College of Letters and Science Curriculum Committee
Report to L&S Faculty Senate
Academic Year 2011 (to date)

Curriculum Committee Members and Chair

Marc Fink (Music)  Ken Sytsma (Botany)
Diane Gooding (Psychology)  Sean Teuton (English and American Indian
Liane Kosaki (Political Science)  Studies)
Venkat Mani (German
Naomi McGloin (East Asian
Languages and Literature)  Students:
Kristopher Olds (Geography) (Chair)  Myranda Tanck (2010-2011)
Gary Shiu (Physics)  Leslie Watkins (2010-2011)

Ex Officio members:
Elaine M. Klein (Assistant Dean, Academic Planning, Program Review & Assessment)
Christopher F. Lee (Assistant Dean, L&S Student Academic Affairs)
Jennifer Kaufmann-Buhler (L&S Honors Program)
Michael J. Pflieger (Assistant Dean, L&S Student Academic Affairs)
Nancy Westphal-Johnson (Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education & Academic
Administration)
Tammy Weisensel (Assistant to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education &
Academic Administration)

Overview

The L&S Curriculum Committee (LSCC) advises the Dean on the curricular integrity of academic programs offered in the College of Letters and Science, from degree requirements affecting all L&S undergraduates, to changes to requirements for existing majors, certificates, and options. The committee reviews proposals to add, change, or delete courses from the L&S subject listings, after departmental approval and prior to final approval by the Divisional Executive Committees. To maintain the integrity of the Liberal Arts curriculum, the committee also considers requests to allow courses offered outside the college to count toward L&S undergraduate degree requirements by awarding them the designation of “Liberal Arts and Science” courses. This work is described in greater detail online, at http://www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook/ChapterOne/chapter1-3.htm. At the Dean’s request, the committee considers other issues related to undergraduate education for purposes of advising him, the faculty and L&S departments and programs, and the L&S division of Student Academic Affairs.
Proposals to Add, Change or Delete Courses

The LSCC is responsible for college-level review of proposals to add, change, or delete courses listed in the Course Guide subject listings that are managed by L&S departments and programs. Proposals approved by department faculty are sent to the LSCC. A technical review is conducted to evaluate whether they conform to technical requirements for entry into the course database. The LSCC chair reviews all proposals to determine if they are ready for committee consideration, and committee members review all proposals online prior to the meeting. At any of these levels, questions may be asked of the units submitting the proposals; L&S staff work with departments to resolve questions that come up before proposals are submitted to the Divisional Executive Committee. (See Attachment A for a diagram illustrating this process.) Since the committee’s last report to the L&S Senate (March 15, 2010), the LSCC approved proposals to create 76 new courses, change 128 existing courses, and delete 18 courses. 3 proposals are awaiting department responses to questions raised in the approval process.

Other course-related issues.

- In recent years, campus has undertaken an effort to trim course lists and retire courses that have not been taught in ten years. The committee encourages departments to monitor their course array and retire courses when they are no longer likely to be taught. The committee also endorses development of “topics courses” at various levels (elementary, intermediate, and advanced) to take advantage of greater flexibility in offering new or infrequently taught courses. More information – including the LSCC’s guidance regarding repetition of “topics” can be found in the L&S Handbook, at http://www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook/ChapterOne/chapter1-3-topicscourses.htm.
- The LSCC’s recommendations concerning the use of Directed Study courses and numbers has been circulated to departments after notice was received about groups outside the university encouraging students to use these courses to earn credit for volunteering. The statement is online at http://www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook/ChapterFive/chV-18.htm
- As the Office of the Divisional Executive Committees considers revisions to the course proposal process and questions asked on the course proposal form, LSCC members and L&S staff hope to be involved in those discussions.

Liberal Arts and Science (LAS) Designation. The LSCC considered several requests from non-L&S programs to consider how their courses are found to meet College criteria for Liberal Arts and Science courses (see http://www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook/ChapterOne/LAS-Criteria.pdf). Undergraduate students in L&S must complete a minimum number of credits in approved LAS courses: students completing the current Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science (BABS07) degree requirements must have at least 108 LAS credits, and students completing the 1971 requirements must have at least 100 “C” credits, and up to 20 “T” credits.

Applications for LAS have been somewhat standardized in recent years. The committee asks that requests include a detailed syllabus accompanied by a substantive memorandum explaining how the course contributes to students’ liberal education, and specifically, how the LAS criteria are met. Requests are reviewed by the full committee and discussed extensively in one or two
meetings. Since the committee’s last report, 12 courses have been considered for LAS designation, and there are ten LAS requests pending resolution of questions asked. This increase in interest in the LAS designation is likely triggered by the anticipated retirement of the “T” designation (see below). Finally, in cases where it was both possible and desirable to do so, the committee recommended that approvals be made retroactive to the semesters reflected in the course syllabi reviewed. We believe that this allowed several students complete their degrees in a timely way.

“T” Course Issues. As noted above, under the 1971 curriculum students were allowed to meet requirements with a limited number of credits earned in “T” credits (the name refers to the twenty-credit limit). The “T” designation is scheduled to be retired from use in 2012, and as a result of that change, we anticipate more requests for LAS designation, since many departments will seek to convert their “T” courses to the LAS designation.

International Academic Programs’ Report on the Study Abroad Subject Listing. The committee heard an update on the Study Abroad Subject listing, which is an administrative tool used to facilitate transfer of credit from UW-Madison approved study abroad sites. These courses are primarily used to process credit needed by non-UW-Madison students who participate in our programs. Less frequently, credit is used for UW-Madison students in cases where no appropriate UW-Madison transfer courses is available. The SAB listing appears to be working well, and as more departments and programs create “Study Abroad” topics courses within their own subject listings, the need for this tool is diminishing.

Proposals to Change Requirements for Academic Programs

LSCC guidelines regarding changes to requirements for academic programs remain in effect (http://www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook/ChapterOne/chapter1-3ccpol.htm). Since the last LSCC report, several departments and programs sought changes to their academic programs; these appear in this report as Attachment B. (The increase in this activity can be attributed to the regular cycle for revision to the Undergraduate Catalog.) The Committee and L&S Administrative staff continue to work with departments to articulate the connections between requests for curricular changes and efforts to assess student learning in academic programs, to link changes to evidence, and to demonstrate more clearly that learning is improving. As part of the approval process, implementation dates are established and plans are developed to ensure that students in the “old” programs are able still to complete those requirements, or that they may be transitioned into the new requirements without adversely affecting their progress.

Implementing Revisions to the L&S Baccalaureate Degree Requirements

The committee continues monitor issues arising from the implementation of changes to the L&S baccalaureate degree requirements, known as BABS07. The interim Associate Dean of L&S Student Academic Affairs recently submitted a memorandum seeking counsel on several policy
matters related to that curriculum; the committee will be considering those matters during the remainder of its 2010-2011 meetings.

Other Curricular Issues

Course Overlap Issues

Implementation of LSCC recommendations concerning course overlap have been slowed by difficulty obtaining meetings among key staffers in L&S SAA, the Dean’s Office, Curricular Services, the Offices of the Registrar, and the Divisional Executive Committees. Though we continue to push for progress on this matter, some progress has been made via attitudinal shifts. For example, the committee staff and others are actively counseling departments not to include “overlap language” in prerequisite statements, and departments for which forward progress in curriculum matters are encouraged to take the initiative to set and enforce prerequisites.

Service Learning

International Service Learning Opportunities. The LSCC met with representatives from International Academic Programs, the Morgridge Center for Public Service, and the UW Without Borders initiative to discuss growing interest in students participating in service learning opportunities while on study abroad, or in programs for which service requires travel abroad. There is a plethora of initiatives on campus to encourage international service learning, and these will only increase over time. The LSCC acquired knowledge about the current state of thinking about this phenomenon, and engaged in dialogue about the various procedures to ensure that international service learning is supported but also receives adequate oversight in a coordinated and strategic way on our campus. In general the LSCC is highly supportive of international service learning, but we recommended that coordination within L&S, and between Colleges and Schools, be enhanced.

Consultation Regarding Establishment of a “Service Learning” Course Indicator. The LSCC met with Professor Nancy Mathews, Director of the Morgridge Center for Public Service, to discuss a proposal to create a new course designation which will allow faculty members who teach service learning courses that meet certain criteria to designate their courses as “Service Learning Courses”. The use of such an indicator is similar to the LSCC assignment of “breadth designations”, or to the University General Education Committee assignment of Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, and Ethnic Studies course designations. In each of these cases, faculty members and/or departments submit a syllabus for review by a designated faculty committee or liaison; the materials are reviewed to establish that they meet criteria established by the faculty; and if approved, Curricular Services is informed that the designation may be applied (usually via the Divisional Executive Committee course proposal form). The creation of standard criteria will ensure a degree of consistency in this area across the course array, though some courses will likely fail to meet the criteria and will not be eligible for the indicator (as is the case with other course indicators). A “Service Learning” course indicator will allow students to identify these courses, while also allowing campus academic planners to
monitor enrollments in Service Learning courses. There are also risk management issues involved, in that students engaged in for-credit service learning activities are covered by campus liability policies. The committee is inclined to be supportive of the proposal, but noted that there are several implementation matters yet to be worked out.

**Assignment of Breadth Indicators**

In response to a question posed by the Divisional Executive Committees, the LSCC prepared a formal memorandum explaining how and why the committee assigns L&S Breadth Designations, and the role these designations play in the L&S baccalaureate requirements. That memo is attached as **Attachment C**.

**Discussion: General Bachelor of Liberal Studies Degree**

As reported last year, Dean Sandefur had asked the LSCC to consider whether the College of Letters and Science should propose creation of a general degree in the Liberal Arts and Sciences. When this issue was presented to the L&S Senate, the LSCC was encouraged to continue its discussions, with the strong caution that any program at UW-Madison must be rigorous. Furthermore, the Senate recommended that the faculty of the Integrated Liberal Studies program be invited to consider the matter, as well. Since then, the LSCC invited ILS faculty to attend LSCC discussions of the topic, and ILS has discussed the concept extensively. The LSCC discussions have so far been unsuccessful in identifying a specific student audience among our traditional residential students who might be targeted by such a program; however, the review of several UW System proposals that focus on facilitating transfer from two-year institutions and on completion of degrees in specific programs, may help guide the committee’s future discussions.

**Report of the Equity and Diversity Committee.**

The LSCC reviewed a report prepared by the L&S Equity and Diversity Committee. In a study of the courses most frequently taken by first-year students, in which at least 45 targeted minority students were enrolled, the EDC found that students in underrepresented groups have higher rates of “adverse outcomes” (grades of D or F, drop or withdraw from course), than do equally prepared (as inferred from ACT score) majority students. Focusing on five “gateway” courses (Chem 103, English 100, Comm Arts 100, Math 112, Psych 202), the authors found that, although these differences are greater in quantitative courses (Chemistry, Math, and Psychology) than in non-quantitative courses (Communication Arts and English), once the results are normalized as deviation from the mean, all classes display similar gaps. This gap is observed at all levels of preparation, with some of the worst gaps appearing at the lowest and highest ACT scores. This phenomenon is particularly troubling because mastery of quantitative classes is needed for admission in all STEM majors, and lower overall GPAs prevent students from advancing into highly-sought programs in Business and Medicine. Thus, students are being locked out of highly remunerated careers linked to certain majors. The EDC surveyed student in these courses to evaluate their perceptions on items related to “engagement” in the course and peer relations. Though overall scores among targeted minority and majority students were similar, significant differences on some items suggest areas that might be
considered for improvement. For example, while general classroom climate was perceived to be positive overall (with different rates reported across classes), students’ relationships with their peers was generally rated considerably lower. In some key questions, the differences between minorities and non-minorities’ replies to the survey indicate a degree of isolation and tension. The EDC has recommended that the Dean convene a task force to work with these departments, with the goal of reducing or eliminating the gap as quickly as possible.

This report was discussed by the L&S Curriculum Committee on February 28, 2011, and is submitted by:

Kris Olds, Professor of Geography and Chair, L&S Curriculum Committee

Elaine M. Klein, Assistant Dean
L&S Academic Planning, Program Review and Assessment
L&S Course Proposal Process

Faculty member proposes course to department; course is approved per departmental process

Proposal sent to L&S Curriculum Committee

Revised proposal sent to Divisional Executive Committee Office

Proposals to add/change/delete courses are forwarded to Registrar's Office for entry into Course Guide.

Departments send:
Electronic copy (pdf preferred) or 3 hard copies to LSCC for Technical and Committee Review. Please note: these documents are reviewed as though they are "drafts", just in case they need revision prior to submission to college/campus committees.

Please include:
Cover letter from chair (one letter per set of proposals)

To:
L&S Curriculum Committee
c/o Tammy Weisensel
307 B South Hall
weisensel@ls.admin.wisc.edu

By:
Ten days prior to Curriculum Committee meeting that falls before Divisional Committee Deadline

Departments send:
20 copies (hard copy only) of revised/final proposal

To:
Divisional Executive Committee Office (134 Bascom Hall)

By:
Three weeks before Divisional Executive Committee meeting

L&S sends:
L&S CC Chair's notice of course approval to Divisional Executive Committee Office (e-mail and hard copy) with correspondence about revisions.

NOTE: Divisional Committees may have additional questions for department or for L&S Curriculum Committee.

- L&S CC staff & chair work with dept to resolve technical questions.
- L&S CC considers proposals when questions are resolved (may vote "approve pending resolution of minor questions").
- Notice of approval and revised proposals sent to Dept. and to Divisional Executive Committee Office.

For more information about the L&S Curriculum Committee, see section I.3 of the L&S Handbook www.ls.wisc.edu/handbook.
Substantive revisions were approved for the undergraduate majors in:

- Geography GIS/Cartography (May 10, 2010) The requested change reduces overall credits required and aligns courses required with courses offered.
- Botany (October 11, 2010) These changes allow students more options to complete the program by adding appropriate courses to the lists used to meet requirements.
- Economics (October 11, 2010). Changes approved include a request consistent with the desire of many departments that students at UW-Madison complete a meaningful proportion of work, not only at the upper or "advanced" level, but in courses taken in residence on the UW-Madison campus.
- Italian (December 13, 2010) These changes reduce the number of credits required beyond the two year language sequence from 27 to 24; this is consistent with other revisions undertaken to the courses that serve the program, and align the credits required with the number offered.
- Psychology (October 25, 2010). Substantial revision of the program, including changes to the requirements for and timing of declaration of the major. Subsequent to this approval, a further technical clarification was approved concerning limits placed on the number of times a student may attempt to complete Psych 225.

Other program approvals

- Folklore Certificate (October 11, 2010). Requirements for the Folklore Certificate were revised to reflect a recategorization of courses that meet requirements, and to better explain the role the different types of courses play in the program. The committee praised this effort as one likely to serve students well, by providing them with the context in which they will learn.
- Certificate in Gender and Women’s Studies (November 8, 2010). Approval of limitation on the number of introductory courses students may take, thereby encouraging them to advance toward more challenging work in this area.
- LGBT Certificate (November 8, 2010). Similar to the change approved for the Certificate in GWS, this request was approved to limit the number of introductory courses students may take, thereby encouraging them to advance toward more challenging work in the field.
- PhD minor in Gender and Women’s Studies (February 28, 2011). Approval of a new rule governing the number of exclusively graduate-level GWS courses that may be applied to the GWS Ph.D. minor, such that a student may complete the program with 9 credits if all 9 credits are in exclusively graduate-level Gender & Women’s Studies courses; if a student completes the minor with 12 credits, they must be in courses numbered 300 and above.
- PhD minor in Science and Technology Studies (October 11, 2010). In discussion, committee members commended the program for efforts to serve students in this interdisciplinary program by allowing them the latitude to work with faculty to pursue studies via individually defined themes within STS rather than narrowly constrained pre-defined themes identified when the program was established.

- Technical corrections were approved for the undergraduate majors in:
  - Biochemistry (February 9, 2011) Technical changes approved to align requirements with changes in credits attached to various courses required in the major. These changes were approved by both L&S and CALS, and have been incorporated into the upcoming edition of the Undergraduate Catalog.
- Biological Aspects of Conservation (January 3, 2011) Changes were approved to add to (and otherwise update) the list of course opportunities for students in this major. Approved as a technical correction because they make materials presented to students in brochure and catalog format conform to what's actually available and offered.

- Comparative Literature (December 13, 2010) LSCC ratification of changes previously approved by the Faculty Honors Committee.

- Linguistics Major. (December 10, 2010). Approval of a technical correction to clarify that the removal of 103/303 from the list of required courses did not reduce the overall number of credits required to complete the program.

Still under consideration
- Revisions to the Jewish Studies Major and Certificate program.
7 March 2011

TO: Divisional Executive Committees

FROM: Kris Olds, Professor of Geography and Chair, L&S Curriculum Committee
       Elaine M. Klein, Assistant Dean, Academic Planning and Assessment (L&S) and Director, University General Education

RE: Assignment of Breadth Designations to Liberal Arts and Science Courses

CC: Andrea Poehling, Divisional Committees Coordinator
        Gary Sandefur, Dean
        L&S Curriculum Committee

It has come to our attention that some of the Divisional Executive Committees may have questions about how L&S Breadth designations are assigned to courses.

As many of your members know through membership in the faculty of the College of Letters and Science, or experience as undergraduate advisors, the L&S undergraduate degree requirements hold that all L&S students must take a substantial number of credits across the three major domains of knowledge represented within the College: the Arts and Humanities, the Social Sciences, and the Natural Sciences. The L&S requirements further subdivide the Arts and Humanities to highlight coursework that focuses on Literature, and Natural Sciences to distinguish between Biological and Physical Sciences, to ensure that students are required to complete a minimum amount of coursework in these areas. These requirements are essential features of L&S baccalaureate degrees in the liberal arts and sciences, ensuring that students obtain breadth of study that complements the depth of study found in the major.

Administration of the L&S degree requirements is the domain of the L&S Curriculum Committee (LSCC). The LSCC is comprised of faculty members from across L&S; they are appointed by the dean, who accepts nominations from the Associate Deans, Department Chairs, and interested faculty themselves. Every effort is made to recruit faculty members who are interested in curricular matters and in liberal education more generally; in addition, these appointments are made to ensure that faculty are drawn from the L&S divisions. The result is
that faculty from the Arts and Humanities, Natural Sciences, (Biological and Physical), and Social Sciences engage in cross-disciplinary discussions about the liberal education we hope our students achieve. These faculty members are joined by *ex officio* members representing advising, administrative, and student perspectives. For your convenience, we’ve attached a list of L&S Curriculum Committee members to this memo (Attachment A). We believe that the strength of this committee is found in its ability to engage in coordinated, student-focused, cross-disciplinary discussions to promote an integrated liberal arts and science experience for students.

One means by which the LSCC administers the breadth component of the L&S degree requirements is via oversight of several “course attributes” (also known as “Timetable” or “GeBLC” codes) assigned in the course database. Questions about these attributes appear in the New Course Proposal form (Q. 10 – 13a). These attributes help L&S students identify courses that may be used to meet the requirements; the attributes include (but are not limited to) the L&S Breadth designations. (The use of codes to identify courses in the various breadth areas pre-dates the 1996 implementation of University General Education Requirements by many decades.) Then, as now, the goal of the L&S Breadth requirement is to ensure that students completing liberal arts degrees are exposed to domains of knowledge beyond the focus of their major.

The LSCC’s assignment of these designations to courses is inextricably linked to the goals of liberal education, and the college has been working to more effectively communicate these goals to students, advisors, and other stakeholders. The revisions to the L&S degree requirements implemented in Fall 2007 were driven, in part, by an identified need to explain more clearly the purpose of various requirements. After considerable discussion and consultation, the LSCC developed a statement describing the role “Breadth” plays in our baccalaureate degree programs. This statement, published in the Undergraduate Catalog, explains that “[at] the heart of any degree in the liberal arts and sciences is an active understanding of the variety and breadth of the many scholarly approaches to knowing the world…. Working together, each of these three fields of knowledge represents a particular ‘way of knowing’ about the world around us.” The broad goals expressed for courses in each of the three domains include (but are not limited to) the following:

- **Arts and Humanities** courses “encourage students to analyze the range of creative and cultural artifacts, expressions, and ideas of human existence—history, literature, art, culture, folklore—and to use that information to better understand humanity and to cultivate civic and social responsibility.”
- **Courses in the social sciences** “demonstrate ways of knowing the world through the systematic study of human society, interactions, and institutions… from a wide range of perspectives and research techniques, both quantitative and qualitative…”
- **In the Natural Sciences**, students “gain an appreciation for science as a way of systematically looking at the natural world, understanding how this process can be used to inform decision-making in a wide range of political, economic, and social contexts.”

In articulating these goals, the LSCC hopes to convey that “breadth” of learning does not mandate that all students must become specialists across all domains; rather, our students should become better informed consumers of information and knowledge about the world around them. The full statement concerning L&S Breadth was presented to, and endorsed by, the L&S Faculty Senate (L&S Fac Doc 279, 20 April 2009). [Attachment B]
When the LSCC considers requests to create new courses that carry breadth designations, these broad goals for each of the three domains are implicit, though often, they will be explicitly discussed. They are always considered when courses outside L&S are considered as “Liberal Arts and Science” courses. In these discussions, the committee bears in mind the principle that breadth matters most for students who are exploring an area outside the domain in which their major falls.

As noted above, breadth designations facilitate administration of the L&S degree requirements, which affect the majority of UW-Madison undergraduates. After the implementation of the University General Education Requirements (UGER), these codes were recruited to serve an additional purpose, since students earning degrees in schools and colleges other than L&S often take L&S courses that may be used to satisfy UGER Breadth. Although many non-L&S students satisfy UGER breadth by taking courses designated with the L&S codes, schools and colleges other than L&S have the latitude to include other courses to meet these requirements when viewed in the context of their own curricular needs. For example, while the College of Engineering allows introductory language courses to satisfy the UGER Humanities requirement for Engineering students, L&S rules prevent those courses from carrying the L&S “H” designation.

Thus, the L&S Breadth codes intersect with (but are distinct from) UGER Breadth. It may therefore be useful to know more about the administration of the UGER curriculum. L&S has been entrusted by the University Academic Planning Council to serve as the “Trustee” on behalf of all schools and colleges to administer the UGERs. The Dean of L&S appoints the University General Education Committee (UGEC), a campus-wide policy committee that reports to the University Academic Planning Council. Membership includes faculty from across the university, as well as on "ex officio" membership from key administrative and advising units across campus that serve undergraduates. This committee provides administrative oversight and evaluation of the UGER. Review and approval of courses meeting faculty-developed UGER criteria for Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, and Ethnic Studies is overseen by faculty members who serve on the UGEC. For UGER Breadth, the UGEC continues to utilize existing L&S Breadth indicators, as assigned by the L&S Curriculum Committee, while also affording the schools and colleges some flexibility to interpret “breadth” in the context of degrees earned in Engineering, Human Ecology, Business, Education, and Agricultural and Life Sciences. The UGER liaisons and staff frequently consult with deans’ offices and advising staff across campus on questions related to the requirements, from managing student requests for exceptions to adding new courses to the UGER course array.

We should note that both L&S and the UGEC are interested in further discussions of the role Breadth plays for undergraduates. The LSCC is currently engaging in discussions of developing an assessment strategy for our Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science (BABS07) degree programs, and that plan will, necessarily, include discussions of breadth. The 2008 long-term UGEC Assessment Plan includes plans to assess student learning with respect to breadth as a component of the Wisconsin Experience, and that project will necessarily involve schools and colleges other than L&S, and will likely include conversations with the Divisional Executive Committees, the Biodeans, and other groups that can weigh in on student learning goals.
associated with divisional breadth. We anticipate that these conversations will clarify student learning outcomes for General Education, as well as for L&S.

In conclusion, we wish to assure the committees that our committee is actively engaged in managing a curriculum, of which Breadth of study is an essential component. The structure of our committee affords us the opportunity to engage in discussions about breadth that allow coordination of expectations for this requirement among the various divisions, in service to a integrated pedagogical experience.

If you have questions about these topics, we would be happy to discuss them further.

Kris Olds, PhD
Professor of Geography
Chair, College of Letters & Science Curriculum Committee

Elaine M. Klein
Assistant Dean, College of Letters and Science
Director, University General Education
2010-2011 L&S Curriculum Committee Membership

Term Members:

Marc Fink, Music, Year 2 of 3  
Diane Gooding, Psychology, Year 2 of 3  
Liane Kosaki, Political Science, Year 3 of 3  
Venkat Mani, German, Year 2 of 3  
Naomi McGloin, East Asian Languages & Literature, Year 3 of 3  
Kristopher Olds, Geography, Year 3 of 3 (Chair)  
Kenneth Sytsma, Botany, Year 3 of 3

Ex Officio:

Elaine Klein, L&S Administration (Academic Planning, Program Review, and Assessment of Student Learning)  
Christopher Lee, L&S Student Academic Affairs (Undergraduate Academic Services)  
Jennifer Kaufmann-Buhler, L&S Honors Program (Curriculum)  
Michael J. Pfieger, L&S Student Academic Affairs (Undergraduate Academic Services, DARS)  
Nancy Westphal-Johnson, L&S Administration (Undergraduate Education and Academic Administration)

Student Members (appointed through ASM):

Myranda Tanck  
Leslie Watkins
College of Letters and Science
Undergraduate Study in Letters and Science

The College of Letters and Science (L&S) provides a broad and deep array of learning opportunities for undergraduate students. Situated at the heart of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, our courses not only provide students with basic tools for learning, but also help students acquire a thorough understanding of the many ways in which artists, scholars, scientists, and professionals create, understand, interpret, investigate, and communicate about the diverse and complex world around us. Whether in the classroom or in the laboratory, on the Web or in the workplace, our educational mission is to help students to actively develop their own sense of how they might best understand the world.

Understanding the world, communicating that understanding to others, and taking action based on what one knows, takes many forms. What we call the “liberal arts and sciences” includes a wide range of academic pursuits: creative production and performance in the printed and visual arts; the analysis of global history, foreign languages and world literatures; scientific inquiry into the physical and natural world; qualitative and quantitative investigation into political, economic, and social processes; and many, many more. No matter what the field, L&S classes and instructors emphasize critical thinking, analytical investigation, and effective communication. The learning experiences that L&S offers are invaluable for students in both their professional careers and their productive lives within the community — helping students develop flexible and transferable skills, both for “making a living” and “making a life.”

The Wisconsin Experience: Essential Learning in Letters and Science

The three elements of learning described below — tools, breadth, and depth — work together to create a broad and rich education in the liberal arts and sciences, and promote attainment of core areas of essential learning: knowledge of human cultures and the natural and physical world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative and applied learning. These and countless other experiences comprise the Letters and Science approach to helping students obtain a distinctive “Wisconsin Experience.” (For more on the Wisconsin Experience, see http://www.learning.wisc.edu/.)

Foundations: Tools for Learning

For all UW undergraduates, these learning experiences begin with students satisfying the university's General Education Requirements — usually by taking courses taught within the College of Letters & Science. These common foundations cover key topics which are necessary for any undergraduate major and any prospective career: oral and written communication; mathematical and logical reasoning; and the diversity of cultures within global society. In addition to these university-wide requirements, all L&S students must attain knowledge of a foreign language, in work that combines training in both communication and culture, so students may better understand and participate in the global community of the twenty-first century. Together, these “tools for learning” may be acquired through many different courses taught by
many different Departments. The key is that they are never taught in isolation, but always considered together with broad exposure to various “ways of knowing” from the arts and humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. (For more on the General Education Requirements, see www.ls.wisc.edu/gened/; for more on the L&S requirements, see ... )

**Breadth: Ways of Knowing**

At the heart of any degree in the liberal arts and sciences is an active understanding of the variety and breadth of the many scholarly approaches to knowing the world. Every student in the College of Letters and Science experiences significant exposure to three principal fields of knowledge: the arts and humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. These broad fields of knowledge aren’t the same as the areas of depth that we call “Majors.” In fact, any particular Major — or even a particular course within a Major — might well involve more than one of these fields of knowledge. (For example, imagine a seminar on “people and the environment” that combines historical background, research on social patterns of energy use, and scientific understandings of climate.) Working together, each of these three fields of knowledge represents a particular “way of knowing” about the world around us.

Courses in the **arts and humanities** attempt to know the world through the production and analysis of artistic, literary, and scholarly work. Some courses examine the fine and performing arts, or literature, presenting students with opportunities to interpret and think critically about these creative expressions of the human condition. Other courses help students to understand and compare religious and philosophical conceptions of humankind. Still other courses take on historical subjects, focusing on moments of change and periods of continuity for the peoples and regions of the world. These courses all encourage students to analyze the range of creative and cultural artifacts, expressions, and ideas of human existence – history, literature, art, culture, folklore – and to use that information to better understand humanity and to cultivate civic and social responsibility.

Courses in the **social sciences** demonstrate ways of knowing the world through the systematic study of human society, interactions, and institutions. The social sciences explore these issues from a wide range of perspectives and research techniques, both quantitative and qualitative. Through these courses students learn how to formulate research questions and determine what techniques are best used to answer those questions — for example, exploring ideas and developing theories, conducting surveys and building models, or observing and participating in social life itself. Developing such analytical skills assists students as they approach complex problems and seek to solve them in both the workplace and the community.

Courses in the **natural sciences** involve knowing the world through scientific inquiry — assembling objective information that can be used to explain observed natural phenomena in a way that is thorough and verifiable. The natural sciences are often divided into the Physical Sciences (dealing with matter and energy, or the study of the earth, atmosphere, and oceans) and the Biological Sciences (dealing with life and living systems, like plants, animals, and environments). These courses often contain laboratory components that allow students to gain firsthand experience in scientific research methods. By completing this requirement, science and non-science majors alike will gain an appreciation for science as a way of systematically looking
at the natural world, understanding how this process can be used to inform decision-making in a wide range of political, economic, and social contexts.

Together, these broad “ways of knowing” give students a complementary set of tools for seeing, imagining, and asking questions about the world — tools that enhance creative problem solving no matter what the field. And, because twenty-first century knowledge is not neatly compartmentalized, it’s worth noting that these areas of study intersect and overlap; courses in some areas draw upon strategies used in the others. Experiences in “breadth” courses can be life-changing: we frequently hear that a course taken to fulfill a breadth requirement introduced someone to a subject that became a new Major, a new way of looking at a current Major, or a lifelong interest.

**Depth: Practice and Understanding (Major)**

The process of declaring and completing a Major — often, but not always, attached to a particular university Department — provides students with an opportunity to concentrate on an in-depth investigation of at least one subject or issue, putting their tools for learning and ways of knowing to focused use. This intensive understanding of one topic helps students to appreciate the potential depth of the others. A students' work in the Major reflects a continuing progression of skills, knowledge, and values, where advanced learning opportunities in upper-level coursework grow from and expand upon earlier experiences, helping students build additional depth in writing, speaking, information literacy, and critical thinking skills from the perspective of a particular discipline. In senior capstone or independent research projects, students are frequently asked to synthesize what they’ve learned and apply it in a variety of new situations. By the conclusion of their studies, students in the Major are better able to understand themselves and their society, to develop their intellectual powers outside of a University setting, and to make productive contributions to the world around them. (For a list of Departments and Majors in L&S, see <link>. )