

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

September 8, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Academic Colleagues
FROM: Provost Kim A. Wilcox
RE: Undergraduate Education

The Deans Council worked throughout the summer on issues of budget, and their conversations included topics of undergraduate curriculum and the university requirements for general education. Of course, there has been a great deal of discussion on these issues as a result of the work of the University Council for Liberal Learning and Academic Governance on the Liberal Learning Outcomes. I have appreciated their work, along with the observations and suggestions that came out of this summer's discussions. In summary, they discussed:

1. Relative weighting of primary components of the undergraduate program
2. Appropriate placement of these components within the typical four-year experience
3. Optimal general education course compositions
4. Appropriate role and placement of experiential components within the curriculum

Those conversations have prompted me to make the following requests for further deliberation or action:

On components of the undergraduate program: I concur with your concern about maintaining a balance between required credits in the major, credits designated for Integrative Studies and University requirements, and college requirements. I continue to maintain, however, that we can do more to expand the flexibility of our programs in ways that both advantage students and student choice, and our units. I am requesting that **each department review college and program requirements** to determine ways to simplify and/or minimize instructional load, while maintaining the quality and strengths of the program. It would also be useful for departments to look at the ways in which experiential learning and opportunities to apply learning are distributed across the curriculum. An immediate review of programs should allow for **spring 2010** submission of change requests (where appropriate) to academic governance for review.

On general education: I will request that the **University Council for Liberal Learning review ways to enhance our model of general education**, recognizing that, at the core, the concept of integrative studies must be maintained. Over the past few



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years, our efforts to integrate general education have received national attention. I am not interested in regressing to a traditional distribution model, but on building on what we have learned about Integrative Studies and its contribution to our liberal learning outcomes.

We also discussed how the application of the Advanced Placement waiver in fulfillment of Integrative Studies requirements is being handled inconsistently, and that there are barriers to transfer students in meeting the Integrative Studies requirements. By way of this memorandum, I am charging **Dean Douglas Estry, with appropriate consultation, to propose a set of revised guidelines which would increase the flexibility for bringing in advanced placement or transfer credit to count toward the Integrative Studies requirement.**

On sophomore admission to majors: Finally, I support the recommendation that students be allowed to matriculate to majors (from major preferences) when they reach sophomore, rather than junior, standing. This will shift some demands to colleges, and require better articulation between centralized and college-level services. At the same time, I am concerned about making sure that advising, academic services, and our understanding of policies are in alignment. I will want to see some assurance that colleges and student support services are prepared to mutually assume this responsibility, but I believe it will advantage students to connect sooner to their colleges.

By way of this memorandum, I am asking **Dean Douglas Estry to initiate conversations with the University Committee on Academic Policy on sophomore admission to majors.**

Again, I very much appreciate the attention given to these issues, and look forward to the policy changes which are likely to result from additional deliberation. Please be clear that this is in no way a call for a comprehensive review of our general education requirement, but a request for immediate attention to means by which we can increase flexibility within our current model.

c: University Community