

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

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To: Alyson Hagy, chair
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Jean Garrison, Cheryl Goldenstein, Margaret Haydon, Stefan Heinz, John Kambutu,
Tucker Readdy, Ken Sims, Lynn Stalnaker, Karen Williams

From: Myron Allen

Subject: University Studies Review Task Force — Stage 2

Date: 13 October 2011

Copies: Andy Hansen, Maggi Murdock, Nicole Ballenger, Erika Prager, Carol Frost, Megan Degenfelder, Tom Burman, Sara Axelson, Dave Cozzens, Tom Buchanan

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the stage-2 task force to review the University Studies Program. I would like the task force to undertake the following tasks during the current academic year. You may wish to organize into subcommittees for some of these tasks.

1. Review documents developed previously:

- "Revisiting University Studies 2003: Guidelines and Reflections on the Task of Updating the Core Curriculum," Myron Allen, November 2010.¹
- Academic Affairs charge memo to the stage-1 task force.²
- "The University of Wyoming Task Force on Learning Outcomes for the Baccalaureate: Recommendations," Ingrid Burke et al., April 2011.³

In the interest of making progress on the USP review, I hope the stage-2 task force will build on the ideas developed in these documents, instead of revisiting the questions *de novo*. Especially worth preserving, in my opinion, are the learning outcomes, analysis of assessability, and proposed limits on scope of USP proposed in the April 2011 document.

If you find those ideas problematic in substance, I would appreciate your letting me know as soon as possible, so we can work with the stage-1 task force to find a path forward.

2. Identify a set of proposed general education course requirements.

The requirements should address a well defined subset of the learning outcomes identified by the stage-1 task force. The requirements need not address *all* learning outcomes associated with the UW baccalaureate. Courses taken to satisfy major requirements, elective courses, and elements of the co-curriculum may also address important baccalaureate learning outcomes. For each proposed course requirement, please identify the learning outcomes addressed.

¹ http://www.uwyo.edu/unst/review/usp_review_white_paper_10.pdf, retrieved 12 September 2011.

² http://www.uwyo.edu/unst/review/usp_task_force_charge.pdf, retrieved 12 September 2011.

³ http://www.uwyo.edu/unst/review/USP_transmittal_letter_plus_report.pdf, retrieved 12 September 2011.

I don't expect the task force to identify specific, existing UW courses associated with the requirements. To keep the analysis realistic, though, it may be useful to consider *examples* of courses — existing or not — that might satisfy the requirements. It may also be useful to identify which requirements, if any, might be best satisfied by common courses taken by all students.

To the extent that the task force proposes requirements for which it sees no correspondence with existing UW courses, please provide a brief analysis of the impacts that such requirements will have on teaching workloads and future instructional budgets.

3. Identify existing and potential rules or features of the USP that reasonably promote or unnecessarily restrict students' flexibility.

This task should help guide the next stage, which will be to implement the next version of USP in a way that provides more flexibility for students and their advisors than the current system. In this context, a rule or feature is unnecessarily restrictive if it is restrictive but has no clear rationale based on learning outcomes. Features of the existing USP that some faculty members have identified, correctly or incorrectly, as restricting flexibility include the following:

- Lack of transferability of some USP requirements when students change majors
- Limited array of faculty-approved courses that satisfy relatively broadly aimed requirements (such as science and cultural context).
- Too few courses that satisfy USP requirements for all majors.

Others may exist. Features that might promote flexibility might include but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- Broad, *a priori* approval of categories of courses for certain requirements. For example, might any course offered by the Chemistry Department count toward a requirement for coursework in the physical and natural world?
- Minimizing the number of requirements that can be satisfied only by taking a narrowly defined set of courses. For example, writing requirements that a student can fulfill only by taking courses taught in the English Department and in the student's major may impose unnecessary restrictions on students who change majors.
- Greater clarity in the status of "embeddable" requirements.

4. Outline a proposed future mission for the Faculty Senate's standing University Studies Committee.

Although this committee's formal functions are broad, much of its work is devoted to the identification and approval of courses for the USP. This work is time-consuming, and it has the potential to pit committee members against colleagues who advance course proposals based on their expertise. Effort currently spent in screening course proposals does little to address the need to assess the USP's student learning outcomes, much less to use findings from the assessment process to make improvements in the program.

Please develop a set of recommendations for a future role for the University Studies Committee. I am especially interested in the possibility of redirecting the committee's work toward tasks more directly associated with assessment and improvement. Might such a redirection result in an overall workload that is no greater (perhaps even less) than the committee's current tasks, while addressing a more pressing set of needs? I urge the task force to work closely with the University Studies Committee and with Dr. Erika Prager in answering this question.

5. Propose a series of town-hall meetings with the faculty to present the findings of tasks 1 through 4.

I envision a set of two or three open meetings, during the last half of spring semester 2012, in addition to whatever meetings the task force may schedule with the Faculty Senate, its standing committees, and academic deans. Please consider mechanisms for maximizing the involvement of academic department heads, who are likely to have special insights into practical constraints on USP's structure and implementation.

Please discuss these matters as broadly as you can with UW's faculty members, academic professionals and students. I urge you to include at least the following groups in your discussions:

- Faculty Senate, through mechanisms recommended by its chair
- Associated Students of the University of Wyoming
- The Office of Academic Support in the Division of Athletics
- Non-Traditional Student Council
- The Outreach School
- The Dean of Students, for input on the proper role of the co-curriculum

I would appreciate receiving a report on your findings no later than spring break, 2012. Of course, you may elect to finish your work earlier.

I've asked Dr. Erika Prager, assessment coordinator in the Office of Academic Affairs, to be available to the task force during its deliberations, to provide perspective on those aspects of the core curriculum that involve the assessment of student learning. If you need other forms of support, please let me know.

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