

Essential Standards of Quality for Liberal Studies Transfer Programs in the Wisconsin Technical College System

History of College Transfer

Wisconsin Technical College liberal studies transfer programs began to evolve during the Great Depression. Milwaukee Teachers College approached the Milwaukee Area Technical College about providing a transitional or second chance opportunity for inner-city youth who were not academically prepared to handle a baccalaureate program. The result was establishment of a junior college in 1934 as part of Milwaukee's Vocational and Adult Schools with the academic credits earned transferring to the University if the student so desired.

In the 1960's liberal arts programs were approved at Madison and Rhinelander. Madison added general education in the form of liberal arts following the recommendation of its accrediting body, the North Central Association. This complemented the recently approved MATC Dental Hygiene program, which was the first Dental Hygiene program in the state and was in fact offered where there was no dental school. Madison's college transfer program was approved in 1965.

The liberal studies transfer program was added at Rhinelander in 1967 because there was no existing institution of higher education serving the North. Nicolet College, as it was named, was intended substantially to meet the needs of the northern part of the state for both liberal arts and vocational-technical education.

Chippewa Valley started its liberal arts program in the fall of 2007. The Chippewa program is collaboratively offered with University of Wisconsin partners at Eau Claire, River Falls, and Stout.

Western Technical College is the latest college to begin offering the liberal arts program. In 2009, it began accepting students into the program in partnership with University of Wisconsin—La Crosse, Viterbo, and Winona State.

Purpose of Essential Standards

Five of the sixteen Wisconsin Technical College System Districts are authorized to award the Associate of Arts (AA) or Associate of Science (AS) of Liberal Arts Degree. To ensure a shared understanding of the definition and purpose of a liberal arts degree, the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) seeks to clearly describe the essential components of those programs currently offered at Madison College, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Nicolet Area Technical College, Chippewa Valley Technical College and Western Technical College.

Value of Essential Standards

A common framework gives students a cohesive education experience, cultivates knowledge, develops skills, and provides dispositions essential for independent learning and thinking associated with the liberal arts degree. These components form the basis of WTCS's liberal studies programs. These five WTCS colleges are carrying on the decades-old tradition begun by Madison, Milwaukee, and Nicolet of offering students in liberal arts degree programs an education in liberal studies that develops a sense of historical continuity; an understanding of the assumptions of knowledge; shared values; and an appreciation for diversity. Offering a wide array of courses in specific disciplines is one way in which WTCS districts that provide the Associate of Arts and/or the Associate of Science in Liberal Arts degree programs ensure student learning of the proficiencies associated with a liberally educated person.

Definitions of Liberal Arts and General Education

The Association of American Colleges and Universities provides a useful definition of "liberal education":

A philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement. Characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than specific content, liberal education can occur at all types of colleges and universities. "General Education" (cf. below) and an expectation of in-depth study in at least one field normally comprise liberal education.

http://www.aacu.org/press_room/what_is_liberal_education.cfm

The WTCS has traditionally had General Education as part of its occupational and technical programs, and this "Gen Ed" is a natural and critical beginning point for development of a Liberal Studies curriculum. The Association of American Colleges and Universities provides a useful definition of "General Education":

The part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities.

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From General Education to Liberal Studies

1. Investment—The Economics of Collegiate Transfer

Delivering an Associate of Arts or an Associate of Science degree program requires an investment in faculty, staff, and facilities that may not be readily evident. First, there are subject areas either not offered or minimally offered in Associate of Applied Science (AAS) occupational programs that are integral parts of a liberal studies transfer program. Subjects such as World Language, Humanities, Fine Arts, and Physical Education are not offered as general education in the AAS programs. Additionally, the

depth and breadth necessary to allow students a sampling of liberal arts disciplines will demand much more than the typical set of offerings to support the AAS. For example, in the Communications or English disciplines a typical technical college will offer general education to support AAS programming – Written Communication, Oral and Interpersonal Communication or Speech, and maybe Technical Reporting. However, a technical college offering a liberal studies transfer program should offer not only those courses but others in the discipline such as English I and II, Creative Writing, English and American Literature, Ethnic Literature choices such as African American or Native American Literature, Journalism, and Mass Communications. Each discipline represented in an AA or AS degree has similar breadth requirements. To meet this key component of the AA and AS degrees faculty expertise must be considered as the program is developed.

2. Curriculum—Breadth and Depth

Curriculum development and recruiting and preparing faculty to teach the additional offerings include identifying the component parts—the curricular depth and breadth—of a liberal studies transfer program.

A comprehensive WTCS liberal studies transfer program includes opportunities for student engagement beyond technical studies. Curricular breadth brings a student exposure to courses that improve quantitative reasoning, writing, speaking and research skills and ensures that students are engaged in the arts and literature, natural and physical sciences, social and behavioral sciences, international studies and philosophy. Participation in these courses supports students' intellectual growth, cultivates imagination, and prepares the student to adapt to an ever-changing world.

Depth requirements underscore the link between general aims, values, methods, and principles of various fields of study and more detailed specialization. In order to provide adequate depth, a WTCS liberal studies transfer program curriculum must allow students to be able to select from a coherent progression of courses within each discipline (e.g. Journalism I, Journalism II, Magazine Writing, and Publishing). Such course variety and progression meets the philosophy of a valid liberal studies transfer program, which functions as—and replaces—the “general education” component of a typical university's bachelor's degree. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association has asserted that “General education and liberal studies are the terms usually applied to studies meant to provide breadth of learning,” and the HLC has also expressed more clearly the need for breadth and depth in quality undergraduate education:

Throughout its history, the Commission has believed that quality undergraduate higher education involves breadth as well as depth of study. As understood by the Commission, general education is intended to impart common knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and to develop in them the skills and attitudes that an organization's faculty believe every educated person should possess. From an organization's general education, a student acquires a breadth of knowledge in the areas

and proficiency in the skills that the organization identifies as hallmarks of being college educated. Moreover, effective general education helps students gain competence in the exercise of independent intellectual inquiry and also stimulates their examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values.

Adopted: February 21, 2003

<http://www.ncahlc.org/download/Handbook03.pdf>

3. The Transfer Imperative

In developing liberal studies transfer programs with appropriate breadth and depth, WTCS programs strive to ensure successful student transfer to four-year institutions.

In order to create a course that successfully transfers to a 4-year, baccalaureate degree granting institution liberal studies transfer program faculty take the following steps:

- Review course descriptions, syllabi, curricula, and textbooks from 4-year institutions that offer a similar course
- Collaborate with professors at 4-year institutions to discuss course details, including goals, outcomes, materials, course requirements and methodology
- Develop the liberal arts course including an outline of instruction with course competencies, a syllabus, a course description, course requirements, select textbook(s) and materials in alignment with needs of AA/AS students and 4-year institution models
- Work with 4-year institution professors to get feedback on liberal arts course
- Make revisions where necessary
- Submit to 4-year institutions for review and articulation
- If denied, collaborate to make changes when appropriate
- Ensure that the Transfer Information System (TIS) has appropriate course articulation listing

Through this and other processes, the WTCS liberal studies transfer programs focus on the development of an academic culture for students that will assist them in making successful transfer.

4. Faculty Credentialing

WTCS liberal studies transfer programs prepare students to transfer to a 4-year, baccalaureate degree granting institution generally at the junior level. Therefore the offerings need to be more than a few courses that transfer to selected four-year institutions. A bona fide liberal studies transfer program offers an associate's degree in liberal studies (AA/AS). The faculty credentialing for these collegiate transfer programs must, in effect, meet the following standards for qualifications:

- a. Educational preparation
- b. Occupational experience
- c. Accreditation Standards: at least a Master's degree in subject area or in a related field with at least 18 graduate credits in subject area

Based on recommendations by the Higher Learning Commission report of 2001 the districts that have Liberal Studies Programs have established the following criteria for faculty in liberal studies transfer programs:

- Have the recognized collegiate credentials to teach in the field
- Bring a depth and breadth of understanding of the discipline into every class
- Have the tools to read the literature of the field critically and to evaluate and integrate new knowledge in the field, and thus maintain current content in their courses

The creation of this document was completed in July 2007, based on the work of the following WTCS faculty and Deans:

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Addendum

Faculty Credentialing

Broad acknowledgement and acceptance of the standard has been established

- For accreditation and other outside evaluators, the master's degree is an objective benchmark for evidence of subject matter expertise that is external to the employing educational institution. The Higher Learning Commission supports the standard but states:

[T]he commission does not dictate hiring standards to be applied to each member of the faculty. In providing this guidance, the commission reflects its long standing understanding that it is the responsibility of the college or university to establish and implement its own policies regarding faculty qualifications. (The Higher Learning Commission, 2005)

In addition the Higher Learning Commission provides detail regarding the definition of "qualified faculty" as it relates to degrees earned. In the Commission Guidance on Determining Qualified Faculty, the Commission states:

Over the years, some hallmarks and common expectations for faculty credentials have emerged within the higher education community, such as: Faculty teaching in higher education organizations should have completed a significant program of study in the discipline they will teach and/or for which they will develop curricula, with substantial coursework at least one level above that of the courses being taught or developed. Further, it is assumed that successful completion of a coherent degree better prepares a person than an unstructured collection of credit courses....

Faculty teaching in undergraduate programs should hold a degree at least one level above that of the program in which they are teaching, and those teaching general education courses typically hold a master's degree or higher and should have completed substantial graduate coursework in the discipline of those courses (The Higher Learning Commission, 2005)

- Degree Expectations for Part-Time Faculty
The HLC states:
Generally, the same guidelines and principals should be used for employing part time, adjunct, temporary and/or non-tenure track faculty as are used in employing full time tenure track or tenured faculty....Although some institutions place a heavy reliance on adjunct faculty... an organization committed to effective teaching and learning in all courses and programs will be able to demonstrate consistent procedures and careful consideration of qualifications for all instructional faculty. (The Higher Learning Commission, 2005)
- Many disciplines' accrediting associations have identified master's degrees as minimum standards in the area of liberal studies transfer. For example, in

developing standards for accrediting community college and two year college transfer programs which lead to educational licensure, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Teacher Education Association Council determined that faculty should have at least a master's degree in the field. (Imig & Harrill-McClellan, 2003)

- Academic associations also set guidelines for faculty credentials. The American Mathematical Association of Two Year Colleges has established guidelines for academic preparation of two year college mathematics faculty: minimum preparation for full and part-time faculty is “at least a Master’s degree in mathematics or in a related field with at least 18 semester hours in graduate level mathematics” (AMATYC Qualifications Subcommittee, 1992). The Association further provides examples of graduate course work to address depth and breadth preparation of faculty.

The standard supports faculty contribution to their colleges, students, and disciplines.

As critical examination and advanced knowledge of the discipline develop at the graduate level, faculty with graduate level preparation:

- Bring a depth and breadth of understanding of the discipline into every discussion at the moment the need arises, even in entry level courses
- Are prepared to teach students about the processes of development and evaluation of knowledge in the discipline
- Have the research knowledge and practice to incorporate student research projects as learning activities.

For the college, faculty with graduate level preparation:

- Have the discipline-specific expertise to develop curriculum at the baccalaureate level. The Higher Learning Commission asserts the need for a qualified faculty to successfully fulfill their responsibilities in curriculum development and assessment. The HLC states that a qualified faculty in a discipline:
 - “know what students must learn...create the curricular pathways through which students gain the competencies and skills they need. (Core component 3b)...
 - understand and convey the essentials of the discipline that a student should master at various course and program levels” and that qualified faculty also “know whether and how much they [students] learned. (Criterion Three)”

Have the tools to read the literature of the field critically and to evaluate and integrate new knowledge in the field; thus they maintain currency in their knowledge and teaching. This includes distinguishing between non-empirical versus empirically-based information from all sources, including the Internet.

For the academic disciplines, master’s level preparation is an assurance that:

- The faculty teaching the discipline's skills, knowledge, and dispositions have the content expertise to prepare students for concurrent and future baccalaureate level studies.
- The faculty have the tools to evaluate and integrate new knowledge, and participate in the advancement of the field.
- The faculty are qualified to assume their roles in curriculum development and assessment for the discipline.

Students can rightly expect that faculty:

- Have the recognized credentials to teach in the field
- Bring a depth and breadth of understanding of the discipline into every class
- Have the tools to read the literature of the field critically and to evaluate and integrate new knowledge in the field, and thus maintain current content in their courses.

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Updated January 2013 to reflect additional colleges offering Liberal Arts opportunities.