

Learning Perspectives: Inquiry Across the Disciplines Supplemental Reading

What do the data say about our current Learning Perspective requirement?

Our institutional data from the 2013 Senior Survey under the heading ‘Curriculum outside major’ indicate that we are helping students understand the purpose of LPs (see Table 1 below). It is clear that students appreciate different disciplines as indicated by the second item.

Curriculum outside major

Each of the questions below were answered on one of the following 5 point scales.

*1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

**1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Very Often

	Number	Mean	St. Dev.
The skills I learned in my general education courses helped me succeed in my major courses.*	495	3.55	1.012
The classes I took outside my major(s) helped me appreciate the way that different disciplines make sense of the world.*	497	4.00	0.83
My classes outside my major(s) challenged me to produce my best academic work.*	496	3.57	0.944
The courses I needed to take were available in the order in which I needed to take them.*	496	3.42	1.029
In your non-major courses, about how often were you asked to include different perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments?***	498	3.50	0.868
About how often did you discuss ideas from your non-major courses with faculty members outside of class?***	498	2.88	0.901
In your non-major courses, about how often were you asked to put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions?***	498	3.25	0.815

Table 1: Curriculum outside major survey results from Senior Survey 2013 [1].

However, outside of this one response, the data provides evidence that we can do better. Students do not report a strong sense that core curriculum courses help them in their majors (see first item), nor do they report that integration of different LP content really occurs (see items #5 and #7).

The data do not directly assess the objectives articulated for LPs in the AGES 2.0 proposal, and we would be more convinced by a direct assessment of student skills instead of self-reported gains. We considered undertaking a direct assessment of these student learning objectives, but Mark Salisbury, the Assistant Dean for Institutional Research and Assessment, warned us that this might be an exercise in futility. His reasons that LPs do not currently emphasize inquiry, nor do we facilitate inter-course connections, so we would likely not find evidence of systematic connections. We have every reason to believe that these courses are high quality experiences on their own, but we do not see the structural support for connections between them.

What is the rationale for merging PN and the I Suffix requirements?

There are currently only a few courses with a PN designation but no I Suffix designation. Some of these courses include, or can be slightly redesigned to include, scientific inquiry. For example, Astronomy, which uses observations of the stars to ask and answer questions about the universe but does not have a "wet lab". We would like such courses to retain their PN.

There are also a few courses on campus with an I Suffix but not a PN, including upper-division courses for majors in Music, Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology. Since the students who take these courses are also required to take a PN course, we do not anticipate any Gen Ed losses from removing the I Suffix.

The existing I Suffix requirement largely hinges on the inclusion of "lab work". The revised PN definition, which focuses on a Signature Question, allows us to broaden "lab work" slightly to include other forms of data collection and analysis. We hope that Senior Inquiry experiences on campus will explicitly build in an additional round of inquiry focused on the investigation of student generated questions in the majors.

Finally, we suggest that AP credit NOT carry with it a PN designation in much the same way that AP History carries credits but not a PP.