BSU Liberal Education Program
Proposed Revisions

Proposed Mission Statement:

1. To provide a foundation that cultivates intentional learners empowered through intellectual and practical skills, informed by knowledge and prepared to meet the personal, civic, and professional challenges of a rapidly changing world.

OR

2. To provide intentional learning environments that empower students with the knowledge, skills and habits necessary for continued personal enrichment and a life of individual, professional and civic engagement in an ever-changing world.

Proposed Goals:

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<th>Proposed Liberal Education Goals</th>
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<td><strong>Academic:</strong> Learners who complete Liberal Education at Bemidji State University will be able to...</td>
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<td><strong>Student Performance, Learning and Development:</strong> Learners who complete Liberal Education at Bemidji State University will...</td>
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<td><strong>Foundational Knowledge:</strong> Demonstrate competency in oral and written communications, quantitative reasoning, scientific thinking, and technology. (Addresses Goal Areas 1, 3, 4, and 11)</td>
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<td><strong>Connect to Others and Region:</strong> Connect to each other, the university and the region through participation in a diversity of creative and intentionally designed learning experiences.</td>
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<td><strong>Awareness of Self in Context:</strong> Demonstrate an awareness of self from a psychological, philosophical, social and cultural, historical, environmental, and physical perspective. (Addresses Goal Areas 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11)</td>
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<td><strong>Integrate:</strong> Explore the connections among different disciplines through participation in theme-based learning.</td>
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<td><strong>Critical and Ethical Thinking:</strong> Demonstrate an ability to critically identify, assess and determine appropriate actions and resulting benefits and consequences in regards to life issues, situations, and solutions. (Addresses Goal Areas 2 and 9)</td>
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<td><strong>Learning and Development:</strong> Participate in high-impact experiences that promote learning (i.e., first year seminar, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, service learning, common intellectual experiences).</td>
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<td><strong>Human Civilization:</strong> Examine elements of human civilization and their local and global roles in relating to society, culture, history and the arts. (Addresses Goal Areas 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11)</td>
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Ideas and high impact practices (Kuh 2008) that we think are important to discuss and potentially include in a revised Liberal Education Program:

1. First Year Seminar. We have not talked about this very much. Nationwide the trend is toward replacing first year experiences that are like extended orientations with those that emphasize academic content (e.g., critical inquiry, frequent writing, and information literacy).

2. Big Questions/Themes/Strands Model. We have talked about this idea a lot. Currently, only 15% of institutions have a distribution model (MnSCU), 18% have a fully integrative model, and the bulk of colleges and universities have a combination of the two (Hanstedt 2012). In this approach, courses from various disciplines are organized around topics or themes. The number of courses required can be as few as two or as many as four depending on the institution. The courses can be required at the same time (a skills course combined with a content course), or they can build on one another over a 2-4 year period. Some universities have relatively few themes, others as many as six.

   • (The Consequences of Science and Technology, America and its Relationship with the World, What it Means to be Human (Hanstedt 2012);
   • Aesthetic Interpretation and Creative Expression, Science Inquiry, Historical and Social, Local to Global (Appalachian State University)
   • Health and Wellness; Arts, Media, and Society; Aesthetics and Culture; Social Justice, Global Studies, Principles of Sustainability; (California State University).
   • Childress suggests a focus on “wicked problems” for which there are no right answers although there are better answers, and that involve ethical decisions and consequences (e.g., Is squatting a civil right? Can we physically shrink an existing city?)
   • Grand Valley State University: Globalization; Health; Human Rights; Identity; Information, Innovation, and Technology, Sustainability

   It would be relatively simple to take the BSU signature themes and make each of these a strand. We may have to add a strand or theme, however, to more fully include arts and humanities disciplines. Students have to take all strands, but may more heavily emphasize one-two than the others.

3. Learning communities. In general, these encourage integration of learning across courses. Students build community at the same time as they learn content and skills. Some also include a residential component, and find this is a great way to retain students. Some use learning communities combined with a residential requirement as a way to retain academically underprepared students. There are five general ways by which learning communities can form (Soven, Lehr, Naynaha, and Olson 2013).

   • Linked courses. This is the simplest model. Linked courses combine a cohort of students in two common courses. The extent to which the faculty link varies—they can teach apart or together. Typically there is a theme that unites them. See above.
   • Clusters. 3-4 courses connected by a theme
   • Freshman interest groups (FIGs). First year students are enrolled together in 2-3 courses and share a freshman seminar.
   • Federated Learning Communities. A faculty member travels with the students to the courses that link them and help them make connections.
   • Coordinated Studies. Team teaching and faculty collaboration that help students make connections.

   We have discussed the first three options, but have not settled on one. The first is attractive because of its relative simplicity and the way it could be tied to a theme-based delivery.

4. Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing-Intensive courses. Beginning with the Freshman year and continuing at all levels of student progress, these courses involve writing and revision of work, and writing for various audiences and disciplines.
5. Service Learning, Community-Based Learning. Content and skill learning occurs both in class and in the community. Students have to apply what they are learning to the “real” world and reflect in a classroom setting on their experiences.

6. Travel abroad as a sophomore or junior to take advantage of obtaining liberal education credits. Travel abroad is more challenging if students wait until they are seniors and trying to finish a major.

7. Internships. Lower division internships that are not necessarily tied to a major, but to an interest.

8. Capstone for general education. This is possible, but we have not discussed this item much.

9. Undergraduate research. This is a great way to get students excited in disciplines. We have not discussed making this mandatory, but some disciplines may want to more fully take advantage of this idea.

10. Co-curricular learning? Internships, service learning, and volunteer work connect students with the broader community. What about the learning that takes place in clubs, organizations, teams? Might we incorporate student activities in these arenas? We have not addressed this much, but it has come up.

Where you can find materials that we have examined:

Groups (J:→EVERYONE→Lib Ed Articles
http://www.bemidjistate.edu/faculty_staff/faculty_association/organization_faculty/

Timeline: This is very tentative and incomplete. It does provide us with a way to begin moving forward.

This academic year:
• We need to obtain input from faculty on this matter—perhaps a survey?
• By the end of this semester, we would like to propose and have approved a theme-based model. This approach blends very easily with the MnTC, yet helps begin with integration.
• Solicit faculty interest in theme development.
• Revise competencies/student learning outcomes
• Funds to help faculty with development over the summer to develop themes?

2014-2015:
• Catalog development fall 2014/theme solidification.
• Any new courses to be a part of a theme need to be moving through curriculum processes by October 1.
• Liberal Education Committee and other interest faculty study whether and how best to modify the first year experience, and incorporate learning communities.
• Students register for fall courses and themes are offered.
• During summer 2015 we could pilot a learning community that helps prepare the underprepared.

2015-2016
• Fall 2015 learning communities are incorporated
• ???

Committee Members:

Mahmoud Al-Odeh, Daniel Guentchev, Andy Hafs, Jim McCracken, DeeDee Narum, Donna Palivec, Sheila Paul, John Truedson, and Randy Westhoff

Deb Peterson: dpeterson@bemidjistate.edu