

## **Proposal to Revise the Baccalaureate Degree Requirements**

### **UW-Madison College of Letters and Science**

#### **L&S Curriculum Committee**

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### **Executive Summary<sup>1</sup>**

In September 2000, Dean Phillip R. Certain asked the Letters and Science Curriculum Committee to reconsider the L&S baccalaureate curriculum and degree requirements, which had not been subject to a thorough review since 1971. In fulfilling its charge over the next several years, the committee considered not only the goals of study in the liberal arts and sciences, but also changes in the nature of courses at UW-Madison as those courses had come to reflect new areas and trends in scholarship in the liberal arts and sciences, as well as how those goals and scholarly areas intersect with the needs of students, advisers, the college, the institution, and the University of Wisconsin System. The scope of the committee's deliberations was broad, with the committee utilizing assessment strategies from targeted inquiries to peer institutions regarding specific requirements; to focused discussions with faculty, staff, and students; to in-depth discussions with campus experts in key areas; to surveying L&S graduates about their perceptions of the curricular goals and the degree requirements by which those goals are met.

After much deliberation and debate, the committee reaffirmed several core principles of the 1971 L&S Curriculum, including the fundamental principle that the College of Letters and Science has a distinct mission, summarized by four pillars of a liberal arts education: education for the complete person, for citizenship, for productive life, and for the love of learning. Students so educated demonstrate habits of mind that include:

- skilled written and verbal communication, excelling in formulating and expressing a point of view, reflecting and questioning current knowledge through reading, research and consideration of the views of others;

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<sup>1</sup> This document consists only of the Executive Summary; the full report, appendices, and a website for gathering comments are available online at <http://www.ls.wisc.edu/curriculum/>, or from the L&S Dean's Office upon request.

- the ability to draw flexibly upon the modes of thought characteristic of the major areas of knowledge and to apply them to individual and community problems;
- knowledge of our basic cultural heritage as a multifaceted and often contested history;
- deep understanding at least one subject area as a coherent body of knowledge with identifiable methodologies, and as a historical process of knowledge-formation; and
- the experience of oneself as a part of a community within which these values are negotiated with respect and are cultivated as durable qualities of personal and social life.

Thus the values expressed so clearly in 1971 continue to resonate today, despite substantial changes in the nature of higher education at UW-Madison. Today's curriculum must accommodate: a more accomplished group of matriculating freshmen, who often enter the university with eligibility for various types of advanced credit; a blurring of disciplinary boundaries, with attendant increases in the cross-listing of courses, and of programs (and students) calling upon those courses for multiple purposes; the fact that students often pursue studies off-campus, in study-abroad programs, or nearer to home, transferring credit from other institutions. This latter point is of particular concern to UW-Madison, given its unique role in the UW System. Since UW-Madison is often the only institution to offer certain programs, access and service to potential and matriculated transfer students are especially important.

The committee sought to affirm the principles of liberal education at UW-Madison in the context of changes cited above, to clarify and simplify language that explains the educational goals of the curriculum, and to better serve students and ease academic advising. To that end, the committee proposes the following curricular requirements, to be implemented in 2007.

- **Quantity of Work:** A course of study in the liberal arts and sciences demands a substantial amount of time and energy be expended in pursuit of skills, breadth, and depth. Students must complete at least 120 degree credits, which will allow students to pursue a range of courses for all requirements, at both introductory and advanced levels, with sufficient time to reflect upon, absorb, and place information into context within a field and within the context of cumulative knowledge, across disciplines.
- **Liberal Arts and Science work:** A degree from the College of Letters and Science should be comprised of a sufficient portion of credit in the liberal arts and sciences. We require 108 credits (90% of degree credit) to be in L&S courses or those in other schools and colleges designated as liberal arts and science credit. This leaves room within the degree for 12 free electives of any UW-Madison or acceptable college work, further expanding the options for students seeking a broad educational experience.

- **Quality of Work:** Students must demonstrate sufficient understanding and effort by earning a 2.0 overall Grade Point Average, a 2.0 in intermediate and advanced level work, a 2.0 in major [department] courses and a 2.0 in courses designated upper level in the major.<sup>2</sup>
- **General Education:** Like other UW-Madison students, L&S students must demonstrate minimum competency in written and verbal communication and quantitative analysis. Additionally, an understanding of social forces and their effect on ethnic groups traditionally marginalized in society is valued. Thus, L&S students must complete the General Education Requirements (GER) of Communication Parts A and B, Quantitative Reasoning Parts A and B, and Ethnic Studies.<sup>3</sup>
- **Mathematics:** All students should possess a command of mathematical reasoning and calculation. For Bachelor of Arts students, these proficiencies are demonstrated by the Admissions requirements (3 units of high school math, including algebra and geometry) combined with the GER Quantitative Reasoning requirements. Bachelor of Science students must demonstrate the additional mathematical skill necessary to carry out deeper study in the sciences by completing at least two intermediate courses in Math, Computer Science or Statistics.<sup>4</sup>
- **Foreign Language:** Knowledge of a foreign language helps students understand the structure and complexities of their native language and is a useful instrument through which students gain an appreciation of other cultures. In the current curriculum, foreign language can be satisfied by mastering a sufficient level of instruction. A level is defined as one year of high school or one semester of college-level language instruction. Bachelor of Arts students must complete either the fourth level, or the third level of one language combined with the second level of another language. Bachelor of Science students must complete the third level of one language.
- **Exploration of the Liberal Arts and Sciences:** At the heart of a liberal arts degree is the variety of scholarly approaches to knowing the world. Students will undoubtedly pursue more work in fields they are attracted to; the minimum requirements ensure students are exposed to modes of thinking they are not inclined to explore. L&S students are required to complete 36 Breadth credits, 12 credits each in Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences, with subdivisions in these areas clarified below.
- **Mastery of Challenging Work:** Students should engage information at levels that challenge their skills in critical thinking, research, analysis and communication, and which build upon prior knowledge. To facilitate the maturation of our student-scholars, L&S requires that at least half—60—of the minimum number of degree credits be completed at the intermediate or advanced level.

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<sup>2</sup> Some of these requirements represent minimum standards that most L&S students will exceed.

<sup>3</sup> L&S requirements for breadth, articulated as Exploration of the Liberal Arts and Sciences, exceed GER minimums; they do not appear here as part of the campus general education requirements.

<sup>4</sup> No more than 1 course in either COMP SCI and/or STAT may apply to this requirement

- **Participation in a Community of Scholars:** An important feature of education in the liberal arts and sciences is membership in a community of scholars, achieved by pursuing a specific methodology or subject at sufficiently deep levels. L&S requires declaration and completion of at least one major area of study with a 2.0 GPA in major courses and a 2.0 GPA in upper level major courses, per the Quality of Work requirements above.
- **Residency:** A UW-Madison degree distinguishes itself by the quality of its instruction as embodied by its excellent faculty and the character of its courses. In order to ensure a distinct educational experience, students are required to complete the majority of their senior study in residence. After 90 degree credits have been completed, 30 degree credits are required in residence. In cases where students have all of their previous credit (90 degree credits) on the UW-Madison campus, 24 degree credits after the 90<sup>th</sup> degree credit is sufficient. In addition to the general residency requirement, 15 credits of upper level work in the major must be taken in residence. Because residence credit may include courses taken on a UW-Madison Study Abroad program and to ensure students experience Madison instruction, 15 credits in the major must be completed on the Madison campus. Residence credit is defined as degree credit taken through UW-Madison, excluding exam credit, AP credit, credit by departmental authorization and/or retroactive foreign language credit.

These curricular goals are expressed in a series of degree requirements that appear at the end of the document. These, too, represent a series of proposed changes intended to clarify and simplify implementation of the curriculum. Although the content and structure of the degree requirements are similar to those that arose from the 1971 Curriculum, the rules that govern how a student can customize his or her program have been liberalized to allow for more flexibility, to increase options for students, to remove barriers to academic progress, and to facilitate meaningful academic advising. Among the most significant recommendations are to:

1. Rename the requirements to reflect their educational intent
2. Increase the required 100 credits in liberal arts and science courses to 108, while also increasing opportunities to explore other areas of instruction
3. Eliminate the 10-credit maximum in a single department for breadth
4. Eliminate the 80-credit rule outside a single department
5. Align credit requirements across the three divisional areas of knowledge

We firmly believe the curriculum and changes we are proposing preserve the integrity of a liberal arts and science degree and enrich the educational opportunities for the increasingly able and interested students in the College of Letters and Science.