The new General Education Program at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, which we now refer to as the University Studies Program or (USP), is the result of years of dedicated work by faculty committed to both increasing student retention and enhancing the quality of student learning. As we implement and carefully assess this highly intentional program of general education, we expect to demonstrate that more students will be better prepared to address the challenges they will encounter in their communities, our state, this nation, and across the world. Information about the program can be found at the following link. http://www.uwosh.edu/usp.

Like all successful curricular developments, this program is the product of faculty-facilitated reform efforts. After the adoption of the AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes in May of 2008, faculty members formed work groups to articulate more detailed descriptions of the essential learning outcomes and to examine general education models. As they considered the options, faculty members investigated general education research; the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U); successful national models at similar institutions; and data-supported, high-impact teaching and learning practices. Faculty teams attended several GE and Assessment Institutes sponsored by AAC&U, as well as several UW System conferences focusing on liberal education, GE and assessment practices, transfer issues, and HIPS. As a result of the faculty members’ collaborative work over a four-year period, the UW Oshkosh University Studies
Program embodies exemplary local and national thinking on general education. Approved by the Faculty Senate in spring 2012, the University Studies Program began in fall 2013.

At the core of this more efficient program of general education is a sequence of courses called the “Quest.” In these courses, students are challenged to ask big questions in small learning communities. The initial Quest courses are supported by peer mentors and taught by instructors specifically trained to address the learning needs of first-year students. In the second semester of the Quest, students encounter a common focus on ethical reasoning. In the third semester, students take Quest III, a discipline based course that includes a significant community engagement experience and work with a community partner and supported by alumni mentors.

The common areas of inquiry guiding the Quest emanate from the UW Oshkosh Essential Learning Outcomes, reinforcing established campus priorities with broad questions related to sustainability, intercultural knowledge and civic engagement. Students address these themes with “Signature Questions” posed in diverse disciplines. All UW Oshkosh students engage in these high-impact learning experiences in the foundational years of their academic careers.

As they participate in the Quest, students will also be taking “Explore” courses designed to provide a broad understanding of the human experience in the areas of Nature, Society and Culture. At the end of the University Studies Program Quest course sequence, students take the “Connect” course. In this course, students are given opportunities to integrate knowledge from their Quest and Explore experiences in an advanced writing course that synthesizes all three Signature Question themes. In this course students produce narratives where they are expected to draw upon what they learned in their general education coursework. Lastly, all students are required to complete a capstone experience in their majors focusing on the integration, synthesis and application of knowledge from the University
Studies Program and the major. The signature learning experiences may vary in format including internships, clinical experiences, student teaching, research projects and performances and exhibitions. Students will also have the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency in the essential learning outcomes through the use of an ePortfolio.

The sustainability of the curriculum reform is reinforced by the extensive faculty development offerings that assist faculty members to design courses, signature assessments, and learning experiences aligned to the learning outcomes and principles of the USP. The USP Council and the USP Faculty Senate Committee provide insight into program evaluation, modifications, and general oversight. The University Assessment Committee conducts regular assessment of student learning for decision-making.

Please describe how this specific change effort connected directly with, or was inspired by any of the major initiatives of the LEAP Campaign—assessment, learning outcomes, high impact practices and general education reform.

The design of the University Studies Program reflects the influence and integration of many of the proficiency initiatives and design components of the LEAP Challenge. Through significant engagement with AAC&U programs and staff at national, state and institution level professional development programs, the faculty members at UW Oshkosh integrated best practices in curriculum reform designs, instructional pedagogies and assessment practices. First, each student that completes the University Studies Program will have the opportunity to experience at least six High Impact Practices including first year experience discipline based courses, a learning community, peer mentors, community based learning experiences, capstones and linked courses. Second, the AAC&U essential learning outcomes are the foundation for the UW Oshkosh Essential Learning Outcomes. Faculty work groups provided institutional descriptions for each ELO. Third, assessment practices reflected the integration of the VALUE rubrics and the creation of proficiency based rubrics with shared understandings.
Please articulate what difference this work made or is making on student learning and success.

The University Assessment Committee created a comprehensive assessment plan to measure the effectiveness of the University Studies Program and to monitor the student success pathways of all students at the University. The plan consists of direct and indirect measures and provides evidence for curricular decision-making based on student achievement of the university learning outcomes as well as learning outcomes at the program level. Information about the assessment plan can be found at this link: http://www.uwosh.edu/provost/accountability/Assessment/uw-oshkosh-assessment. Assessment data are posted on the Office of Institutional Research website at: http://www.uwosh.edu/oir/usp.

Within the first years of implementation of the USP, several student success indicators demonstrate a positive trends in terms of higher first year GPA across all demographics, lower numbers of dropped courses, decreases in the DFW rates of gateway courses, and increased retention. A review of undergraduate retention rates shows an increase in retention by almost 3% after the first year of implementation of the USP and sustained rates. Additionally, the number of students who are contacting and visiting the Center for Academic Resources has doubled since the implementation of the USP. Regular reporting and sharing of assessment and student success data are key processes for planning professional development and student support services across campuses.

The University Studies Program is an excellent example of how faculty, staff, students, and the community reflect the University’s strategic academic priorities related to student success, academic excellence, community engagement and fostering a supportive learning environment.

Supporting Materials

- University Studies Program Infographic
- Quest Talks