

05/01/2020

WOU General Education Update

*Follow your heart, but
take your brain with you.*

- anonymous

The most common Gen Ed advising questions:

Q: Can I substitute a different course for a General Education course if they are in the same discipline and have the same course prefix?

A: It depends. The Gen Ed requirements are not discipline specific. WOU courses that have not been through the curriculum process are not eligible. Transfer course reviews can be requested by petition.

Q: Can Health Promotion be met with PE 131 and an activity course?

A: Yes. PE 131 is still available and with an activity course can be used for Health Promotion.

Q: A Division or Department approved a transfer course in place of a course in the LACC. Can the transfer course substitute for the same course in the new General Education?

A: Yes. Use the Gen Ed Petition form and include this information in your petition.

Q: Can a student use CS 121 for Critical Thinking?

A: No. CS 121 is not aligned to any Gen Ed requirements.

Find more advising FAQs at our [Advising Resources page](#)

TSOAR, SOAR and Fall Advising

Awareness of General Education resources can help advisors get new students started right while keeping ongoing students on track. We have collected many resources online at our [Advising Resources page](#).

New Courses have been added to the 2020-21 catalog!

Our [Requirements page](#) has links directly to the current Academic Catalog and will update when the catalog updates. All of the great new classes available for General Education in 2020-21 can be found on our [Course Updates page](#) and are listed in the [2020-21 Orientation Guide](#). And don't forget to use the handy course attributes feature in the Scheduler and Real time search tools to find all of the General Education courses.

Benefits for transfer students

Transfer students with [articulated AA degrees](#) will meet their WOU General Education requirements. For those with AA-degrees not yet articulated, the [General Education petition form](#) includes an AA-review request option. Transfer students with 30 or more college credits (excluding AP courses) will have their FYS requirements waived.

How to assess if a Gen Ed catalog-year change is a good idea

Students who started in 2019-20 do not need to change catalogs to take courses added in later catalog years. For students in earlier catalog years, if they have an AAOT or other articulated AA degree, the 2019 program is a good choice – it does not include the Additional BA or BS requirements (AGRs). Students who have mostly or completely fulfilled their LACCs and their AGRs are usually best served by not changing. Several requirement categories (e.g. Critical Thinking and Integrating Knowledge) do not align as easily to the LACCs or AGRs. The What-If tool in Degree Tracks is useful to check the impacts of a change.

The most important thing for incoming new students to know

Getting incoming new students into a First Year Seminar - either FYS 107 or FYS 207 - in their first term at WOU is our number one advising tip for SOAR. For 2020-21, we have built a schedule that emphasizes availability of FYS sections in Fall term. Topic descriptions are now available at <https://wou.edu/gened/fys/>

The most important thing for advisors to know

Think about the degree holistically and make sure you are helping your students think of it that way too. Be aware of the General Education requirements – you don't need to know them in and out, but if you have a sense for what each requirement involves, you can help students identify if they have a transfer course they should petition or if there is a course they can double dip. When you make sure that you and your students know how to read Degree Tracks and are paying attention to the whole degree – it's less likely they will get that note from the graduation registrar that they are missing a General Education requirement.

10 Characteristics of Wicked Problems

(Rittel and Weber 1973)*

- No definitive formulation
- No stopping rule (no ideal state to be reached)
- Solutions are not true or false, but better or worse.
- No immediate or ultimate test of solution.
- Solution tests are irreversible and do not allow for trial-and-error; ever attempt counts.
- Lack enumerated possible solutions or well-described operations.
- Every problem is unique.
- Are symptoms of other problems.
- Perspective and how the problem is explained informs the potential solution.
- Planners engaging in wicked problem solving must consider the consequences of the solutions they attempt.

*Rittel, H. W., & Webber, M. M. (1973). "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning." *Policy sciences*, 4(2), 155-169. <https://www.cc.gatech.edu/fac/ellen.do/rittel/rittel-dilemma.pdf> .

General Education in the time of COVID

When the General Education Taskforce launched, they began their efforts by participating in an intensive workshop with Dr. Paul Hanstedt. Dr. Hanstedt's work with innovative General Education curricula that prepared students to tackle "wicked problems" was part of the impetus for his selection to help Western Oregon University engage in this significant curricular renovation effort.

What is a wicked problem? Wicked problems are unique and fluid, with changing parameters. They don't have simple or generalizable explanations as the problem space may shift over space and time. Wicked problems seek optimization or improvement of a situation, rather than reaching an ideal solution. These kinds of problems require interdisciplinary, creative and critical thinkers who can incorporate a variety of perspectives to approach and address novel situations. The pandemic situation and the associated challenges of shifting courses developed for one delivery format into another are wicked problems. The day-to-day version of work and school that our families are finding themselves tackling are wicked problems.

Certainly, the novel coronavirus and associated challenges are not the only wicked problems we face as a society. Climate change, social inequities, poverty, access to education are all wicked problems. Our General Education Learning Outcomes and the associated requirements are part of a framework that helps students build their own capacity to approach and tackle wicked problems.

WOU's General Education students are joining a diverse community of learners to approach new and multifaceted problems that can only be addressed by that diversity of perspectives, knowledge and skills. You can see the goals for "wicked students" in our learning outcomes:

1. **Intellectual foundations and breadth of exposure:** Put into practice different and varied forms of knowledge, inquiry, and expression that frame academic and applied learning.
2. **Critical thinking:** Demonstrate the ability to evaluate information and develop well-reasoned and evidence-based conclusions.
3. **Citizenship:** Articulate the challenges, responsibilities, and privileges of belonging in a complex, diverse, interconnected world.
4. **Multidisciplinary learning:** Integrate knowledge, perspectives, and strategies across disciplines to answer questions and solve problems

Our hope for our students is that they master these outcomes, because we want them to be successful, and that includes living in a world filled with wicked problems that they will be prepared to face.

Want to know more about wicked students and wicked problems? Paul Hanstedt's book has practical tips and examples: Hanstedt, P. (2018). *Creating Wicked Students: Designing Courses for a Complex World*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing