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CHARTING A COURSE FOR
STUDENT SUCCESS

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GENERAL EDUCATION...LIBERAL EDUCATION...LIBERAL
ARTS...ARE THESE ALL THE SAME THING?

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

GENERAL EDUCATION... LIBERAL EDUCATION... LIBERAL ARTS... ARE THESE ALL THE SAME THING? 1

GENERAL EDUCATION... LIBERAL EDUCATION... LIBERAL ARTS... ARE THESE ALL THE SAME THING? 2

GENERAL EDUCATION AT SIPI: CONTINUITY & CHANGE 2

GENERAL EDUCATION AT SIPI: CONTINUITY & CHANGE 3

HOW ARE GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES EXPRESSED? 4

HOW ARE GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES EXPRESSED? 5

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Liberal Education is an approach to college learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. This approach emphasizes broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth achievement in a specific field of interest.

Liberal Arts refers to specific disciplines (the “majors” i.e., the humanities, sciences, and social sciences).

General Education is that part of a liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing essential intellectual, civic, and practical capacities. General education can take many forms, and increasingly includes introductory, advanced and integrative forms of learning. It is an overarching, institutional-level program that is infused in all academic and non-academic programs. It is the many and diverse ways in which students have opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills associated with a liberal education in increasingly advanced and complex ways, and the opportunities they have to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. General education is where students develop breadth in their education. The majors is where they develop depth in their field.

SIPI Gen Ed Core Competencies (GECC’s) are skills and abilities that all students from every discipline should achieve to be successful as they transfer to other institutions and/or enter the workforce.

What skills do employers want in their new employees?

Earlier this year, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) commissioned a team of research consultants to find the answers to that question. The researchers surveyed more than 300 executives from organizations in the private and non-profit sector. The full report, *It Takes More Than a Major*, can be found at http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2013_EmployerSurvey.pdf. Here are a few highlights:

- The ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than undergraduate major.
- It is important for new employees to demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity; intercultural skills; and the capacity for continued new learning.
- They want colleges to place more emphasis on helping students develop these key learning outcomes: critical thinking, complex problem-solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge in real-world settings.
- Employers endorse several educational practices to help prepare students for the workplace: a) conduct research and use evidence-based analysis; b) gain in-depth knowledge in the major and analytic, problem solving, and communication skills; and c) apply their learning in real-world settings.
- Most would recommend a liberal education to a young person they know as the best way to prepare for success in today’s global economy.

What should students learn from a liberal education?

AAC&U worked with several hundred institutions to identify the knowledge and skills students should acquire. Here are some excerpts from the resulting Essential Learning Outcomes (http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/EssentialOutcomes_Chart.pdf). Beginning in school, and continuing at successively higher levels across their college studies, students should prepare for twenty-first-century challenges by gaining:

- *Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World*, Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts. Focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring.
- *Intellectual and Practical Skills, including inquiry and analysis*, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, and teamwork and problem solving. Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance.

(General Education...Liberal Education...Liberal Arts...are these all the same thing? Cont. from Page 1)

- *Personal and Social Responsibility*, including civic knowledge and engagement—local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning. Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges .
- *Integrative and Applied Learning*, including synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies. Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

How does SIPI's general education program fit into all of this?

In 2010, SIPI faculty developed the following general education core competencies (or outcomes).

- *Communication*: Students will be able to effectively communicate ideas to others in correct ways.
- *Interpersonal Skills/Teamwork*: Students will demonstrate individual and interpersonal skills to work with others professionally on a community and global level.
- *Cultural Legacy*: Students will demonstrate knowledge of Native American history, cultures and traditions while recognizing the cultures and traditions of others on a national and global level.
- *Critical Thinking*: Students will be able to analyze, synthesize, and interpret verbal information and quantitative data by using critical thinking skills.

These core competencies align reasonably well with the AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes, and show that the expectations we have for our students are consistent with those found at other institutions.

GENERAL EDUCATION AT SIPI: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

SIPI was established as a vocational postsecondary institution in 1971; its purpose was to provide access to postsecondary education and job training. As a result, when students arrived at SIPI in the early 1970's they took occupational, academic, and personal development courses. Communications and mathematics courses were taught as they applied to occupations (e.g., math for electronics, etc.). By the 1980's students could take general composition, literature, speech, Indian studies, and psychology courses that were not specific to an occupation; however, these credits did not transfer to a four-year institution. This lack of transferability of course credits was addressed in 1993 when SIPI was approved by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to offer Associates of Science (A.S.) and Associates of Arts (A.A.) degrees.

Transferability was further enhanced by SIPI adopting the General Education Course Transfer Curriculum established by the State of New Mexico Higher Education Department (HED) Chapter 21, Article 1B NMSA 1978 (Chapter 224 of the Laws of New Mexico 1995). This "distributive" model of general education allows students to selected courses under five broad subject areas. The curriculum includes Communication (9 credit hours), Mathematics (3 credit hours), Laboratory Science (8 credit hours); Social/Behavioral Science (6-9 credit hours), and Humanities and Fine Arts (6-9 credit hours). SIPI requires a minimum of thirty-two credit hours in general education for the AA and AS degrees; a minimum of fifteen credit hours for the AAS degrees, and six credit hours for certificates.

Fast forward to July 2010, SIPI's accreditation was withdrawn by the HLC and the college was placed into candidacy status. The world has changed, we are more global and we have moved to a knowledge economy, tribal nations are exercising greater self-determination and self-governance, working to keep their languages and cultural traditions alive and renew their communities. The accreditation crisis along with societal change led faculty to review the curriculum within the context of SIPI's mission, the needs of tribes and students, and the expectations of the HLC.

The HLC views general education as the breadth of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes that an organization's faculty believes every educated person should possess and that "effective general education helps students gain competence in the exercise of independent intellectual inquiry and also stimulates their examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values." They expect, "institutions to clearly and publicly articulate the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of the general education, to include an appropriate component of general education in all undergraduate programs of substantial length, for the faculty to exercise oversight for general education, and to work with the administration to regularly assess its effectiveness against the organization's stated goals for student learning." (The Higher Learning Commission, A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Commission Statement on General Education. February 2003.)

As a result, faculty established a Statement on General Education and four general education core competencies for which all students are expected to acquire knowledge and skill through their education at SIPI. Additionally, rather than viewing general education as a distribution of introductory courses that students complete in addition to their major courses, the faculty have embraced an "integrative" model; where general education core competencies are integrated into the learning experiences students have in their major. Students learn critical thinking, communication, teamwork/interpersonal skills, and cultural legacy skills as they learn more in their majors and will be able to apply these skills to their professions or careers.

(Cont. on Page 3)

(General Education at SIPI: Continuity and Change, Cont. from Page 2)

This model of general education is broader and focuses on these four core competencies or learning outcomes, rather than relying solely on disciplinary list of courses as the means to provide general education.

Finally, the inclusion of cultural legacy as a general education outcomes and the shift to an “integrative” general education model allows faculty to begin formally and systematically incorporating across the curriculum and co-curriculum a body of knowledge, concepts, skills, and attitudes that prepare students to be aware of, engage, support, and reinforce at varying levels tribal-nation building.

HOW ARE GENERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES EXPRESSED IN SPECIFIC MAJORS OR COURSES?

A prevailing misconception in higher education is that students receive their “general education” only in the liberal arts department. Once a student reaches their intended major, faculty might believe they can focus solely on the learning outcomes associated with the student’s program of study. By letting go of this narrow idea of how post-secondary, general education is delivered in the curricula, programs can expand the way general education is taught in both depth and rigor. For example, **in the Accounting Program**, students learn that accounting is the language of business. Communicating business information is an important skill within the profession. This fundamental concept offers an ideal opportunity to teach and assess SIPI’s Communication core competency at increasing levels as students advance through the program.

The first accounting course taken by accounting and business majors is ACCT 101: Fundamentals of Accounting. One of the course learning outcomes is to prepare financial statements, which is an important introductory level skill in the field of accounting. Students enrolled in that course complete a project that allows them to record the transactions of a simulated business for one month and then prepare a basic set of financial statements for the business. In the second year of the program, students complete ACCT 202: College Accounting II. In this course, they also complete a set of financial statements for a company, except that now the transactions are more complex and students must complete a ratio analysis to explain, in a business memo, the company’s results of operations. This higher-level assessment not only requires students to prepare financial statements, but also to explain the financial statements in a professional manner.

Upon completion of the Accounting Program, students have been assessed not only on their ability to prepare financial statements, a program level learning outcome, but also on their ability to communicate information to others, a SIPI general education core competency. Student learning is demonstrated and assessed at increasing levels throughout the program and within the context of the students’ field of study.

Within SIPI’s Early Childhood Education (ECE) program, general education outcomes are developed in order to prepare students to become effective early childhood educators. SIPI ECE students refine their communication skills and interpersonal skills as they participate in practicum courses and field experiences. The program offers two practicum experiences within two distinct educational settings. In the first practicum course, ECE 131: Curriculum Development through Play, students spend 50 hours within infant and toddler classrooms at the Youth Development Incorporated (YDI) Head Start. Throughout their practicum experiences, students have the opportunity to work with early care professionals in the classroom. This includes collaborating with professionals in providing an enriched setting for infants/toddlers through relationship building and meaningful activities and interactions. Students refine their interpersonal skills as they work with their cooperating teachers to develop lesson plans to support Infant/toddler development within the classroom. These are important professional interactions that will be expected of students as they enter the field. These interpersonal skills are assessed as students participate in a minimum of two formal observations conducted by their practicum instructor. Practicum students also refine communication skills as they utilize lesson planning tools to document the developmental progress of children in their care. This includes written communication that conveys the impact of their interactions within the classroom. It is clear that practicum experiences are key to developing students who are prepared to enter early childhood settings.

Cultural legacy has been inherent in the Indigenous values that many students and faculty/staff bring to campus. However, the curricular instruction and assessment of this general education competency has been limited to pockets of courses and assignments across programs. For example, various instructors have been especially effective at intentionally recognizing a Native framework within Western paradigms. Rebecca Izzo-Manymules invited Dr. Lorenda Belone and Dr. Calvin White to her spring 2013 **Psychology class** to present on Community Based Practitioner Research and Indigenous Psychology respectively.

(Cont. on Page 4)

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SIPI is located in the heart of Indian Country, in the center of New Mexico's high-tech corridor. The College was established by a consortium of tribes including the All-Indian Pueblo Council (19 New Mexico tribes), the Navajo Nation, the Jicarilla Apache Nation, the Mescalero Apache Tribe, the Southern Ute Tribes and other southwestern tribes. On September 16, 1971, SIPI officially opened its doors for classes. Today, the College as a federally-operated institution offers advanced technical education and a university transfer degree to students who are members of federally recognized tribes.



Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute

A NATIONAL INDIAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE THAT
PREPARES NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS TO BE
PRODUCTIVE LIFE-LONG LEARNERS, AS TRIBAL MEMBERS,
IN AN EVER-CHANGING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT.

(How are General Education Outcomes Expressed in Specific Majors or Courses? Cont. from Page 4)

Jan Woomavoyah encouraged the use of the PhotoVoice methodology, which has contributed tremendously to articulating Cultural Legacy as well as contributing to the Wakanyeya "Sacred Little ones" grant of the ECE Program. In her spring 2013 **Sociology course**, students made empowering statements on the Native student perspective at SIPI through PhotoVoice. Mike Daney implemented a research assignment on Indigenous Games for his summer 2013 **course in Physical Education**. Every student reported that this was a useful activity which contributed to their cultural knowledge base. Furthermore, students who took **the new course Introduction to Native American Studies** with Dr. Leola Tsinnajinnie in the summer of 2013 made direct connections between the Native Studies paradigm and previous lessons learned from Teresa Gomez **in the History of Indian Education course**.

From the standpoint of an evolving area of focus in Liberal Arts at SIPI, students who take Native studies oriented classes gain a rich foundation in multiple core competencies. **The Introduction to Native American Studies course** was approved by the Curriculum Committee in the Spring of 2013. Dr. Tsinnajinnie teaches the course with the purpose of directly feeding learning outcomes into Cultural Legacy and Critical Thinking abilities for students so they may apply these competencies to any course they take, regardless of curriculum or pedagogy. As this course grows and becomes a greater fixture in general education, SIPI students will demonstrate assessable measures of the Cultural Legacy competency upon graduation. Nonetheless, most students at SIPI have taken long established requirement fulfilling courses such as those named previously and/or Contemporary Indian Issues. The core requirement of **the Issues course**, also taught by Dr. Tsinnajinnie, is a final research paper on a contemporary Native issue framed with an Indigenous research perspective. Students are required to select research issues that are significant and appropriate to contemporary Native society; access academic books and articles; and contextualize their findings within a Nation Building framework. Thus, successfully completed research papers demonstrate strong student competencies in cultural legacy, critical thinking, and communication.

"SIPI's general education component prepares students to live in and contribute to a dynamic, complex and multicultural world as productive life-long learners and tribal members, in an ever changing global environment. In support of this philosophy, SIPI is committed to providing student learning experiences meant to develop and enhance such abilities as critical thinking, communication (written and oral), interpersonal skills, and an appreciation of their cultural legacy. SIPI's statement on general education can be found in the 2013-2014 Catalog at http://www.sipi.edu/acadprog/catalog/SIPI%202013-2014%20Catalog%20final_7_23_13_Final.pdf on page 21.