

Institutional Coursework for Graduation Requirements
White Paper No. 2
by Committee on Designated Curriculum Matters
Northwest Missouri State University

This report is second in a series of four white papers written by the Designated Curriculum Matters subcommittee in the 2004-2005 academic year. This white paper will address the potential for institutional requirements *in addition to* the 42-credit general education package.

Background

In 2001, the General Education Advisory Group proposed the 42-hour general education requirements that would fit the state mandate for transferable competencies. By 2002, the faculty senate proposals for general education consisted of a 42-hour package and a 9-hour institutional requirement. Ultimately, due to concerns about competition and the effect on admissions and transfer students, these 9 hours were not supported by the administration and the proposal was tabled in a meeting of the Board of Regents.

In a re-write of the Faculty Senate Constitution, the subcommittee on Designated Curriculum Matters (DCM) was formed as a subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee. This committee is charged with six areas related to curriculum, including graduation requirements and general education. In 2004, this subcommittee agreed that the 42-hour general education requirements were complete and sufficient.

Identifying the Need for Institutional Requirements

Many discussions have been held over the need for certain institutional requirements. However, the university should not change its graduation requirements at just any opportunity. Further, such changes should be at a period of no less than four years (which is the normal time-to-completion for undergraduate degrees). Finally, any institutional requirements that are unique to Northwest should be seen as an opportunity to provide the best education without encumbering students with too many requirements.

A reasonable method of determining the necessity and identification of institutional requirements is by a comparison of the current graduation requirements (general education, major, minor, and electives) to the **Educational Key Quality Indicators** and **University Core Values** as published in the 2004-2006 Undergraduate Catalog. It is beyond the scope of this white paper and beyond the charge of the DCM subcommittee to propose actual courses for institutional requirements. However, it is appropriate to prescribe a process to identify and approve any potential requirements. This paper will address such a process.

Competition and Admissions Considerations

All members of this institution should be concerned with any decisions that could impact the quantity and quality of students attracted to and who ultimately enroll at this university. Likewise, all members should also be concerned with the quality of Northwest

graduates based on graduation requirements. The recommendation of these requirements then becomes a balancing act between attracting students and providing academic rigor.

The institutions with which we compete for admissions and transfer students have requirements that are above the transferable 42-hour competency-based general education requirements. These may be outright institutional requirements such as the 3-credit *Personal Interaction* course at Central Missouri State University. Another method of imposing institutional requirements is by adding capstone courses to various majors or degrees (such as found in the requirements at the University of Missouri–Kansas City, Central Missouri State University, Southwest Missouri State University, and Southeast Missouri State University). A situation is also found where the likelihood is high that students will take more than 42 credits to complete their general education package (such as Missouri Western State University’s 8-hour science requirement, with more than half of these courses listed at 5 credits each).

It should be noted that the “institutional requirements” from our competitors discussed above range between 2 and 9 credits, and average 6 credits. Competition would be a factor for any proposed institutional requirements above this range.

If new and transfer students were to choose Northwest based on general education requirements *only*, then we would have experienced an increase in enrollment and transfer students. However, it is reasonable to assume that students choose a university based on many factors. Northwest Admissions indicates that the four top reasons current students choose Northwest are: academic reputation, university size, cost, and available technology. Additionally, Admissions identified that transfer students have three priorities: degree time-to-completion, location (convenience), and cost.

Impact on Graduation Time-to-Completion

The DCM review of current requirements (general education, major, minor) shows that all majors outside of Education have total requirements under 124 credits. These students would take electives to complete the minimum number of credits for graduation. The range of total credits for non-Education degrees is 92 (B.A. Music—Comprehensive) to 114 (B.F.A. Art and B.S. Accounting). The average number of credits that non-Education majors need to take as free electives is 20 credits. In this case, the major, minor, and general education credits would total 104 credits, leaving 20 credits needed for the graduation requirement.

The DCM recognizes the national trend of increasing credits for Education and other professional degrees. The range of total credits for B.S. Education degrees is 120 (Math Ed.) to 145 (Middle School, which includes state requirement of *two* minors in content areas). While there may be room for some non-Education majors to absorb institutional requirements, the impact on Education majors should seriously be considered in proposing such additional credits.

Any proposed institutional requirements should address the impact on all Northwest graduates, including Education majors.

The Call for Institutional Requirements

An additional set of courses required for graduation requirements could be proposed in the next academic year. These courses would be called “Institutional Requirements,” and could be additive to a degree (beyond general education, major, minor, and certification requirements). They could fit within current majors, but they should not hide extra coursework (in the spirit of removing hidden requirements from all majors). These institutional requirements should be implemented in a schedule that places them in the 2006-2008 Undergraduate Academic Catalog.

Suggested Plan for Proposing Institutional Requirements

The DCM proposes the following process for introducing institutional requirements:

- Proposals should come forth from the department(s) proposing the course (or choice of courses) that comprise an additional requirement.
- The proposal should indicate the impact on graduation requirements for all majors (B.S., B.A., B.F.A., B.T., and B.S.Ed degrees).
- The Curriculum Committee should set a date to start considering all proposed institutional requirements and course proposals that may be a part of these requirements. The DCM recommends September 9, 2005 for this date. (The 2006-2008 catalog deadline for Faculty Senate Proposals is in November, 2005). Any proposals delivered before this date should be tabled until September 9 (or whichever date is chosen).
- The Curriculum Committee and the DCM subcommittee should weigh the cost of institutional requirements based on:
 - Fit (such as Educational Key Quality Indicators or University Core Values)
 - Cost (Academic cost, not resource cost)
 - Competition (overall number of requirements)