

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Faculty Oversight Committee for University Studies (FOCUS)  
Alan Wood, Steve Collins, Gray Kochar-Lindgren, Andrea Kovalesky, Pete Nye, Arnie Berger, Kathleen Martin, Becky Rosenberg (ex officio), and Sarah Leadley (ex officio)

FROM: G. Thomas Bellamy  
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

DATE: November 17, 2005

SUBJECT: Charge to the Founding Members of the FOCUS

As you know, the campus-wide discussions about the development of lower division programs has progressed through several faculty forums, task forces, planning committees, and discussions within academic programs. The entire campus can be very proud of the resulting concurrence between the GFO and Academic Council as they reviewed and synthesized the results of these various groups and recommended:

- Development of the Center for University Studies and Programs (CUSP) to administer the freshman (pre-major) programs,
- A Faculty Oversight Committee for University Studies (FOCUS) to lead the CUSP,
- An approach to evaluation of student learning in CUSP, and
- An allocation of credits to the Discovery Core and other courses.

Reaching these agreements through such a participatory and collegial process is an enormous accomplishment!

These agreements and the formal approval of the CUSP Charter by the Chancellor set the stage for the next critical phase of our work—development by the FOCUS of the specific courses and processes for next fall as we begin serving freshmen. The purpose of this memorandum is to outline the work to be accomplished over the next few months by the FOCUS and to describe criteria that should guide that work. These criteria reflect the efforts of the Academic Council, GFO Executive Council, and the VCAA to synthesize the recommendations from the many planning groups and the results of the faculty sessions last spring and this fall.

According to the CUSP charter, initial members of the FOCUS will be appointed by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs with consultation from the Academic Council and the Executive Council of the General Faculty Organization. Thank you for agreeing to serve on this committee. Your work will have a long-lasting impact on the nature of the UW Bothell campus.

I am appointing the FOCUS now in order to allow you to take the official lead in planning for curriculum and course development, student learning evaluation, and instructional planning for the freshmen who will enter next fall.

In order to complete the many pending tasks on time, it will be necessary for the FOCUS to begin work before a CUSP Coordinator is appointed. Recruitment for the CUSP Coordinator will commence immediately, and I expect to make the appointment by January 1, 2006. The Coordinator will support the work of the FOCUS associated with curriculum development, and will begin work on course scheduling, CUSP staffing, and finalizing agreements with academic programs for faculty to teach in the University Studies program.

The campus has provided considerable guidance for development of the University Studies program, but it has also expressed confidence in the faculty members directly involved in the program to make more detailed decisions about the curriculum and program. Consequently, the initial FOCUS members—who will also serve among the program's faculty during the initial year—will have special responsibilities for designing and teaching courses and developing procedures for student advising and evaluation of student learning. The primary tasks as the FOCUS begins its work are to:

1. ***Formalize a structure for evaluating student learning across the University Studies program.*** The planning documents to date contain considerable discussion of using a portfolio of course products as a means of assessing overall student learning in the University Studies program. The documents also contain initial work on rubrics for assessing this work. Finally, the planning documents proposed a two-credit course to assist students in finalizing such a portfolio and giving faculty course teaching credit for its evaluation.

The immediate task for the FOCUS is to consolidate these pieces into a workable plan. While the FOCUS should exercise its own academic judgment in constructing such a plan, there has been much discussion that should provide general guidance for the effort. Two criteria emerge from these discussions: (a) The evaluation of student learning should be a comprehensive assessment of the primary learning results we want students to achieve during the first few quarters (typically, the freshman year) of their UW Bothell experience. (b) While comprehensive, the assessment should also be as simple as possible, so that it is sustainable over time.

Attachment A outlines one approach to achieving these two criteria for consideration by the FOCUS. Attending to the development of this plan early in the curriculum and course planning process will ensure that courses and course assignments can be designed with these evaluations in mind from the beginning. It will also provide a framework that enhances coordination between University Studies courses and those offered by other academic programs. For this reason, the Academic Council and GFO Executive Council request a tentative timeline of January 1, 2006, for completion of this plan.

NOTE: Completion of at 45 credit hours, completion of the 20 credits associated with the Discovery Core (as outlined below), and passing the portfolio assessment of student learning are expected to serve as prerequisites to admission to majors.

**2. *Develop syllabi for the Discovery Core, gain approval from the Curriculum Committees, and arrange for instruction during the first year.*** Much of our planning discussions and faculty feedback have focused on the scope of the Discovery Core. Differences in views about the core are natural, given the many different goals that have been presented for these courses: to provide a distinctive introduction to UW Bothell's interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning; to ensure that all freshmen develop skills for college success; to provide a learning context that supports development of writing and quantitative skills; to create a learning community that supports student development and retention; to provide a scheduling mechanism that allows students to be on campus at common times and connect with each other.

Other views of the Discovery Core reflect various concerns about the limits on what can feasibly sustain the core over time. It needs: (a) both sufficient continuity so that course development is not a significant burden each year and sufficient flexibility so that responsible faculty can personalize the course; (b) both enough time (credit hours) to be a significant interdisciplinary learning and community-building experience and constrained enough that students have room for electives and prerequisites and do not have their entire grade determined by a single class.

Naturally, no single framework fully addresses all these goals and constraints. While we fully expect the structure to evolve as we gain experience, we believe that the following framework provides a workable balance among the many recommendations. We ask that the FOCUS develop its plans for the Discovery Core to reflect the following:

- a. All students who enter as freshmen would be required to take the following elements of a 20-credit Discovery Core:
  - One ten -credit Discovery Core in the Fall Quarter which includes intensive support for student writing and other skill-building, including information and technology literacy, that the FOCUS believes is critical for entering students.
  - One five-credit Discovery Core in the Winter quarter.
  - One two-credit portfolio reflection and evaluation course which could either provide interim feedback or final approval of the portfolio during the Spring quarter.
  - One three-credit freshman interest group in the Spring Quarter. These courses could include options such as participation in undergraduate research, service learning/community engagement, and on-campus freshman interest groups.

While our primary focus should be on freshmen who enter in the fall, the FOCUS and the CUSP Coordinator will naturally need to develop plans for sequencing these courses that also accommodate students with less traditional schedules.

b. All new students entering as sophomores would be required to take one five-credit Discovery Core course.

c. The Discovery Core classes should be planned so that students can receive credit for at least one course in two of the three areas of knowledge (VLPA, I&S, NW) in the UW distribution requirements.

d. Each Discovery Core will be problem-focused and designed to provide both disciplinary and cross-disciplinary perspectives on the selected problem. At least two disciplinary perspectives will be included in each core. This may be accomplished by a single faculty member, a faculty member who relies on some guest lectures, paired classes that deal with the same problem area and exchange resources, team-taught courses, or other arrangements.

e. For financial reasons, each group of 20-25 students in a 5-credit Discovery Core class will be sufficient to give one course credit to one faculty member. (So, if a course is team-taught by two faculty members, it would need to serve 40-50 students in order for each faculty member to get credit for teaching one course. Similarly, a ten-credit core course serving 40-50 students would provide four faculty members with credit for one course or two faculty members credit for two courses.)

f. Depending on the framework for assessing student learning that is adopted by the FOCUS, each Discovery Core should include one major student assignment that allows the student to demonstrate knowledge and skills to be assessed in the program portfolio.

g. A common outline and common learning goals should be developed that apply to all Discovery Core classes, regardless of the particular problem addressed. This suggests a “syllabus template” for 5- and 10-credit cores that can be adapted to whatever problem area is selected for a particular core. It should also be possible for faculty from all parts of the campus to propose Discovery Core courses, so some process of soliciting proposals should be developed once the “template” is finalized.

3. ***Develop syllabi for additional University Studies courses to be taught in AY 2006-2007.*** The draft charter gives the CUSP responsibility for developing and offering most 100-level courses and 200-level courses that are required by more than one academic program. The tasks for this year are to develop a list of these courses, develop priorities (with the Academic Council) for which courses should be taught in the first year, determine which ones need to correspond closely to UWS courses (so that we can serve their students and ours can transfer credits easily),

develop syllabi, and have these reviewed by disciplinary faculty and by the Curriculum Committee.

*Priorities for courses to be offered.* While the design of the Discovery Core is intended to support the development of learning communities and to foster coherence and retention, remaining courses in the CUSP program should be planned and scheduled to accommodate the following priorities:

Priority 1: Students entering as freshmen should be able to take all the prerequisites for our current majors and concentrations at UW Bothell.

Priority 2. The course schedule should contain a sufficient number of traditional lower division courses at the freshman level to enable students to transfer to other institutions.

Priority 3. When possible, courses should be included that provide prerequisites and recruitment opportunities for new majors and concentrations that have been formally adopted as program development goals by programs or other campus faculty groups.

*Scheduling.* In general, the curriculum structure and schedule should allow students to take 15-18 credit hours each quarter if they choose. It should also allow participation of students who are able to take only one course each quarter after the initial ten-credit discovery core.

**4. Provide an Interim Report to the Faculty.** In January 2006, the FOCUS should provide a report to the faculty on the design of the student learning assessment, Discovery Core, and other courses that are under development, in order to solicit feedback on the content and approach of the planning effort.

NOTE: An Academic Council Support Committee for University Studies has been appointed and charged with supporting the FOCUS by providing initial administrative plans and oversight for the CUSP program. While the CUSP Coordinator will assume responsibility for these tasks as soon as she or he is appointed, this Committee will ensure that we make timely decisions on matters related to course scheduling, budget development, staff recruitment, office set up, and so on. This group includes JoLynn Edwards, Chair, Chuck Jackels, and Susan Franzosa.

## DRAFT Evaluation Framework for the End of the Freshman Year

A. Evaluation based on a portfolio of about five products from classes (2 of these from discovery cores)

B. Evaluation with a rubric with criteria distinguishing *emerging*, *satisfactory* (for end of freshman year), and *advanced* (what we would want of our graduates?) performance in the areas like the following:

- Disciplinary Awareness
- Interdisciplinary Inquiry
- Participation/engagement (service learning?)
- Writing
- Quantitative skills
- Information and technology literacy
- Meta-cognitive self-reflection on learning

C. Assignments from each discovery core and some other CUSP courses would allow students to demonstrate proficiency in *some* of these areas. This would mean that an important aspect of developing each course would be the design of an assignment (or cumulative series of assignments) that allowed the student to demonstrate proficiency in the above areas. The student would be responsible for ensuring that the collection of products met expectations in all areas.

D. All students would be required to sign up for a two-credit portfolio reflection and evaluation course. The faculty member responsible for this course would be responsible for providing guidance on the development of the reflection statement and assessing the overall portfolio using the rubric for each of the above areas.

E. Passing the portfolio examination could be required (a) to get sophomore status; (b) before entry into the major, (c) as a graduation requirement; or (d) in some other way.