

Appendix A

COAA Statement on the Eight Academic Goals (October 2009)

Note: This statement has been generated by COAA, but it does *not* reflect any change in policy at Hobart and William Smith Colleges

To ensure that students receive an education based on multiple perspectives and experiences, all Hobart and William Smith students must complete a course of study that includes:

- *Addressing each of the institution's eight educational goals and objectives*
- *Passing a First-Year Seminar*
- *Completing any potential faculty-mandated writing requirements*
- *Passing 32 courses (including achieving a minimum grade and GPA standards)*
- *Completing a major and a minor or a second major. Of the major and minor (or second major), one must be DISCIPLINARY, the other INTERDISCIPLINARY...*

[“The Curriculum,” <http://www.hws.edu/academics/curriculum.aspx>]

Everything in that statement is straightforward and unambiguous, except possibly the first point.

It is the responsibility of each student's academic advisor or advisors to certify to the Registrar that the student has fully addressed all eight goals. Each student normally has two academic advisors during the student's career at HWS, and there are more than 170 faculty who serve as advisors. Since 1995 the Colleges have enjoyed the presence of many new colleagues on campus, both on the faculty and in the administration, so that perhaps a majority of us were not privy to the long conversations that resulted in the present curriculum, including the goals.

In order to insure a satisfactory degree of consistency as to what is meant by an education at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, the Committee on Academic Affairs began in the 2007-2008 academic year an attempt to clarify and reaffirm the core principles of the eight goals and the procedures by which students demonstrate that they have addressed them¹. COAA was in the process of releasing a statement when the Colleges' received the Teagle grant and, as a result, the committee decided to pause in the release of our

¹ It has been clear since October of 2008 that any outcomes of our efforts must be provisional, now that over 100 faculty members will be participating over the three years in the initiative funded by the Teagle Foundation to review the faculty's expectations for students' learning and our means of assessing that learning.

statement until we had a better idea of how the aims of the Teagle groups and COAA might intertwine. The past few months, many Teagle working groups have requested data about courses and how they are used to satisfy goals. As such, we feel that now is the right time to share our data with the HWS community.

Some Background: Why Did We Adopt the Eight Goals?

We begin with some background. From 1994 – 1995 the faculty then teaching at the Colleges took part in discussions focused on teaching and learning, meeting in small groups drawn from across the campus². The small group discussions were followed by a whole-faculty retreat in the winter of 1996 for the purpose of updating the Colleges' curriculum. Both the Colleges Faculty and The Board of Trustees voted to approve the new curriculum and graduation requirements in the Spring of 1996. The two primary features of the new curriculum were the graduation requirement for interdisciplinary and disciplinary study and the move from distribution requirements to 12 “goals” (copied from the 1996-98 catalogue):

Distribution Requirements For Students Matriculating Prior to Fall 1996

One objective of a liberal-arts education is to acquaint students with as many fields of human inquiry as possible. The distribution requirement is designed to foster study in areas students may not explore on their own and to ensure formal exposure to the subject matter of the three main academic divisions. Such exposure not only broadens students' education but also prepares students for disciplinary and interdisciplinary analyses; in addition it gives students a sense of confidence in having successfully met curricular challenges often far from their special interests.

Every student must satisfy the distribution requirement by passing two courses each in the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities, earning a grade of C- or better in at least one course in each division. One of the humanities courses must be from the fine or performing arts (studio art, dance, music, theatre, creative writing) and one of the natural science courses must include laboratory work. Participation in some theatre, dance, musical ensemble, or music lessons, if continued through three terms, may count as credit for the fine arts requirement. One course in each division is to be taken by the end of the first year; the other course in each division must be taken by the end of the second year.

No courses in other parts of the General Curriculum (First-Year Seminars or Bidisciplinary Courses) may count toward distribution requirements.

² Since the initiative was supported by a grant from the Christian Johnson Foundation, these were called “J-Groups.”

***Goal Requirements For the Degree For Students Matriculating
Fall Term 1996 and Later***

- 1) the acquisition of those essential skills required as a foundation for effective communication, specifically: (a) the ability to read and listen critically, (b) the ability to speak and write effectively, (c) the ability to organize the presentation of arguments and points of view.
- 2) the ability to reason quantitatively.
- 3) the ability to organize the process of inquiry: to articulate a question; to identify and access appropriate information; to organize evidence, and to construct a complex written argument.
- 4) an understanding of the nature of scientific inquiry and knowledge.
- 5) critical knowledge of Western cultural and social origins, as expressed (for example) in history, literature, philosophy, social and economic structures, and artistic expression.
- 6) critical knowledge of the multiplicity of world cultures, including: (a) knowledge of the relationships among these cultures and their relation to the West. (b) the individual experience of cross-cultural interaction.
- 7) a foundation for the understanding of gender.
- 8) sufficient knowledge in a disciplinary or interdisciplinary area adequate to support advanced study (includes majors, minors, and fields of concentration).
- 9) the ability to recognize relatedness and the unity and diversity of knowledge and inquiry.
- 10) the experience of creative expression.
- 11) an intellectually grounded foundation for ethical judgment and action.
- 12) the development of cooperative and leadership skills and a sense of personal competency.

The 1998 catalogue reflects a collective wish of the Faculty to reduce 12 goals to its present list of eight. (see current catalogue)

Given the long tradition of interdisciplinary teaching at the Colleges, and the expansion of knowledge beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplinary departments or divisions, the faculty decided that requiring students to assemble a sampling of courses from our three divisions would not necessarily lead to meaningful breadth in a student's education. We resolved instead to specify more precisely what we expect a broadly educated person to know and be able to do. Since the faculty shared the expectation that students take more initiative in guiding their own education, we agreed to hand off to students the task of demonstrating that they had addressed (not to say "met" or "satisfied," since those terms implied a once-and-for-all-completion) the goals of the curriculum.

In the spring of 2002, following two years of exploratory yet inconclusive curricular action, a Subcommittee on the Curriculum worked diligently to bring new curricular proposals before the Faculty with an assurance that "The curriculum decided upon will be

in force for the five year period 2003-04 to 2007-08” (2/27/02). Despite concerns about consistency with regard to certification of the goals, no proposals trumped the current curriculum. The presence or absence of a list of courses as a guide to students’ course selection for goal certification remained a contentious topic.

Changes in Practice Over Time:

Within the first few years of implementing the new curriculum, three changes were made through Faculty Resolutions:

- 1) only courses and not other experiences could be counted to address the goals (April 1997);
- 2) the first two goals would be considered sufficiently addressed once a student had completed a major (October 1999); and
- 3) the goal petition forms were optional and no longer required for certification, and they were replaced by the Baccalaureate Plan in the junior year.

How Do We Certify That Students Have Addressed the Goals?

When students select their courses before registering for classes, they are expected to consider which courses might satisfy which of the goals. Students typically ask for an advisor’s guidance. Advisors rely on both their understanding of the goals and their knowledge of the contents of the course. For the latter, they may consult the course description in the catalogue, or query the course instructor.

The ideal liberal arts experience at HWS comprises all eight of the curricular goals and can and should occur naturally within a student’s four-year education. *A goal is certified by the academic advisor after the student has discussed his or her learning experiences with the advisor and only if progress toward meeting the curricular goal is demonstrated fully within that conversation.*

In addition to catalogue course descriptions and queries of course instructors, two useful sources of guidance are attached following this document. **Appendix B** contains the results of a campus-wide poll that asked faculty to specify the extent to which they believe their course(s) address the eight goals. The poll was conducted in the fall semester of 2007 and two reminders were sent out to departments in the Fall of 2009 if data had not been submitted. COAA finds this information to be helpful, in the main. However, some departments did not respond to the requests for information (either in 07 or 09). And, some statements about goals struck the committee as counter-intuitive. Current practice by the committee is to ask at the time courses are proposed for more informative statements on which goals are addressed and how they are addressed (partially or fully). We hope that in the future more of this information will be available to faculty and students. This data is displayed in six spreadsheets that have been organized with the courses that address goals fully followed by those that address goals partially. Each goal has a separate spreadsheet to help make the data easier to read. **Appendix C** contains a study of the courses students and advisors submitted to the

Registrar for the graduating class of 2007 as having addressed the goals.³ However, COAA cautions advisors that the attached lists should not be considered sufficient either singly or together in deciding whether a course should be taken because of the likelihood that it will address a goal. It is the spirit of the present curriculum that students should consider how their courses will help them address the expectations stated in a goal, and not simply choose courses from a list. **The Appendices are meant to serve as a resource for faculty and students when considering their academic interests and goals, but they are by no means meant to change the current practice.** Many majors and minors have changed dramatically over the past decade due to the expansion of departments/ programs and the introduction of new faculty. This has led to a dramatic increase in new courses across the curriculum, many of which advisors may not be aware of, or how they might be used to address a goal (either partially or fully). We interpret the present curriculum as the expression of the faculty's wish that the student be asked to think beyond course titles to the meanings of the goals and the ways their participation in a course may lead them to address the goals' expectations.

After a student has taken a course, she or he has a conversation with the advisor in which they may make an argument that their work in that course addressed a certain goal. In practice, that conversation has come to have certain expected parameters:

- 1) goals must be addressed by taking credit-bearing courses (formal academic work).
- 2) the first two goals do not require certification, because it is assumed that faculty in every major do what is necessary to help students to read, write, speak, and listen to an adequate level of quality, and will assist the student in getting support as necessary from the CTL and elsewhere;
- 3) that advisors can expect students to want to know before they enroll in a course if it can reasonably be expected to help them address a goal. Advisors need reliable sources of information as to what the student's experience in a course will be;
- 4) students should be required to make a case for having a course or courses address a goal. That means they should be able to speak intelligently about the contents of the course (or courses) and how engaging with that content contributed to their education;
- 5) more specifically, the goals for mathematical reasoning, scientific inquiry, and performing arts require that students reason, inquire, and perform—and not only study other people's reasoning, inquiry, and performance.

From even a cursory reading of the attached two documents—and especially the Mapstone-Brophy document-- it is apparent that an issue of fairness arises, in addition to consistency, when one advisor requires significantly more rigor than another advisor in a student's attempts to address a goal.

Respectfully,

The Committee on Academic Affairs: Christine R. de Denus (Chair), Charlie Temple, Kevin Dunn, Patricia Myers, Dean Baer, Dean Banks, Provost Amott, Donna Davenport (Associate Dean of Faculty), Peter Sarratori, Syed Zaidi (HO student rep), Julia Hoyle (WS student rep)

³ The Committee thanks David Mapstone and Scott Brophy for this information.

Appendix C

The following data, assembled by David Mapstone and Scott Brophy, is the result of a project which sought to be an inventory of courses used by students, and certified by faculty, to address goals. This data reflects the courses submitted by advisors for the graduating class of 2007. The purported purpose of the project was to be able to give departments and programs feedback on which courses within their department were being used to certify goals so that a departmental review of the course content could take place with the goals in mind. Admittedly, the data is probably not 100% accurate, due to faulty records, typos, and so forth.

The data is organized on 13 Excel sheets contained in Appendix C: Goal Certification '07 is the complete list of student records and the courses used to certify each goal; HO or WS Goal 3-8 sheets are a list of courses, by department, that were used to address goals 3-8 for all Hobart students/William Smith students in the cohort. Please note that the 3-8 spread-sheets are not organized by unit record. You should disregard the first two unit record columns and view the sheet as an inventory of courses by department. In other words, there is not a direct relationship between columns 1 & 2 and the rest of the columns. Any course with an asterisk was used in combination with at least one other course to address the goal; any course without an asterisk was used as the sole course to address the goal.

The entire population of the class of 2007 was used instead of a sampling so that people could look objectively at the issue of outliers. Much of the worry amongst faculty and students regarding goal certification centers around the few sensational stories – possibly of the Performing Arts Goal being certified with a chemistry course, or the Scientific Inquiry Goal being certified with a history course. This organization of the data should help people see where the outliers exist.

Dean Mapstone notes that there are not so many outliers, and that outliers and stretches tend to occur when students are majoring in highly organized/scaffold majors where students either do not have a lot of flexibility or tend to be very directed/committed to their discipline and a particular vocation (e.g. biochemistry, comparative literature). Certain departments are very present in certain goals and few departments are consistently present in more than a few goals. Finally, students are much more likely to use combinations of courses for goals 6 & 7 with the range of departments represented being much broader for those two goals.