?) 4. Separating First-Year Writing Seminars from academic disciplines will 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.) 5. Primary responsibility for the writing-intensive first-year seminars would shift from departments and programs to the Writing Program. (This cedes intellectual ownership and instrumentalizes writing as an isolated form of competence. Effective, engaged, or improved analytic writing cannot be taught in isolation from topical intellectual work.) 6. Advanced writing requirement in the second year or beyond is too late to be effective. |
| Note | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 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. |
| Clarifications | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Possibility of non-English advanced writing courses? 2. Timing of the advanced writing seminar and declaration of a major? Must the advanced writing course be in the major? (Note that students don’t have to choose a major until the end of their sophomore years. If a student takes an Advanced Writing Seminar outside their major, would it still count?) 3. Must all departments develop courses that would count as an advanced writing seminar? |
| Suggestions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rename to “Presentation Requirement” or a broader term to reflect other modes of expression/presentation (e.g. oral, visual and other media from the <i>Express</i> learning outcome). 2. Re-envision the writing-intensive first-year seminar as a “research seminar.” (An explicit research component would perform the invaluable and neglected work of bringing students into contact with the library and/or some kind of archive; would also inspire students to write with urgency and engagement.) 3. If there are to be two required freshman-year classes, recommend that one be headed “research”(thereby allowing for faculty who don’t explicitly want to teach writing) and one headed “writing”—but only in the current freshman seminar format. 4. Introduce the advanced writing seminar as an overlay rather than as a foundational requirement. |

| Language | |
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| Concerns | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed requirement still falls far short of the goal of global and cultural competency. The name “World Language” is too vague to reflect the stated goals of the requirement. (It could be understood as excluding more regionally limited languages.) The 3-course minimum imposes additional constraints on the curriculum, particularly for science majors and double majors. Other courses and topics will be displaced by this requirement, particularly in other areas of the Humanities. (Are language courses the best choice for all students? Why privilege language enrollments over other areas?) Why are we beefing up language study when the sciences are such a pressing issue that effects so much of our daily lives as individuals and citizens? If one year of a language is insufficient to acquire depth of knowledge of the language, then why, for students who enter with second language proficiency, is it allowable for them to take one year of a third language? |
| Notes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed minimum of 3 courses at NU helps level the playing field for students from HS with limited language study opportunities. For some language (especially Spanish), significant additional teaching resources would be needed. (Need to ensure adequate/ample resources especially as they relate to teaching line faculty in the languages.) |
| Clarifications | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Implications for study abroad. Why are language courses the best, or only, courses to address the goal of global citizenship? (Aren’t there other routes to this goal?) Exactly what courses would count towards the 3-course minimum for non-native English speakers and life-long bilingual students? |
| Suggestions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Specify that language courses would not double count for distro credit. (Response to concern about displacing other courses, especially in the humanities.) Stress the “advanced competency” aspect of the requirement. |

| Distro | |
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| Concerns | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do not eliminate current Areas V: Ethics and Values. (Ethics is a trained discipline of thought, not a lens through which other disciplines can be viewed.) Do not call Area II Quantitative Reasoning if not all courses involve quantitative reasoning. The Humanities are excessively down-played and removal of Literature in the area name is a regrettable loss. (Humanities & Arts is too broad, proposed structure reduces Humanities to a single distro while other divisions each have two distro areas) The sciences are excessively down-played. (There is a strong bias towards the Humanities. Weinberg requirements should include a robust science literacy requirement; the two-course Natural Science distribution requirement is not adequate.) |
| Note | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The "Critique" and "Reflect" outcomes are uniquely and precisely described by the outcome-specification of current Area V: Ethics & Values. |
| Clarifications | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Why exactly are Humanities and Arts more amenable to the overlays than any of the other areas (and therefore deserving of 3 rather than 2 required credits)? |
| Suggestions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Replace “Ethics & Values” with “Normative Studies” instead of eliminating it. (By its very nature, value inquiry is normative: it seeks to show us not what <i>is</i> but what <i>ought to be</i>. We must guard against the impression that courses that take up value inquiry are really nothing more than exercises in indoctrination. It is not easy to craft something that does justice to the first but avoids the second.) |

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| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Divide Area II into two sub-areas, “Formal Reasoning” and “Quantitative Data Analysis,” and require students to take one course from each of these two sub-areas. |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Add a requirement for a computer coding class (more specifically, 1 coding, 1 data science, 1 lab, 1 abstract reasoning (math or logic), 2 (non-lab) in the social and behavioral sciences). |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Include explicitly a statement that graduates should have some reasonable depth and breadth of mastery of their discipline. |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. For Area II, consider calling it “Logic and Quantitative Reasoning” or “Logic and Quantitative Analysis.” |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Consider separate physical science and life science requirements. |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Consider classifying natural science as a “foundational competency” rather than a “foundational discipline.” (Introduce a group of science literacy courses distinct from subject-matter courses; science literacy courses might be waived for students who do a certain number of subject-matter science courses.) |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Include quantitative reasoning as a foundational competency and modify the foundational disciplines appropriately. (Quantitative reasoning is a foundational competency, but formal studies is a foundational discipline.) |

| Overlays | |
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| Concerns | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disincentive to take courses that don't satisfy an overlay. 2. Potential over-burdening of some departments (e.g. ethnic studies). 3. Over-estimation of support for a Social Inequalities and Diversities requirement (petition signed by only 200 students). 4. Reactions of alumni (goes too far) and students (doesn't go far enough). 5. Overlays, rather than a stand-alone requirement, water down attention to the core issues at stake here (esp. US focus). 6. “Dilution” of the ethics requirement. 7. Name of the Social Inequalities and Diversity overlays link inequality and diversity together (doing so can create a chauvinistic sense of diversity). 8. Need to ensure that overlays are fulfilled earlier (year 1 or 2) rather than later (year 3 or 4) 9. Overlays complicate rather than simplify the curriculum 10. While social inequality is a burning question of the day, will it stand the test of time and not become passé in a decade or two. (Concern about political overtones. It seems reactive.) 11. Even a course which is US-centric should still be required to bring in global perspectives. (Concern about separating the social inequalities & diversities overlay into two pieces.) |
| Clarifications | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language of “social” inequalities. (Does it encourage the conflation of social, political and economic inequalities when it is exactly clarity and theoretical sensitivity to just such distinctions that the requirement is supposed to support?) |
| Suggestions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allow a volunteering requirement instead of a diversity class (experiential learning with a paper at the end). 2. Change “Diversity” to “Justice” and remove “Social.” 3. Include/add “Environmental” or “Sustainability.” 4. Change “Social Inequalities & Diversities Across the Globe” to “Global Perspectives.” 5. How about "Cultural, Economic, and Social Diversity"? |

| Other/General | |
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| Concerns | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How will changes in Level 2 (college requirements) affect Level 3 (courses, majors, minors)? Logistics with respect to advising need to be carefully considered, e.g. in relation to the fall quarter seminars, special programs, and transfers. Proposed new requirements are too complicated (we would be at a disadvantage relative to our peers). Are there too many requirements? Do “requirements” stifle exploration or the ability of students to combine majors and minors? New requirements may selectively disadvantage students who are coming in less well prepared. The proposed curriculum is not in line with the future direction of education (the model is too archaic). The “Critique” learning outcome is being reduced to “reasoned decision making.” Objection to branding of the proposals by constant 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.) Description of Weinberg Way does not mention enough about how disciplinary knowledge (depth, i.e. a major) is also an important part of degree requirements. Problem solving is absent from the learning outcomes. (The draft report largely reflects a humanities sensibility.) Unclear how foundational competencies correlate with the learning outcomes, and division between "competencies" and "disciplines" is somewhat arbitrary. (Opposition to “bloodless” language, such as “competencies.”) Surprise that any committee charged with updating our curricular mission would not view science as a “core literacy” in this era. |
| Note | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> No recommendation to reduce total number of credits from 45 to 42 or fewer. |
| Clarifications | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What exactly are the procedures for specifying learning goals, courses, and qualified instructors for each requirement (esp. writing requirements)? What is the meaning and use of “interdisciplinary” in this scheme? (Where is cross-department innovation? How are disciplinary boundaries critiqued? Where is the incentive to undertake new, “interdisciplinary” course design? On the one hand, it can mean when people, courses, etc., cross disciplinary boundaries. On the other, it can mean that an issue, theme, etc., crosses or informs many disciplines; ethics is an example of this.) Will faculty vote on an entire proposal all at once, or will there be votes on different aspects? |
| Suggestions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Include "Create"/"innovate" in the learning outcomes for "The Weinberg Way." Include some form of common experience for first-year students. Include some sort of community service/engagement requirement, perhaps as one way to fulfill the diversity requirements. Modify the description of the “Express” learning outcome by adding “explanations and arguments” to “...assemble narratives,” and include “digital” along with “oral, visual and other media.” Integrate research more fully into the proposals. For the sake of justice, sanity, and educational quality, please reduce the load to 36. |