Overview of Essential Studies Program

Preamble

The extraordinary level of participation and effort on the part of Oregon Tech faculty members over the past three years is evidence that we value general education. As currently designed, the **Essential Studies** program advances the goals of general education. Instead of experiencing general education as something to "get out of the way," students will see how general education is integral to an Oregon Tech education, is part of a meaningful learning trajectory, and helps prepare them for life beyond Oregon Tech. The **Essential Studies** program integrates and scaffolds general education. It moves student learning from Foundational to intentional reinforcement through practice, provides an opportunity for synthesis in a cross-disciplinary experience, and asks students to apply what they have learned at the Capstone level.

Purpose of Essential Studies

Oregon Tech's Essential Studies program has been designed to help students

- acquire knowledge and skills as integrated elements of the educational experience through the study of broad topics, principles, theories, and disciplines;
- widen perspectives, explore relationships between subjects, and develop critical and analytical thinking skills in areas integrated with a student's major;
- make progress toward becoming educated persons while providing a Foundation for lifelong learning; and
- become competent, well-rounded professionals as well as well-educated human beings and citizens.

Oregon Tech's Essential Student Learning Outcomes (ESLOs) are embedded in the **Essential Studies** curriculum and help to ensure that students are not only equipped with the technical ability to enact significant change in the world through a particular program of study but are also prepared to enact that change eloquently, responsibly, collaboratively, and considerately. The **Essential Studies** program provides students with opportunities to engage in lifelong and professional learning by effectively

- communicating,
- conducting inquiry and analysis in diverse fields,
- practicing ethical decision making,
- working with others,
- reasoning quantitatively, and
- working within diverse global and cultural systems.

Employers want graduates who can

- contribute to innovation in the workplace,
- think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems, and
- draw on both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broad range of skills and knowledge (as cited in *General Education Maps and Markers*, AAC&U, 2015).

Identified Gaps

Through a two-year review of general education requirements and seven years of assessment of institutional outcomes, groups identified gaps in Oregon Tech's current general education program and requirements.

Identified problem in current GE	Essential Studies proposed solution
Current distribution model with á la carte menu of disconnected courses. Curricular mapping indicates lack of clarity and intentionality between institutional outcomes and the curriculum.	Coherent hybrid curriculum defined by what all Oregon Tech students should know and be able to do when they graduate. Connections between Foundation, Practice, and Capstone. Work integrated with the discipline, synthesis in the Essential Studies Synthesis Experience (ESSE), and Capstone. Essential Student Learning Outcomes (ESLO) pathways articulate clear connections between required coursework and six ESLOs.
Students do not always understand the outcomes they are expected to achieve through GE courses or fail to see the relevance of GE courses.	The Essential Studies program requirements identify ESLOs and curricular pathways to achieve them. GE and major become complementary. Major programs place greater value on GE proficiencies by designing intentional course pathways and by articulating how students develop GE proficiencies.
GE curriculum is not vertically connected outside the program. The 36/45 requirement was one attempt to provide depth, but for most programs provided depth in program rather than GE.	Practice and Capstone levels build on Foundation knowledge and skills. Depth outside the major provided in Required Practice courses and Program-Integrated Practice courses.
Diverse Perspectives ESLO is not a GE requirement and curricular mapping reveals that this outcome is not systematically addressed by programs.	Diverse Perspectives Foundation course and pathway. Professional development supporting common expectations and pedagogy provided for faculty teaching practice courses.
Reinforcement of writing not intentional in current GE program. Writing assessments indicate students have difficulty transferring skills from WRI courses into disciplinary writing.	Writing at practice level continues through Required Practice WRI courses and Program-Integrated courses. One Practice WRI course taken as a co-requisite with a major course to provide context. Reinforced in the upper division ESSE and Capstone. Professional development supporting common expectations and pedagogy provided for faculty teaching practice courses.

Assessment results indicate weak inquiry and analysis skills.	Inquiry and Analysis Foundation courses, Required Practice courses, Program-Integrated courses, and the ESSE. Professional development supporting common expectations and pedagogy provided for faculty teaching practice courses.
Assessment of the Math Knowledge and Skills ISLO indicated significant differences in expectations across majors. This led to Assessment Commission adoption of new Quantitative Literacy ESLO as a clearer institutional outcome. Quantitative Literacy has now been defined with personal, civic, and professional components. Current math requirement does not connect to the new ESLO.	The Quantitative Literacy Foundation course (Money, World, Power), addresses the personal and civic while a Foundation Math course selected by the major (along with additional courses required by the program) address the professional. The ESSE reinforces personal and civic aspects of Quantitative Literacy. Professional development supporting common expectations and pedagogy provided for faculty teaching practice courses.
Ethical Reasoning ESLO not consistently embedded in program curricula. While most programs touch on professional ethics, few students have Foundational courses focused on ethical reasoning to guide ethical decision making in all aspects of their lives.	The proposed Foundation course (PHIL 105, Introduction to Ethics) introduces moral theories and guides students in making rational moral judgements. The Program-Integrated courses bring ethical judgement into the context of the discipline. Ethics is reinforced in the ESSE and the Capstone. Professional development supporting common expectations and pedagogy provided for faculty teaching practice courses.
Students were required to demonstrate teamwork skills in courses without prerequisite training. No consistent requirement existed and no consistent "place" where Foundational skills addressed.	SPE 321, Small Group and Team is being redesigned as a Foundation course (SPE 221). This helps make sure that students have knowledge and skills before they advance in collaborative work at Practice and Capstone levels of the Teamwork pathway. The ESSE, designed as a co-curricular experience, involves collaboration in addressing real-world challenges. Professional development supporting common expectations and pedagogy provided for faculty teaching practice courses.
Distribution requirements, while flexible, are taken haphazardly throughout four years of an Oregon Tech degree.	Multi-year paths for ESLO development combine some required courses with clearly integrated courses in the major. Value of Essential Studies clearly articulated throughout Oregon Tech degree paths.

ESLO—Essential Student Learning Outcome(s) **ESSE**—Essential Studies Synthesis Experience **GEAC**—General Education Advisory Council

Students siloed in major-specific courses and with limited practice in several Essential Studies skills. This practice, which can be both narrow and limited, does not meet employer expectations for grads who can integrate major areas of study with other disciplines and who can apply all they have learned to real-world situations.	The ESSE, designed as a co-curricular experience for students in different majors, requires collaboration in addressing real-world challenges. Also, Program-Integrated courses clearly identify ESLOs and target development in these outcomes.

Model Description

The **Essential Studies** program prepares students by providing intentional pathways that

- build on a broad foundation in essential knowledge and skills,
- integrate the ESLOs into the discipline through practice, and
- culminate in a Capstone experience.

Oregon Tech's current GE program is a distribution model with specified credits in various content areas. Essential Studies is a hybrid model that requires some courses (distribution requirements) and then integrates outcomes into courses at the practice level. It is important to note that the model includes both program-defined elements (Program-Integrated courses; Capstone experience) built into each program's curriculum map <u>and</u> transcripted courses that students specifically track (Foundation, Required Practice, ESSE, Growth and Exploration).

The **Essential Studies** program

- provides experiences that lead to the development of demonstrable proficiencies aligned to Oregon Tech's ESLOs;
- ensures the Oregon Tech ESLOs will be practiced and integrated at increasingly more challenging levels from Foundation to Capstone and are deliberately connected to the complexities of the world beyond college;
- integrates student learning as it prepares students for the changing nature of knowledge, even in their own fields;
- is deliberately designed to prepare all students for their personal, civic, and professional lives beyond Oregon Tech by fostering knowledge of the wider world and by preparing them to think analytically and learn collaboratively;
- asks that curricula go beyond simply requiring students to take courses from different disciplines. The program asks that students explore connections among different disciplines and then apply information and habits of mind learned in one setting to other settings. Deliberateness is essential; it is not enough to be exposed to information.

See the map for required curricular elements of the **Essential Studies** program**.**

FAQs

- **Is the model presented today final?** Almost. The purpose of this mapping exercise is to help programs assess the model's impact on current curriculum, thus allowing faculty to provide feedback to the Task Force for revisions and ensuring that it can be flexibly applied to all programs.

- **Once adopted, how will the Essential Studies program be modified when needed changes are identified?** One of the original charges presented to the Task Force was to develop a sustainable structure to support general education. This new structure, utilizing the expertise of the ESLO committees, will provide the mechanism for change based on assessment results and other input.

- **What about transfer students?** It is the goal of the General Education Review Task Force to develop a model for general education that can be flexibly applied to transfer students while allowing for an Oregon Tech Essential Studies signature at the upper division level. In the implementation phase, the Academic Excellence Steering Committee will work with the Registrar's Office to develop transfer equivalencies for Essential Studies courses. The Office of Academic Agreements will work out new articulation agreements with partner institutions. Department chairs of content areas (COM, H/SS, NS, Math) will remain responsible for the review of specific transfer course substitutions on a student-by-student basis.

- **How will courses be approved?** Essential Studies course approval will be managed by the General Education Advisory Council (GEAC) with support from the ESLO committees. The process and criteria are being defined by GEAC in the 2015 – 16 academic year.

- **Must programs integrate ESLOs into courses in the major at the practice level (Program-Integrated)?** Ideally, students will have the opportunity to practice ESLO skills in the context of their discipline in courses within the major, but the model is flexible and will allow programs to select appropriate courses outside the major to fulfill this practice requirement.

- **What are the responsibilities of Program-Integrated course instructors?** Instructors of Program- Integrated courses will be responsible for making necessary connections, building upon Foundation knowledge and skills, and preparing students for success in the Capstone experience within their program. The Commission on College Teaching will help the ESLO committees in developing professional development opportunities to support instruction along the ESLO pathways.

- **Is co-teaching part of the model for Essential Studies?** Co-teaching is an option being considered in the development of the **Essential Studies** program, but is not integral to the program. **How will this work?** In creating the Essential Studies Implementation Plan, the Task Force will recommend faculty workload models for co-teaching opportunities.

- **Who will track Essential Studies requirements for graduation?** In a system similar to the current one, student progress in the **Essential Studies** program will be tracked by the Registrar through transcripted courses. Faculty advisors will continue to use program curriculum maps and advising tools such as Degree Works to provide advising and track progress. In addition, advisors and students will have access to advising materials created to articulate the Essential Studies program requirements.

- **Will this new model require more assessment?** No, it will make the assessment of ESLOs easier. The Assessment Commission Executive Committee is working on developing an academic assessment plan that integrates the assessment of the ESLOs with general education assessment.