

WOU General Education Update

06/01/2020

The most certain way to succeed is to always try just one more time.

- Thomas Edison

Transfer Pathways and General Education

WOU is a transfer-friendly institution, and the General Education program works closely with the Transfer Pathways office. We asked Dr. Kristin Mauro to update us on the work her office is doing to support transfer students:

Transfer Evaluation System

The Transfer Evaluation System (TES) is the tool we have purchased to replace the current articulation tool. TES allows users to research and match courses, track evaluations, and manage our equivalencies.

Once fully implemented, TES will be the mechanism by which we house, manage, and update our articulations. Reporting features within TES allow for review of catalog changes from our feeder institutions and initiation of reviews as needed. We are no longer reliant on our partners to communicate their changes to us and allows us to be proactive.

We recently purchased an API add on that will allow us to fully automate communication between Banner and TES. In addition, the API allows students to submit an evaluation task and advocate on their own behalf.

Recent weeks have seen an increase in course review requests and TES has allowed us to quickly review and update articulations. Everyone who uses this system loves it!

If you would like access to TES, please contact Kristin Mauro at maurok@wou.edu account setup and training. Coming soon to the [Transfer Pathways website](#) are training resources, including "how to" videos and step-by-step training materials.

Transfer Pathways has been busy this academic year! First, the roll out of the new General Education program is much more transfer friendly and has made transferring to Western without a transfer degree more seamless. A great example of this is the success we had with the students who transferred from Concordia University but had not completed their General Education requirements.

Second, last summer a workgroup of faculty and staff met to develop the inaugural transfer student survey. This group was charged with deciding what areas of the transfer student experience we wanted to include on the survey. The survey was administered from March 1st to April 1st. This is an IRB approved research project and is a mixed methods survey. While the data is still be analyzed, initial results are positive with areas we can improve upon. Overall, there was a 33% response rate. The full report of the survey results will be published in the inaugural Transfer Pathways report that will be available later this summer. Thank you to everyone who served on this workgroup.

Third, earlier this month the first three Major Transfer Map (MTM) MOU's were signed. This is extremely exciting as it provides a roadmap for Biology, Education, and English majors wishing to continue their education at a four-year institution. As we move into the fall term, training will be provided to all academic advisors so that they know what to expect. Please stay tuned for information on training.

Last, planning is underway for Western's second National Transfer Student Week celebrate, which is October 19-23. Sponsored by Transfer Pathways, this week is an opportunity for Western to spotlight the diversity of our transfer students and what they add to the campus culture. Currently, the plan is for a primarily virtual event. If permissible, there will be a combination of in-person and virtual events. I would like to thank Gabbi Boyle (SSA) and Erin Ritchie (Transfer Pathways WOU CiP Intern) for their assistance in planning this event. More information will be provided as the event gets closer, in the meantime, please save the date!

Rachel Bayly

Class of 2020

A graduating Interdisciplinary Studies student in the Honors program, Rachel reflected on her experiences as a student in her IDS capstone course.

Her advisor and teacher, Dr. Sriram Khé secured her permission to share her thoughts with us, noting, “the write up about gen.ed. is from a thoughtful and well-accomplished student about whom we can all be proud.”

With Rachel's permission, her essay has been excerpted to emphasize her thoughts on general education. Although she completed General Education through the Honors curriculum prior to its recent revision, her ideas resonate for us in the General Education program and remind us of the value of considering how all of our courses contribute to the mission of General Education to provide students those “opportunities to gain diverse understandings”.

You can find [Rachel's full essay](#) available in the General Education newsletter [archive](#).

Student Perspective: The Brea(d)th of one's education

In the article, "[It's time to end college majors as we know them](#)" Jeffrey Selingo made the "T" argument, claiming that both breadth and depth are necessary to an education that will truly prepare students for "the real world." Even as I tried to talk myself out of it, I found myself agreeing that students should have the opportunity to approach college with a wider lens.

Imagine if the first year or two were full of developing multidisciplinary skills sure to serve students well in any profession. That would be my alternative to "majors as we know them," allowing students time for meaningful exploration and support from an invested advisor before seeking the vertical line of the "T" in a major.

How interesting that I am ending up describing general education—a very basic piece of higher education! Although the goal of general education is likely what I described, it doesn't seem like that is how general education classes are presented these days.

Maybe we just need to change the language from "general education requirements" (students hear this and are unhappy that they have to keep taking classes in math, science, English, whatever subjects they find less interesting) to "opportunities to gain diverse understandings." Beyond that, I think those classes should focus on things like communication, leadership, cultural understandings, and critical thinking (interwoven with writing, math, historical understandings, and scientific inquiry).

What I envision is not college algebra, college writing, biology 101, and the like. On the other hand, I imagine project-based classes where students work in groups to design products that solve world problems then participate in pitch competitions, or other integrative classes, where students have the opportunity to gain understandings of multiple disciplines in practical settings.

However, the general education courses were mostly offered in silos and cut off from other disciplines. For instance, what I learned in Biology 101 was certainly interesting, but flight patterns of starlings and reproduction of tiny organisms is actually not going to apply outside of biology or even within many sectors of biology. Perhaps an in-depth study of an endangered species and an opportunity to propose methods for increasing the species' population would have served me/us better. A class like this could give students the tools to understand and share ideas about ecosystems and the classification of living organisms, and at the same time help students better understand environmental issues; how to do research; and how to problem-solve and think critically. Such a class might be more exciting for students, and it would also help them develop a sufficient level of competence in biology, while developing more universal skills.

Universities around the world are having to rethink what it means to provide a college education right now. At the same time, we are also seeing a glimmering example of why students need to gain broad skill sets that allow them to adapt to the rapidly-changing world.

Selingo, J. (2018). It's time to end college majors as we know them. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. May 20, 2018. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/It-s-Time-to-End-College/243448>

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