University Studies Program 2.1 Proposal
March 17, 2016

We are grateful to the many members of our campus community who provided feedback--both in-person at our fora and in various meetings and in writing--on the "USP 2.0" proposal we drafted in February. Based on that feedback, we created "USP 2.1," a proposal designed to move the USP forward into the next academic year and beyond.

This proposal is divided into two distinct phases. In **Phase 1**, some of the structural changes to the program are outlined and are designed to be effective for the 2016-2017 academic year, assuming approval by governance bodies. We are confident that these changes will help to resolve many of the challenges our students now face as they move through the program. Phase 1 changes are also those items on which there was significant agreement in our original proposal.

Phase 2 is designed to unfold over the next academic year, requiring significant input from faculty, staff and students. As we read the feedback on our original proposed changes to Quest II, we saw that there was significant disagreement about how to proceed given the options presented. Because it is important that we have a common understanding of what Quest II should accomplish for general education, we would like to proceed thoughtfully and deliberately, collecting more ideas from our campus community. Ideally, a full proposal for Quest II would emerge from our collaborative discussions by the end of the 2016-2017 academic year.

Our proposal is for Phase 1 changes to be effective Fall 2016 through the 2017-2018 academic year. During that time frame, we will collect data on students' exposure to Signature Question content in Quest and Explore and also hold campus conversations on the likely addition of a Signature Question (see below). This will allow us to proceed thoughtfully about additional SQs and the role of Quest II (Phase 2), and will also give departments and instructors time to develop Explore courses with SQ content. At the end of this two-year period, the campus community will have a complete portrait of a more accessible USP, and the Faculty Senate can again take up the issue of requiring students to take courses in each SQ (but with a broader range of options than they currently have).

In what follows, we briefly summarize feedback we received on the "USP 2.0" proposal and then outline Phase 1 and Phase 2 in more detail.

USP 2.0 Feedback

By February 2016, the USP Core Team had drafted a proposal ("USP 2.0") aimed at solving the problems of student scheduling, departmental representation, and incomplete assessment in the USP. Faculty and academic staff had a number of opportunities to review and comment on the proposal. The USP Council on Culture, the USP Council on Nature, and the USP Council on Society, made up of faculty and academic staff who teach in those Explore categories all reviewed it. So

did the Faculty Senate USP committee, the USP Council, and a new student advisory group: the OSA Committee on the USP. In addition, there were four open fora, and an online, open-ended form that allowed comments on all aspects of the proposal.

This feedback was rich, thoughtful, and broad-ranging. Here is a summary. There was broad support for unpairing Quest II from WBIS and Comm, as well as for encouraging Explore courses to adopt signature questions. There was also majority support for allowing students to choose from the full list of Signature Questions at each level of the Quest sequence (i.e. not insisting that students only take Signature Questions they have not yet taken). On this last point, though, there were also strong dissents: concerns that if students were not required to touch all three signature questions, the university would be backing away from its "signature" commitments to Civic Learning, Intercultural Knowledge, and Sustainability.

There was also broad agreement that something different ought to be done with Quest II, and that there ought to be some increase in the Signature Questions to allow more departments to offer Quest classes. But what ought to be done with Quest II? Which and how many Signature Questions ought to be added? There was no consensus around either of these questions.

USP 2.1: A Proposal in Two Phases

After reflecting on all the feedback, from all the various constituencies, we are proposing the following changes to the USP to be applied retroactively to students who entered the University (and USP) in Fall 2013. Please note the timeline of each of these phases.

Phase 1: Effective for Fall 2016 | Retroactive to Fall 2013

Note that the changes outlined below for Phase 1 maintain our existing Signature Questions and the structure of each Quest. Phase 1 proposes changes to students' progress through the Quest sequence and their exposure to the Signature Questions in Explore courses. Our University Assessment Plan will accommodate these changes and will continue to assess learning outcomes for all USP courses.

A.   *Structure of Quest Sequence*

Challenge: As described in the original "USP 2.0" proposal, the existing Quest sequence (Quest I, II, and III) requires that the Quests are interdependent: a student's choice in Quest I impacts his/her choice in Quest II and Quest III because these students are "collecting" the three Signature Questions. By the time a student reaches Quest III, he/she may have a very small number of courses to choose from, and cannot choose the course in which he/she would most like to enroll. In practice, although we would like students to be familiar with each of the SQs, many students end up repeating an SQ or having Quest III waived due to course availability limitations. As it stands, the Quest sequence bears the burden of introducing students to the SQs.

Solution: Make the Quests independent from each other, and remove the requirement that each student is exposed to each of the three existing SQs in the Quest sequence.

Explanation: This change would make all Quest courses available to students each time they register, allowing them to choose from the full array of Quest courses being offered. Students would not be limited by choosing Quest courses in a particular Signature Question, as we would no longer require that they collect each one. Rather, students would be able to chart their own course through the Quest sequence. All Quest courses would still have our existing Signature Questions attached to them.

This means that students might not gain exposure to all three of our Signature Questions in the Quest sequence (and indeed, given some scheduling difficulties, many students do not collect all three now). After consulting with advisors in the UARC and with students, we are confident that students will nevertheless gain exposure to at least two SQs in the Quest sequence, and beyond that will likely be exposed to all of them by the time they complete their Explore (breadth) requirements (see below). Because of this, we are also confident that students will be prepared to take Connect; indeed, they may be better prepared due to additional exposure to the SQs in Explore, as outlined below.

B. Signature Questions in Explore Courses

Challenge: Currently, the Quest sequence carries the full weight of the Signature Questions. They are possibly a student's only exposure to these learning outcomes we have designated as having a priority on our campus.

Solution: Recommend that all Explore courses have Signature Question content.

Explanation: Extending the SQs to Explore courses adds greater integrity to our program, and also allows for multiple exposures to these important learning outcomes throughout the first two years of a student's time at UW Oshkosh. Many courses already have SQ content but that content is not formally recognized in the Explore syllabus or on TitanWeb. Explore courses carrying SQ content ensure that our students can chart a course through general education that grants them significant exposure to the SQs from multiple disciplinary lenses.

C. Unpairing Quest II

Challenge: By the time a student reaches Quest II in the second semester of their first year, they find it difficult to arrange a schedule around a 6-credit block.

Solution: Formally "unpair" Quest II from Comm 111 and WBIS, but make those courses co-requisites with any Quest II course.

Explanation: We have already moved away from a tight pairing of Quest II courses and WBIS/Comm courses, realizing early on that this was the source of much student frustration. However, we recognize the benefit to most students of taking Comm 111 and WBIS early in their careers at UW Oshkosh. Unpairing Quest II--in conjunction with making all Quest II courses available to each student, as outlined above--should go a long way toward increasing scheduling flexibility for first-year students while maintaining the benefit of taking Comm and WBIS and gaining some familiarity with information literacy.

We should also note that one of the reasons Quest II courses were originally paired was to continue the learning communities students experienced in Quest I. We discovered that the learning community in Quest II was not as strong as it was in Quest I, given that Quest II courses increase the class size to 50 students. Additionally, while students tend to form strong relationships to each other in the small Quest I courses, those same types of relationships were less likely to occur in the larger Quest II courses. For instructors, too, creating a tight learning community with 50 students was difficult, especially considering that the Quest II disciplinary course (e.g., Political Science 105) was actually two different WBIS/Comm sections combined together; all 50 students were never in the same two courses. Coupled with the scheduling difficulties, unpairing Quest II emerged as the best solution to multiple challenges.

D.   Other Changes, not Requiring Approval by Governance Bodies

i. Scheduling some Quest II and Quest III courses during interim

In order to further alleviate scheduling difficulties experienced by students in high-credit majors or majors that require many classes in the first two years, the USP Core Team will work with the COLS Dean's office to increase offerings of Quest II and Quest III courses during interims. While Quest I would not work in interim due to its First Year Experience components, some Quest II and Quest III courses might use the intensity of interims to their advantage, while offering scheduling alternatives for students who need more room in their first- and second-year schedules.

ii. Reducing Syllabus inclusions in Quest syllabi

As the first round of USP course approval is over, the USP Core Team and the Faculty Senate Committee on the USP now have an opportunity to review their requirements for what instructors include in course syllabi. With a new course approval process, it could be possible to allow syllabi to slim down, at instructors' discretions, by putting the onus for USP course approval on the USP course approval form, and not on the contents of the syllabus itself.

Phase 2: Effective for Fall 2017

As noted in the "USP 2.0" proposal, Quest II has long lacked an identity vis-a-vis its companions Quest I (first-year experience, Peer Mentors, introduction to campus resources) and Quest III

(community engagement experience, Alumni mentors). While Quest II was originally meant to introduce students to Ethical Reasoning, multiple instructors have indicated that this is difficult for them to put into practice and students have not noticed a difference between Quest II courses and their other Explore courses.

The USP 2.0 proposal suggested that we might consider changing Quest II to have more of a "skills" focus, focusing on different SQs than the ones on which we currently focus. Possibilities included Problem-Solving, Ethical Reasoning, Critical & Creative Thinking, and Information & Technical Literacy.

Feedback on this change to Quest II indicated that a wider campus discussion about changing Quest II needs to occur, and that such a change cannot be rushed. Whether we change the entire nature of Quest II or simply add a new Signature Question to those we already have (applicable to all Quests) will be a campus decision, arrived at through extensive conversation.

This proposal thus recommends that the campus undertake possible changes to Quest II in the next academic year, with the aim of having a proposal by the end of that year. This would allow time 1.) to see how the Phase 1 changes impact Quest II and the Signature Questions; and 2.) for departments and instructors to determine how they might best fit into a possible new Quest II.

Conclusion

Again, we invite feedback on this proposal. Please contact the Director of the USP (slagtert@uwosh.edu) or the Associate Director (loiacong@uwosh.edu) or your Faculty Senator. We would like to proceed to consideration in the Faculty Senate, but also allow our constituents some time to reflect on this two-part strategy. The goal here is to best serve our students and, for students, community, faculty and instructors, to offer the best opportunities for "Gen Ed Joy."