WCSU General Education Framework

General Description

In this competency-based approach to general education, students are expected to develop a variety of skills and perspectives that fully prepare them for lifelong learning. We focus on 10 essential competencies, which may be developed in the student's major or any other discipline offering a courses with the designated competency. Courses may satisfy up to two competencies.

While some competencies are considered foundations and must be completed early in the student's education, the rest may be taken any time prior to graduation. Students are required to take at least three courses that focus on competency in writing, take at least one FY course, and to take two courses that focus on each of three more of the competencies before they complete 60 credits. Students must take courses that focus on all ten competencies before they graduate and complete a culminating general education experience (often a capstone within the major).

We allow students to satisfy competency requirements in any discipline because we know that learning is most effective when it is connected to a topic that is important to the student. Similarly, we require students to complete 40 credits of liberal arts curriculum outside of their major. These 40 credits are meant to ensure that students graduate with a balance of major and general liberal arts knowledge. There are no limits on any particular liberal arts category because we want students to have the broadest opportunities to develop their interests and create connections between their majors and potential minors.

Rationale

The American Association of Colleges and Universities challenges institutions to provide an education marked by breadth and rigor. A liberal arts education such as this should encourage students to adopt a way of thinking about knowledge and the world rather than narrow focus to specific disciplines or categories. At WCSU and other institutions, the current distribution model is based on traditional general education categories delivered by specific departments that are aligned with specific disciplines. Students are now required to take a certain number of courses within each category to meet the requirements for general education, in addition to courses required for their major and/or minor. Over the years, this system has resulted in a burdensome bureaucracy, where both students and faculty struggle to understand layers of rules and exceptions to those rules. The adoption of a tiered, competency-based approach to general education will return WCSU to the fundamental principles of a liberal arts education based on attaining essential competencies while serving as a foundation for the student’s major area of discipline and as the basis for lifelong learning.
Competency-based liberal arts education moves the delivery of information and experiences in a competency area from a single specific course or department to many possible courses or departments.

Competency-based liberal arts education allows for greater flexibility at an institution such as WCSU, which focuses not only on traditional liberal arts students but on students (traditional and nontraditional) enrolled in strong professional programs as well.

10 Competencies

Many of the competencies defined below are derived from AAC&U's VALUE Rubrics. As the final rubrics are developed for these competencies, we anticipate some modifications that reflect the expertise of Western's faculty and the specific goals of our mission. These descriptions capture the main themes and reflect the consensus reached by the general education committee. Sample rubrics from AAC&U are also included in appendices as a guide, but not a final version.

1. First Year Navigation (FY)
   First Year Navigation is an orientation to Western Connecticut State University’s expectations, processes, and opportunities. Students completing this competency will have an introductory understanding of college-level research skills, financial literacy, registration processes, technological support systems such as Banner, Blackboard, and WestConnDuit, and the many academic, social, and personal support services and opportunities available at Western.

2. Writing Intensive (WI)
   Writing Intensive work involves producing a significant amount of both formal and informal writing, much of which is revised based on instructor feedback. Strong writers are able to analyze and write to a variety of rhetorical situations, showing an understanding of the purpose, audience, and form required for their responses. At higher levels of writing intensive encounters, students will gain informational literacy through the gathering and written analysis of information, data, perceptions, evidence, background, observation and/or arguments.

3. Quantitative Reasoning (QR)
   Quantitative Reasoning is a “habit of mind,” a competency, and a comfort in working with numerical data. Individuals with strong QR skills possess the ability to reason and solve quantitative problems from a wide array of authentic contexts and everyday life situations. They understand and can create sophisticated arguments supported by quantitative evidence and they can clearly communicate those arguments in a variety of formats (using words, tables, graphs, mathematical equations, etc., as appropriate). (AAC&U VALUE Rubric)
4. **Creative Process (CP)**

*Creative Process is both the capacity to combine or synthesize existing ideas, images, or expertise in original ways and the experience of thinking, reacting, and working in an imaginative way characterized by a high degree of innovation, divergent thinking, and risk taking.* (AAC&U VALUE Rubric)

5. **Critical Thinking (CT)**

*Critical Thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.* (AAC&U VALUE Rubric)

6. **Oral Communication (OC)**

*Oral Communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase values, beliefs, or behaviors.* (AAC&U VALUE Rubric)

7. **Health and Wellness (HW):**

Health and Wellness helps students (1) understand the connection between lifestyle choice and disease risk, (2) develop individual wellness plans that control their risks for developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, osteoporosis, and/or forms of cancer, and (3) engage in lifestyle behavior(s) that have the potential to control their disease risk.

8. **Scientific Inquiry (SI)**

*Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.* (AAC&U VALUE Rubric)

9. **Intercultural Competence (IC)**


10. **Information Literacy (IL)**

An information literate person knows when information is needed and has the ability to locate, evaluate, and utilize information. Students will learn how to define specific questions, identify key concepts or issues, discover and access information sources, evaluate information, digest and organize information, communicate information, and use information ethically.
Structure of the Program

Competencies to be completed within the first 30 credits

- **First Year Navigation**: This will be embedded in major course work or the students may take UNI 101.
- **Writing 101**: with embedded critical analysis and thinking
- **Three additional competencies**.

Competencies to be completed within the first 60 credits

- **Writing 2**: This is a student’s second exposure to the writing competency. It may be taken within a student’s major or not. It shall focus on research.
- **A second encounter with each of the three additional competencies from above**.

Competencies to be completed prior to graduation

- **Writing 3**: This is a student’s third exposure to the writing competency. This should be taken within the major and can be a part of the student’s culminating experience.
- **The rest of the ten competencies not already encountered**.
- **Culminating General Education Experience**: In this course students will need to demonstrate competency in written and oral communication. They will also need to draw connections between disparate areas of learning, thus demonstrating an ability to integrate their general education experience. This may be satisfied by a major capstone.