

Colleagues,

In the October faculty meeting, you will be asked to **vote on a change to the catalog language about competencies**. This proposal has been reviewed by the new General Education Committee and EPC. These changes were also the subject of the general education workshop during Fall conference.

It is important to note that this is only the first phase of this change.

This changes the language of our competencies from one that emphasizes seat time to one based on proficiency. It also includes language to specify how students can demonstrate if they meet this proficiency on admission through IB, AP, transfer credit, or (when applicable) proficiency exam. In making this change, we are reflecting a larger shift in higher education and acknowledging the need to ensure we are transfer-friendly.

You will note that we are also *removing* language in the catalog about literacy; this change does not reflect any change to support we can offer students who need support, but this language was unnecessary since it describes no specific course, placement, or proficiency measures related to literacy. Moreover, the college has moved away from a philosophy of remedial coursework and toward one where *all first-year students* are supported in the transition to college reading and writing through FYS and ENG 101. Moreover, MTH 110 and 111 will be designed to meet students where they are and move them towards greater comfort with and proficiency in mathematical thinking.

In November, we will bring forward the second part of this change. Associated with each of these competencies will be a **badge**. In concept, these badges are similar to Quill; however, unlike Quill, each badge is carefully defined and has specific learning outcomes. As we have done in the past, before we ask faculty to vote, we will make the proposed language available for faculty comment.

Below is a Q&A that tries to anticipate common questions faculty might have. The faculty representatives for QR (Quantitative Reasoning), GCA (Global Cultural Awareness), and Writing will be available at the faculty meeting to address questions, as well.

FAQ

Why are you making these changes in two phases instead of bringing both parts of this forward at the same time?

Originally, that was our intention; however, the delayed start to the GEC meant that group needs more time to finalize the learning outcomes for the badges in each area. We expect to have that drafted and reviewed by EPC in time for the November faculty meeting.

However, the first part of this, the basic competencies, involves issues that matter to the Admissions process. Prospective students, for instance, want to know if that 5 on the AP Language and Composition test ‘counts.’ In our current system, the answer is no. The sooner we pass this the better in terms of messages to incoming students.

Why are we moving toward a proficiency model instead of seat time?

HLC's emphasis on learning outcomes is part of a larger shift in higher education away from measuring the value of education in terms of courses taken or time in a seat and toward measurable learning. As we revise other parts of our curriculum to reflect this, it only makes sense to be consistent throughout the model.

What does the “novice high” statement mean in the language competency?

Novice-high is a term used by ACTFL to describe a specific level of competency. Novice-high speakers are “able to manage successfully a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture, such as basic personal information, basic objects, and a limited number of activities, preferences, and immediate needs. Novice High speakers respond to simple, direct questions or requests for information. They are also able to ask a few formulaic questions.” (www.actfl.org). In earlier sessions about the new language competency, the World Languages department shared the following video samples of Novice-level speech (in English) please see:

- [Video 1—Leonor](#) (2:19)
- [Video 2—Luis](#) (1:08)

We plan to use the AAPPL *Interpersonal Listening and Speaking* and *Presentational Writing* skills tests Form A for students who wish to demonstrate proficiency through an exam.

How do we determine what proficiency will mean in Math?

We have piloted the Accuplacer Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, and Statistics exam this year. This is a widely accepted placement exam used by colleges and universities. You can find a [sample question set here](#). This exam focuses on skills that prepare students for coursework with the new QR badge. Scores place students in different bands that indicate what level of skill they have, and students with a high enough score can demonstrate they have already met the math competency. The band levels will be calibrated over the next few years, and in conversations between the Math Department, the General Education Committee, and the Provost.

Why is there no proficiency exam for Writing?

We asked Anne Porter, the Director of our Writing Program, to explore what best practices were for our peer and aspirant institutions, and quite simply, there are no empirically validated or widely accepted tools for this, and only one school is doing it (Albion). In fact, there is a general consensus that placement or proficiency exams (especially of the timed variety) are a very poor measure of writing ability.

Although there is no proficiency exam, there are several other things behind the scenes that English is working on to allow more students to meet this requirement on admission if they are already proficient. Currently, our ENG 101 course is not very transfer-friendly. It has more outcomes than is typical for first year writing. As we develop the outcomes for the writing-intensive badge, which will include learning how to write and research within a discipline, we can bring our ENG 101 course more into line with other institutions and make it easier for students to meet this requirement with courses they took through dual-enrollment or through the AP Comp exam or IB credits.