

Faculty Liberal Studies Survey

Qualitative results – major themes

Faculty members shared their opinions on the current liberal studies (LS) program as well as the future of general education at Western Carolina University.

The current LS program

Students

Faculty members appreciate students' "who want to learn" and enjoy helping students with the first year college transition. They enjoy "opening students' eyes" to their respective disciplines as well as working with students from a variety of majors. However, faculty members also struggle with the skill and knowledge base that students come to WCU with (e.g., writing, higher order thinking). Many students need "remediating skills that [they] should already have when they enter my classes," and others have "prejudice against LS courses."

Program structure

Some faculty members believe that the LS program goals and curriculum are appropriate while others believe that the overall program purpose needs more clarity (i.e., "I'd like to see a clearer purpose articulated, and that students, faculty, staff, and administration all know of this purpose and recognize its benefit to our students. It should have clear connections with QEP goals and assessment."). The focus on interdisciplinary, integrative, concept-based teaching is a plus, and the faculty appreciates the writing-intensive nature of the program as well as the relatively small class sizes. However, others worry about the increasing class sizes at WCU as well as a lack of rigor in the courses ("courses are too easy"). Some faculty members are likewise concerned about how the courses are distributed across programs (e.g., "Too many history courses and sections..." and "PAR has too many courses in liberal studies..."), and they worry about the impact of this "turfiness" ("My guess would be turf warfare. Everyone wants his or her disciplines covered...").

In general, faculty members are split on two major fronts regarding the LS program:

- Too restrictive ("More flexibility in how to meet the objectives") vs. too flexible ("... Too many choices, too much variation within a given category (e.g., P1).")
- Focus on pre-career education vs. broader LS objectives ("Preservation of a broad liberal studies base while the institutional mission and the QEP steer us more toward career training.")

Support for LS program faculty

Many faculty members are comfortable with the current levels of LS support ("I have the resources I need"). However, others are hoping to increase professional development for LS faculty (e.g., differentiated instruction, higher order thinking skills, covering objectives). They also look for increased

support for using technological resources (“We have wonderful technological support, but they are overwhelmed and most of us teaching LS are NOT technologically savvy – an increase in tech building of courses/support would be extremely helpful.”). In addition to these supports, faculty hope for an increase in peer support (“There is not a widespread buy-in to the program from faculty”) as well as access to LS course modules and/or models to help improve their teaching (“previously prepared course modules that have been effective for others in the past”).

University/institutional support for LS

Increasing time for LS development and an increase in funding/resources (“funding for library materials, funding for outside speakers, funding for field trips”) stand at the forefront of current weaknesses in terms of institutional support. In addition, faculty request more/better marketing (“A way to promote my course directly to students who might excel”) of the LS program and an increase in general LS faculty support (“Clear leadership and buy-in from all on campus.”).

The future of general education at WCU

While many faculty members felt that no changes are needed to the liberal studies program (“Continue to focus on the whole student – intellectual, physical, emotional.”), others believe that any future general education program needs program clarification and work on the teaching and content.

Program clarification

Some faculty members agreed that clarification is needed for LS program assessment (“...must build assessment in on the front end” and “It should have clear connections with... assessment”) as well as connection to the QEP (“... integrated into the QEP”). Still other faculty members believe that including different tracks for Honors vs. non-Honors students is inconsistent with the LS philosophy (“I have heard that Honors College students may be given different requirements, and I don’t agree with that. Gen Ed is Gen Ed, and it should be consistent across the board.”). Others disagree where the future of general education should move at WCU, particularly in regards to:

- Program objectives – skills and knowledge (“Our student profile is changing, we are not a liberal arts univ...” and “...memorization and knowing facts about the subject area studied”) vs. a broad, liberal studies perspective (“stick to a ‘liberal’ education format” and “WCU without a broad general education program would be a far weaker institution”)
- Curriculum – simplify (“please simplify the curriculum...”) vs. broaden (“I would love to see more LS course options within majors”)
- Hours required – retain current requirements (“keep it at 30 hours”) vs. decrease hours (“The idea that there is some sort of inherent danger in less than 42 hours of liberal studies has got to be abandoned” and “Less is more!”)

Teaching and content

Faculty members believe that future general education needs to include a focus on teaching (“need to keep courses updated with current pedagogical and global trends”) across disciplines (“It would be nice to see a requirement for interdisciplinary/collaborative work”). In addition, a future curriculum should include focus on:

- More writing, including ‘research’ or ‘technical’ writing (“Students should be required to do more analytical research writing in all of their classes.”)
- More science/math (“...mathematics and a physical science must be included”)
- A foreign language requirement (“I’d require 2-3 years of MFL for every student we graduate”).