

Subject: General Education Requirements

Date: Tuesday, September 24, 2019 at 10:13:05 AM Central Daylight Time

From: Billingham, Chase

To: Jarman, Jeffrey

Jeff,

Thank you for your leadership of the Faculty Senate. I'd like to raise a point of clarification. It was mentioned in our meeting yesterday during the discussion of General Education requirements that undergraduate students at Harvard University must take only three courses to satisfy their general education requirement. The implication was that if a small General Education requirement is good enough for a university as prestigious as Harvard, it should be good enough for us.

The claim is inaccurate, however. Harvard College (the unit that enrolls all undergrads at Harvard—including engineering students) has very strict curricular requirements for its students. Details can be found here: <https://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/book/program-general-education-requirement>.

These requirements include:

- General Education Requirement: **Four courses**, one each in “Aesthetics & Culture,” “Ethics & Civics,” “Histories, Societies, Individuals,” and “Science & Technology in Society”
- Distribution Requirement: **Three courses**, one each in “Arts and Humanities,” “Social Sciences,” and “Science and Engineering and Applied Science”
- Quantitative Reasoning with Data Requirement: **One course**
- Expository Writing Requirement: **One course**, taken during a student’s first year of study
- Language Requirement: **Two courses**

While only one of these requirements is explicitly called “general education,” it is clear that the intent of the Harvard College curriculum requirements is in line with what we refer to more broadly as “general education” here at WSU.

It’s difficult to make a direct comparison with our general education requirements, because most semester-long courses at Harvard are counted as 4 credits. Altogether, these requirements entail 11 courses, or 44 credits, compared to 14 courses (42 credits) at WSU currently.

Because the graduation requirement at Harvard is 128 credits (for more details, see <https://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/book/bachelor-arts-and-bachelor-science-degrees>), those 44 credits represent approximately 34% of a student’s course of study. By comparison, at WSU, with a 120-credit limit, 42 credits in our gen ed program represents approximately 35% of a student’s course of study.

If we are going to use Harvard’s system as a benchmark by which to evaluate ourselves, we should get the details right. I would like to introduce this information at our next meeting and/or have this correction included in the minutes from our previous meeting.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thanks again.

Chase

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