

Alignment of Multiculturalism and Computer Literacy with University Values and Key Quality Indicators as Rational for Institutional General Education Requirements

White Paper No. 4

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This report is the fourth of a series of four white papers documenting the research and recommendations of the Designated Curriculum Matters subcommittee in the 2004-2005 academic year. This white paper will address the alignment of multiculturalism and computer literacy with university values and KQI's.

Northwest Missouri State University Vision

Northwest will keep its student-centered "Culture of Quality" vital by continually developing all individuals in the University community, by accommodating and celebrating diverse learners and ways of learning, and by practicing quality in all we do. All elements of the University will function seamlessly and purposefully to ensure a measurably better living, learning, and work experience.

The **Vision** of the university seeks to ensure a measurable increase in better living, learning, and workplace experience. The current general education curriculum neglects areas of computer literacy and multiculturalism as major factors contributing to this vision.

Multiculturalism as a skill area for curriculum focus: Global communication and business through rapidly growing technology dictate a growing need for a more inclusive curriculum and university. One-dimensional studies that often address a specific topic and/or discipline area often relegate multiculturalism to a specific unit or chapter. This narrow focus leads students to value diversity and multiculturalism as one component of life instead of a foundation skill necessary for success in the world. Academic settings around the world have long recognized the need for a specific course in multiculturalism that addresses diversity issues across the course content. Northwest has set a precarious precedent by ignoring the value of multicultural education as a part of the general education foundation for liberal arts education. Sending students out from a largely homogenous educational experience and into a global multi-cultural world without cultural sensitivity cheats students who will need this competency in the work place and society.

The inclusion of a specific general education requirement for multiculturalism gives students skills that allow critical thinking, analysis, and a less biased construction of information related to history, politics, science, the arts, and human behavior. Without a general education requirement that specifically addresses multi-culturalism, Northwest cannot state that all students coming through its doors have the opportunity to build these crucial cross-cultural skills that assist in abstract and pragmatic problem-solving and business planning. The ability to ensure measurably better living, learning, and work experience is at risk without this focus area in the curricula. This course is deemed necessary to education by the Northwest faculty.

Computer Literacy as a curriculum focus is crucial in a world of dramatic growth of computing and technology and is apparent in every field of study. Computer science is not only an area of study in its own right - but also a crucial supporting area for many other disciplines. Failing to require a minimum competency in current, state of the art, computer skills puts Northwest students in a difficult position as

they enter courses in their major and later enter the job market. Failing to provide general education in this specialty area will likely lead to poor academic performance across disciplines where assignments that require computer literacy are commonplace and later lead to employment difficulties as students compete in the world of business and service.

To argue that students come with computer skills intact is misleading at best. Technology changes at such a fast pace that skills acquired only months ago are now out of date. Even the skills of the most computer literate high school students need updating. Students who consider themselves proficient may be narrowly defining skills with little more than application minimums required by past educational environments or entertainment needs. Also, while many students may arrive literate in computers especially due to the popularity of the home computer, many from disadvantaged homes and/or school district have only a rudimentary understanding of computers and technology. This aspect of skill development puts Northwest in the position of catering to the needs of students with enriched environments. When assessing the need for other courses, we have to acknowledge that some students already come to us with skills (e.g. English, Math). Yet, we require students to take these courses to insure that a minimum standard criterion is met and that students have up-to-date skills in a rapidly evolving world.

Without a general education requirement that specifically addresses computer literacy, Northwest cannot state that all students coming through the curriculum meet the minimum skills level and are computer literate. This is a difficult position for the “electronic campus” to continue to sustain. The current lack of focus on computer technology as a core skill for students belies the dictate to ensure better living, learning, and work. Students need cutting edge knowledge in this area in order to successfully complete academic studies and compete for employment. Northwest needs to insure that competency is a focus of curriculum. If we fail to require minimum competency and education in computer literacy, we fail our students.

Northwest Missouri State University Mission

Northwest is a moderately selective, learner-centered regional university offering a focused range of undergraduate and graduate programs. Historically, the University serves 19 northwest Missouri counties, emphasizing programs relating to agriculture, business, and education.

In its undergraduate programs, Northwest is committed to providing students a strong general education core, preparing them for a world of constant change.

The University is a national leader in applying information technology to improve learning processes and in promoting continuous quality improvement to enhance performance in all of its activities. As a leader and initiator of cooperative efforts within its region, Northwest seeks to expand and improve access to learning and to promote applied research designed to address regional and state issues.

The fit between the Northwest Missouri State University mission statement and the two courses proposed as institutional requirements could not be clearer or more concrete. Our mission rests on the premise that understanding a changing world and application of technology is at the foundation of our beliefs about education. Yet, currently, students can come to Northwest without being required to focus on these areas that the university faculty, administrators, and board members have deemed our mission.

Preparing students to enter a world of constant changes entails preparing them for a global multicultural world. In today's world, it is rare to be involved in business or leisure activities that do not involve diversity of color, language, and religion. This change in cultural and international profile of the world is a change that has been constant and continues to impact the consciousness of us all, even in isolated rural areas of the world. A failure to understand the importance of recognizing and respecting differences in behaviors, values, opinions, and points of view across culture will severely limit students as they enter an environment of change and diversity.

Computer knowledge is constantly changing and in flux. The assumption that students coming into college would already have necessary skills is fallacious. As technology changes, students will be expected to know and understand cutting edge computer technology. Without a curriculum requirement, students may feel prepared only to use computing skills gleaned in other classes as a secondary requirement.

Northwest Missouri State University Cultural Core Values

The list below gives a concrete view of the University's values and KQI's. There is a clear connection between these university statements and the proposed six-hour institutional requirement addition to the curriculum.

We focus on our students and stakeholders. Students come to us from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. Multiculturalism and a focus on diversity is a response to our changing stakeholders. A focus on multiculturalism lets stakeholders know that Northwest is invested in understanding the differences that define us as an institution. Investment in computer literacy also communicates to our stakeholders our continued dedication to truth in advertising as an "electronic campus."

We care about each other. Multiculturalism as an institutional requirement communicates respect and concern to staff, faculty, and students as we endeavor to work together and collaborate on common grounds. Computer literacy, in many cases, allows for effective and immediate communication that is used to help others.

We are a learning organization, continually improving our University and ourselves. Multiculturalism and computer literacy interplay in this KQI to enable the achievement of this high aspiration. Central to learning endeavors is the understanding how cultural history/sensitivity and technology shape and form us as a world and enable us to continue to improve and evolve.

We collaborate and work together to accomplish our goals. Again, multiculturalism and computer technology would seem to be central to this indicator of quality. Collaboration in today's world is literally impossible without basic understandings of diversity and technology.

We master the details of what we do. Computer literacy is integral to any endeavor in our society that requires attention to detail.

We are open and ethical. Business and professional ethics across disciplines require cultural sensitivity and computer literacy.

We are leaders in our field. It would be impossible to make such a statement and justify this statement without a foundation focus on multiculturalism and computer literacy

Communications Competencies - Can there be any doubt or misunderstanding about the value of multicultural issues and computer literacy in this indicator? Communications in a highly diverse and technological society require the foundation of competencies in these areas.

Critical/Creative Thinking Competencies: Critical thinking and creative thinking have long been linked to enriched educational experiences that include knowledge of world cultures and an understanding of practical use of computer technology.

Problem-Solving Competencies: Interpersonal relationships and cultural differences dictate the understanding of differences in communication styles that may be due to interpersonal as well as intrapersonal differences. Understanding the differences in information processing as well as historical roots of culture enhance the ability of leaders and managers to move individuals and groups beyond problems and into solutions.

Computer Competencies: If we fail to provide course work that guarantees that our students have ample opportunity to develop computer literacy, we will not meet this indicator of quality.

Self-Directed Learning Competencies: Students who do not have basic computer competency will not be able to perform independently in many courses and will be hindered in their ability to function as autonomous learners in upper division courses.

Competence in a Discipline: Comprehensive competency in a discipline is often dependent on the student's computer literacy and abilities. Many disciplines also require students to critically analyze and think about topics and ideas in terms of cultural knowledge.

Personal/Social Development and Teamwork/Team Leading Competencies: Multiculturalism is at the root of personal and social development in the world today. The ability to understand and communicate with diverse others is an essential aspect of acquiring knowledge pertinent to professional/social development and leadership. Communication in these endeavors often depends on computer skills.

Multicultural Competencies/Cultural Enrichment: This competency begs for an institutional requirement specifically targeted at building a foundation. Computer literacy and multicultural education are specifically outlined in the university's value system and are represented concretely in the quality indicators.