

The Five Questions (plus one) for the October 3rd Faculty Meeting

September 26, 2019

We will be voting on a series of questions related to GE revision at the Faculty Meeting on October 3. In this packet, you will find the five questions in their final form, plus an additional question, Question #3.5, that was added in response to feedback from the faculty.

The GE Task Force added this question to further clarify the wishes of the faculty. The original version of the five questions asked whether or not we should develop “Ethics in the Major” but did not specifically ask about the creation of a specific GE requirement. Accordingly, the version of question #3 presented for the September 19 faculty meeting asked about “Ethics in the Major” vs. Ethics as a general education (Core) requirement. The current version of questions #3 and #3.5 provide more complete information.

A revised description of “Ethics in the Major” appears on pages 5-7. The description of “Writing in the Major” is unchanged aside from the footnote. The description of First Year Experience has been updated to indicate that the two courses can be taken in either order. The description of the Portfolio is unchanged from the version that was circulated in August.

Table of Contents

The Five Questions for the October 3rd Faculty Meeting	
Question #1. An Experiential Requirement for Natural Science in the OLE Core	Error!
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Question #2. Linking First-Year Experience Courses	1
Question #3. Ethics in the Major	2
Question #4. Writing in the Major	2
Question #5. Portfolio	3
The First-Year Experience	3
Writing in the Major & Ethics in the Major	5
Writing in the Major	5
Ethics in the Major	6
Portfolio Requirement	8

Question #1. An Experiential Requirement for Natural Science in the OLE Core

Should the natural science requirement (name to be determined) require an experiential component?

Option A: Yes, it should require that students participate in an experiential component

Option B: No, it should not require that students participate in an experiential component

Note for the Faculty: Back in late August, this question was presented to the faculty with “a lab” in place of “an experiential component.” Faculty in the Natural Sciences requested that we replace “lab” with “experiential component,” as the latter suggests a broader range of modes of inquiry. Examples of how students might fulfill the experiential component could include the following:

- A. “Wet” lab investigation
- B. Analyzing existing data in pursuit of a question/answer
- C. Observing the natural world
- D. Discipline-specific engagement with the scientific process

Question #2. Linking First-Year Experience Courses

The March 2019 draft of the OLE Core proposed that all students complete a linked, two-course sequence during their first year at St. Olaf, with one semester described as a “First-Year Seminar” and the other as “Writing and Rhetoric.” (Students in first-year Conversation Programs would receive credit for “First-year Seminar” and “Writing and Rhetoric” in fall and spring semester of year one.)

Should students be allowed to choose either linked or unlinked versions of “First-Year Seminar” and “Writing and Rhetoric”? (See pages 3-4)

Option A: Yes, students should be allowed to choose either linked or unlinked versions of “First-Year Seminar” and “Writing and Rhetoric”

Option B: No, students should only be allowed to choose linked versions of “First-Year Seminar” and “Writing and Rhetoric,” with the exception of students who fail to pass one of the above classes and those who receive pre-college credit for “Writing and Rhetoric.”

Question #3. Ethics in the Major vs. Ethics as a GE Requirement

Should the GE Task Force propose “Ethics in the Major” (see pages 6-8 of this document) or a revised ethics requirement that is part of the core curriculum?

Option A: The GE Task Force should propose “Ethics in the Major”.

Option B: The GE Task Force should propose a revised ethics requirement that is part of the core curriculum (an ethics GE requirement).

Question #3.5. Support for Ethics Preference in #3

Should the GE Task Force propose the version of an ethics requirement (Ethics in the Major or a revised ethics GE requirement) favored in the previous vote?

Option A: The GE Task Force should propose an ethics requirement as determined by the previous vote.

Option B: The GE Task Force should not propose any version of an ethics requirement.

Question #4. Writing in the Major

Should the GE Task Force propose the development of “Writing in the Major” as outlined (see page 5 of this document)?

Option A: Yes, the GE Task Force should propose “Writing in the Major” as part of the OLE Core.

Option B: No, the GE Task Force should not propose “Writing in the Major” as part of the OLE Core.

Question #5. Portfolio

Should all students be required to complete a portfolio as outlined (see pages 8-9 of this document)?

Option A: Yes, students should be required to complete a portfolio

Option B: No, students should not be required to complete a portfolio

The First-Year Experience

Two courses taken during the first year. One course, the First-Year Seminar, emphasizes reading, critical thinking, conversation, and academic habits for the liberal arts. The other course, "Writing and Rhetoric," introduces and engages students in academic and public discourse (audience, purpose, genre, context) related to a particular topic. Both courses require that students engage with the OLE Questions. The two courses can be taken in either order.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

First-Year Seminar:

Students will demonstrate the ability to

- Respond with explicit reasoning to OLE question 1, *In what ways can I understand the world and my role in it?*
- Explain the concept of academic conversation and recognize different ways of learning and making knowledge.
- Learn and practice foundational academic habits for the liberal arts:
 - Use critical reading and annotation to show how texts communicate to particular audiences for particular purposes
 - Write to learn, to reflect, to respond to texts, and to understand one's own prior knowledge.
 - Ask questions, gather information from multiple sources of print and digital information, collaborate, and determine the relevance and credibility of their sources.
 - Prepare for and participate in productive and respectful classroom discussion

Writing and Rhetoric:

Students will demonstrate the ability to

- Explain how writers and speakers, including class peers, situate themselves in relation to course topics.
- Develop and express ideas through the following critical activities:
 - evaluate claims and evidence in a variety of texts.
 - ask research questions, identify, locate, and evaluate sources, and manage research-driven projects.
 - synthesize information from a variety of sources to express understanding of course-related ideas.
- Evaluate and use appropriate technologies for different purposes and audiences.
- Engage in writing as a systematic, interactive process, using flexible strategies for generating drafts, responding to feedback, revising, editing, and proofreading.

Course Guidelines with Comments:

The First Year Experience courses must explore the open, linked, and enduring questions--OLE questions--through a wide variety of topics. The FYE can take the form of a conversation program such as "Great Con," a linked first-year course sequence, or, potentially (depending on the outcome of the faculty vote on Question #2), in standalone seminars.

As part of students' First Year Seminar and Writing and Rhetoric courses, students will attend at minimum three "St. Olaf Orientation to Academics and Resources" (SOAR) workshops on topics such as wellness and belonging, vocation and career, study strategies and college resources. The purpose of these workshops is to increase and equalize students' knowledge of college resources and expectations, including the multiple opportunities for deeper learning available. Students will engage with trained staff and faculty members in discussion of how they might begin to answer the OLE Questions.

FAQ:

Q1: *How will the FYE work with the conversation programs?*

A1: The first course in the conversation program will satisfy the First Year Seminar and the second semester course will satisfy the Writing and Rhetoric requirement.

Q2: *Will all First Year Seminar and Writing and Rhetoric courses be linked?*

A2: This will depend on the outcome of the faculty vote on Question #2.

Q3: *Are there specific themes or topics to which the First Year Seminar and Writing and Rhetoric courses must adhere?*

A3: No. As long as the course addresses the Ole Questions and teaches the foundational academic habits of the liberal arts and introduces and engages students in academic and public discourse (audience, purpose, genre, context), any topic may be used. For example, a theme might be a "Grand Challenge" or another topic of broad relevance.

Q4: *How will the required SOAR workshops work?*

A4: Students will be required to "swipe" their ID when they attend a qualifying workshop. Faculty will be provided with a list of students who did or did not satisfy this requirement of the course.

Q5: *What about the Grand Challenges proposal?*

A5: The Grand Challenges proposal outlines an intriguing model with, among other things, its focus on problem-based learning, community building, and civic engagement; however, carrying it off successfully will require further development of the general model and considerable work on the part of faculty and staff. The GE Task Force recommends piloting this proposal within one or more of the three options (conversation programs, linked-course sequences, and/or stand alone courses) available to incoming first-year students. It can always be expanded from that point.

Writing in the Major & Ethics in the Major

On several occasions over the past few years, the St. Olaf faculty has affirmed the idea that our new general education curriculum should be smaller than our current general education curriculum. One consequence of a smaller GE is that it seems worthwhile to consider whether elements of a student's education that had previously been addressed in the general education curriculum might instead be addressed within a student's major. The Task Force also sees value in bringing the study of these subjects into closer alignment with a student's major. This helps explain why the GE Task Force has proposed "Writing in the Major" and "Ethics in the Major."

Writing in the Major

Individual departments and programs will be responsible for reviewing the structure of their major and completing an application that explains how their students will achieve an ability to write within their major. As a starting point, departments or programs might consider the following set of models:

Model #1: Students are required to take a 300-level seminar that focuses on writing in the major in the major department or program.

Model #2: Students choose a 300-level writing intensive seminar from a pre-approved list. This list of courses might include courses within the major department (or program) as well as those taught within other departments or programs. Students might also have the option to petition the major department/program for approval of a course that is not on the list. Model #2 might be especially practical for interdisciplinary programs and small departments.

Model #3: The distributed approach: In this model, a department or program builds writing in the major into two (or more) courses required for the major with particular units, modules, and/or assignments. A minimum of 50% of the content involved in justifying the fulfillment of writing in the major must occur at the 300-level.¹ This is because Writing in the Major is envisioned as the final component of a three-part sequence ("Writing and Rhetoric," "Writing in Context," and "Writing in the Major").

¹ It is possible that the minimum percentage of material at the 300-level will be reduced below 50%. Some faculty have suggested that 25% or 33% might be more appropriate.

Ethics in the Major

Note: The faculty have had more questions about “Ethics in the Major” than “Writing in the Major,” perhaps in part because the teaching of ethics has been less widely distributed across the curriculum than the teaching of writing. Although the structure of the two requirements and the plans for implementation are quite similar, the GE Task Force has revised the description of “Ethics in the Major” so that it includes more detail about the various models that departments and programs are being invited to consider.

Under “Ethics in the Major,” the Curriculum Committee and the Registrar’s Office will maintain a list of courses that satisfy the ethics requirement, and all students will be expected to fulfill the ethics requirement with one or more of the courses on this list, except in the case of transfer credit. As with other requirements, the Curriculum Committee will be responsible for reviewing course proposals related to ethics. Faculty will be able to request that a new course be allowed to fulfill this requirement (as part of a new course proposal); faculty will also be able to request that an existing course (with modifications) be allowed to fulfill this requirement (as part of a proposal to modify a course). All such requests will be reviewed by the Curriculum Committee. Over time, the list of ethics courses will grow as new courses and course modifications are approved; it will contract as existing courses go dormant.

During the implementation phase for the new general education curriculum, the Curriculum Committee will review courses that presently carry the “Ethics and Normative Perspectives” (EIN) requirement and determine whether they should be placed on the list of approved ethics courses. Because the new ethics requirement is intended to be more flexible than the current EIN, it seems reasonable to assume that all courses that presently carry the EIN will be approved for the list.

Departments and programs will be responsible for reviewing their major(s) and crafting a proposal that outlines how their students will complete this requirement. Each proposal will also include a rationale explaining the logic behind the plan. These proposals will be reviewed by the Curriculum Committee in keeping with the CC’s role in reviewing changes to major requirements.

Departments and programs will be asked to consider the following scenarios:

- A. Some departments and programs already require that **all** of their majors complete a specific course or one of several courses that currently carries EIN. As described above, these courses are likely to be approved for the new ethics requirement. Assuming that these courses are approved for the ethics list, these departments and programs would not need to make any adjustments unless they would like to do so.
- B. Some departments and programs that do not have a requirement that fits scenario A might decide to require such a course for all majors. These departments and programs would have several options: 1) they could require all of their majors to complete a specific course or one of several courses that currently carries EIN that had previously been optional; 2) they could transform one or more already required courses (that do not carry EIN) into

courses that meet the ethics requirement; 3) they could develop one or more entirely new courses that meet the ethics requirement; or 4) they could opt for a combination of the above. If a department or program decides to take any of these approaches, they would be asked to provide a rationale to the Curriculum Committee describing the reasons for their plan.

- C. At present, some departments and programs give students the option of taking a course that fulfills a major requirement and also carries EIN. Some of their students fulfill EIN in this fashion and some of their students do not. Under “Ethics in the Major,” departments and programs would continue to have the option of taking this approach. In this scenario, departments and programs would maintain their role in determining which courses count as electives for their major; however, they would not be able to arbitrarily decide whether a particular course satisfies the ethics requirement. In other words, they would not be allowed to deviate from the college-wide ethics list maintained by the Curriculum Committee.

For example, a program might allow their majors to take one of five courses that satisfies both a major requirement and the ethics requirement. Some students would take one of these five courses, while other students would take a different course off of the college-wide list of courses approved for ethics. In this scenario, all five courses that fulfill both a major requirement and the ethics requirement would need to appear on the college-wide list of courses approved for ethics, and if a student opts to fulfill the ethics requirement with a course other than one of these five, the student would be allowed to choose from the complete college-wide list of options. The program would not be able to exclude particular courses from this college-wide list for their majors.

- D. Some departments and programs may find all of the options outlined in scenarios A, B, and C unworkable or undesirable for their students. The simplest solution for these departments and programs would be to require that all of their students complete a course from the college-wide ethics list.
- E. In addition to scenarios A, B, C, and D, Ethics in the Major will offer departments and programs one final option. One of the most significant differences between Ethics in the Major and EIN is that departments and programs would be able to propose that their majors be allowed to fulfill the requirement with modules distributed across two or more classes. For example, a department might integrate 50% of their required ethics-related material into a required 100-level course and 50% of this material into a required 300-level course. Such a structure is not possible with EIN (or any of our other current GE requirements), and it would be difficult to manage a modular system like this as part of general education.

Note: Integrated Societal Engagement. In April of 2019, a group of faculty submitted a proposal to the GE Task Force that outlined interdisciplinary courses in “Ethical and Empirical Perspectives.” In these team-taught courses pairing an expert in ethics with a specialist in the

social or natural sciences, “students would receive training in/exposure to social/natural-scientific modes of analysis and investigation alongside ethical modes of analysis and investigation, with emphasis on integrating the two to address problems of profound public concern.” Once such courses are approved, they would represent another option for departments and programs for Ethics in the Major.

Portfolio Requirement

Ideal general education does not simply offer siloed content or skill development with little to no connection among areas of study and experiences. Students should have opportunities to analyze and synthesize their learning as it relates to their development and futures post matriculation. Such efforts minimize the chances the general education process will be reduced to “checking boxes” of requirement completion with no thought to the meaning of courses/learning and their connection to their major, electives and students’ futures post St. Olaf. Portfolios provide an evidenced-based practice for encouraging integration of learning. Available research suggests students who complete a portfolio as part of their degree process have higher GPAs, higher graduation rates and higher persistence rates than their control group peers (Watson et al., 2016). Portfolios offer learners the opportunity to assemble key artifacts of their education and reflect on those artifacts and the processes leading to them in a formal, structured way. Specifically, the portfolio process encourages:

Remembering: allows students to catalogue learning for future review and facilitates higher level integration of learning using the ability to look back at older content and integrate it with the new

Analyzing: students engage in multi-temporal (past, present, future) analysis of the connections among content and learning experiences

Envisioning: students contemplate what learning experiences are best for moving forward in their education including identifying need areas

Synthesizing: given all the learning experiences, students assess who they are now, how their thinking has evolved and what the learning process means for them moving forward in their lives
(Mathews-DeNatele, 2019)

Assessment and the Portfolio:

In addition to serving as a way for students to integrate their learning, the portfolio will provide data for assessment of the St. Olaf curriculum. All students will tag the content in their selected artifacts according to key learning outcomes. For example, a student whose artifact is a research paper reporting and interpreting quantitative data might tag the paper as “applied quantitative reasoning,” “social analysis” and “writing in context.” A student writing a blog about current political events in a second language might label that artifact “second language

proficiency” and “rhetorical skills.” A student submitting a video clip of a dance performance might tag the video “creative expression.” Other possible tags could include “scientific inquiry” and “critical synthesis of learning.” Having all students create a portfolio of artifacts tagged according to key educational outcomes allows the college to take a random sample and increase the reliability and validity of assessment data.

The portfolio at St. Olaf College:

- Students will collect artifacts throughout their time at St. Olaf college sufficient to have at least one example of each of the key content/skill areas from the curriculum. The student will tag each artifact according to the content or skill they feel it represents. Students should have a minimum of two artifacts in their portfolio from each year and each artifact should have no more than three tags. A student may not tag an artifact prior to completing a course focused on a particular learning outcome. For example, a student cannot tag an artifact “second language proficiency” prior to completing the language general education requirement.

- Students will complete two reflections on their learning. The first will be completed as part of the student’s second semester first year seminar with the timing determined and approval granted by the instructor. The final reflection will be completed just prior to the final advising period of a student’s final semester. The advisor will approve the reflection after a discussion of the document in an advising session. Both of these reflections will be artifacts in the portfolio tagged with critical synthesis of learning.

Year one reflection: The student will reflect on the OLE questions as their first year concludes. These include: In what ways can I understand the world and my role in it? What skills do I need to live a meaningful and purposeful life in community? How can I live responsibly and prepare for challenges in a dynamic, global society? The students will have a common understanding of how the Lutheran heritage of St. Olaf seeks, “to train graduates who are called and empowered to serve the neighbor so that all may flourish” (Rooted and Open, 2018, p. 8). They will also reflect on the meaning of this goal as they plan the rest of their study at St. Olaf and what comes after for their lives. The reflection should include citation of specific course content and learning.

Final year reflection: The students will reflect on their first year reflection. What has changed and what has stayed the same or been strengthened in how they view the OLE questions and serving the neighbor? What learning has contributed to their changing views? How does their St. Olaf education affect their immediate and long term vocational and life goals? The reflection should include citation of specific course content and learning from general education courses, electives and major/concentration courses.

- Students will complete a vocation section of their portfolio related to their major and goals after St. Olaf college. All students will include a resume (or equivalent) and cover letter or professional statement approved by the Piper Center in this section. The rest of the content of the vocation section will be determined by individual majors.