

## OVERVIEW OF ESSENTIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES AND WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK

The University General Education Committee, the University Assessment Council, the College of Letters and Science, the Offices of the Dean of Students, and the Office of the Provost have worked together on a project to improve our university's ability to communicate effectively about what students learn and do at UW-Madison. These efforts produced a rhetorical framework representing the "Essential Learning Outcomes"—campus-wide aspirational outcomes for our students—along with the unique experiences that we nurture here at UW-Madison (the "Wisconsin Experience") to help students achieve these outcomes. The ELOs and WI Experience serve as a framework that provides a common language to talk with each other, with students, and with external audiences about what it means to learn at UW-Madison. Arising, as it does, from audits of current practices, the document describes (and does not prescribe) learning at UW-Madison.

Some of our rhetorical framework is based on extensive national research done by the Association of American Colleges and Universities that asked employers, faculty, students, parents, graduate programs, foundations, alumni and others the question, "What do you want from college graduates?" That research revealed a consistent call for graduates to possess competencies in knowledge about human culture and the physical and natural world, critical and integrative thinking, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility—in short, a new vision of liberal education. Importantly, this vision of liberal education is founded on the traditions of the liberal arts, but is not restricted to students in the humanities and social sciences; rather, it includes recommendations linked directly to learning in technical programs and the professions as well.

Many of the other universities in the UW System have also been working with the AAC&U to advance the discussion about essential learning outcomes on their own campuses and in their local communities. The UW System, as part of its Advantage Wisconsin strategic plan, collated student learning outcomes from all system campuses into a document of Shared Learning Outcomes. Our ELO/WI Experience rhetorical framework served to shape the UWS document, which is especially intended to describe the learning goals for UW System students to those outside the university community.

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## Essential Learning Outcomes for UW-Madison Students

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*These learning outcomes were developed through extensive national surveys and interviews done by the Association of American Colleges and Universities with employers, faculty, staff, and alumni, asking the basic question, "What qualities and skills do you want in college graduates?"*

Beginning in their first year, 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, media, and technology literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving

***Practiced*** extensively across the curriculum in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance

### Personal and Social Responsibility, including

- Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

***Anchored*** through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

### Integrative 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

(continued)

## The Wisconsin Experience at UW-Madison

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UW-Madison graduates become extraordinary citizens, community members and national and global leaders. We have produced more Peace Corps and Teach for America volunteers than almost any other university in the country over the past 20 years. More leaders of major corporations have graduated from UW-Madison than any other university in the country. We are among the top producers of faculty members who teach at research-intensive institutions around the world. Many local, state, and national leaders are our graduates. Something about the UW-Madison experience prepares our students to become outstanding leaders who are engaged locally, nationally and globally.

That “something” is the *Wisconsin Experience*. Grounded in the 100-year old *Wisconsin Idea* and our *progressive history*, our historical mission has evolved to create an expectation for all of us—faculty, staff, and students—to apply in and out of classroom learning in ways that have significant and positive impacts on the world. **What we do matters, and together we can solve any problem.** It is this unique *Wisconsin Experience* that produces graduates who think beyond the conventional wisdom, who are creative problem-solvers who know how to integrate passion with empirical analysis, who know how to seek out, evaluate, and create new knowledge and technologies, who can adapt to new situations, and who are engaged citizens of the world.

- The Wisconsin Experience comprises the following **inquiry-based** opportunities:
  - Substantial research experiences that generate knowledge and analytical skills
  - Global and cultural competencies and engagement
  - Leadership and activism opportunities
  - Application of knowledge in the “real world”
- The nature of these opportunities and how we offer them makes UW-Madison unique in higher education. The resulting Wisconsin Experience is characterized by close integration of in-class and out-of-class learning experiences, by active, creative and entrepreneurial engagement in real world problems, and by offering students leadership in their learning. Here are few examples of these opportunities:
  - Service Learning and Community-Based Research
  - Research apprenticeships on competitively-funded projects
  - Summer internships in for-profit and non-profit organizations
  - First Wave and other multicultural arts initiatives
  - Classroom instruction peer mentoring
  - The Undergraduate Research Scholars Program
  - First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs)
  - Entrepreneurship opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students
  - Intercultural dialogues through small group learning communities (SEED, ICD, etc.)
  - Training for health professions in rural, central city, and other underserved areas
  - Leadership certificates in schools, colleges and majors
  - Activism and leadership through student organizations and Campus-Community Partnerships
  - Comprehensive Honors and Honors theses in the major
  - Year-long and semester-long Study and Research Abroad
  - National and International internships
  - Residential Learning Communities
  - Research communities for graduate students
  - Graduate and Professional Student Development (Delta, Multicultural Grad. Network, Grad. Student Collaborative, etc.)

We urge you to explore these opportunities and more on <http://www.learning.wisc.edu/>