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University Studies Mission Statement

“The purpose of the general education program at Portland State University is to facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes that will form a foundation for lifelong learning among its students. This foundation includes the capacity and the propensity to engage in inquiry and critical thinking, the use of various forms of communication for learning and expression, to gain an awareness of the broader human experience and its environment, and appreciate the responsibilities of persons to themselves, to each other, and to the community.”

How University Studies Works

University Studies (UNST) emphasizes teaching through human experience. This priority is accomplished via four program goals: Inquiry and Critical Thinking, Communication, Ethics and Social Responsibility, and Diversity of Human Experience. Students begin their general education experience at Portland State University with Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ), where they address broad thematic questions and learn different disciplinary approaches. As they begin their Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ) coursework, they begin exploring topics outside their major. These topics are connected to even more specific Upper Division Cluster themes, which expand on what they have begun investigating during their SINQ classes. Finally, Senior Capstone brings together all the skills they have learned and acquired by taking them out of the classroom and into the community.

These concepts are represented in the diagram below.
**Freshman Inquiry**

Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) forms the foundation of the University Studies program. This year-long course introduces students to PSU’s general education goals and to the opportunities available here. Faculty from different departments across campus create FRINQ courses that are centered around different thematic questions, such as how democracy works, the nature of the self, and the role of art in our society. These faculty work together in teams to help students understand different disciplinary approaches to the problems posed by each particular theme. Each faculty member is paired with a Peer Mentor, who is an upper division student and leads smaller inquiry sessions. Classes include lecture and group dialogue on course content, student-led discussions based on homework assignments, and creative opportunities to challenge and expand thinking.

FRINQ follows a sequential order, so classes and Mentor Sessions meet at the same time during each of the three quarters and students stay with each other throughout the entire year. Generally, classes are small, with less than 40 students per class, and each Mentor Session takes about one-third of these students. Each FRINQ series is worth 15 total credits (or 5 credits per quarter).

**Sophomore Inquiry**

In Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ), students continue to build communication skills through class dialogue, individual and group presentations, and writing/research projects. Emphasis on the human experience, inquiry and critical thinking, as well as ethical and social responsibility are continually integrated into the curriculum. SINQ is an opportunity to explore topics of interest that are different from, yet complementary to, the students’ majors. Students are not limited to when they take SINQ courses or how many they take per quarter.

Each SINQ requires a Mentor Session once per week, led by a Graduate Mentor or an experienced Peer Mentor.

It is important to note that through these three courses, students choose their area of interest for further exploration in even more specific Upper Division Cluster courses. (There are 15 different Clusters, containing several different classes, to choose from.) The SINQ classes are not only connected to a Cluster theme but also to its learning outcomes as well.

The purpose of this connection is to provide a framework and prepare the students for their Cluster coursework. *The connections between SINQ and Upper Division Clusters should be made explicit by faculty in order to support each student’s experience through PSU’s general education program.* Faculty are expected to engage with colleagues and the Cluster Coordinator to improve quality through common assignments, ePortfolios, and other assessment activities to strengthen Cluster themes.

Each SINQ course is worth 4 credits, for a total of 12 credits that are counted toward University Studies (UNST) requirements. All students who began UNST with FRINQ are required to take three SINQ courses. Transfer students’ SINQ requirements are dependent on the number of transfer credits they have the term they are admitted to PSU.
Upper Division Cluster

Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ) courses act as an introduction to Upper Division Clusters. Students decide which SINQ course compliments their majors and engages them most. Coursework at the Clusters level then expands and advances the subject matter that was established during a course. Unlike Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) and SINQ classes, there are no Mentor Sessions associated with the Upper Division Clusters. It is here that the student puts into practice the skills that were developed during the previous two years.

These courses are offered through a variety of departments and an array of disciplines, which have been specifically proposed and approved as University Studies (UNST) courses. Each course is designed for students to individualize their program and compliment their educational goals. Students are encouraged to seek guidance from both their departmental advisors and the Cluster Coordinators to optimize their experience.

Most Upper Division Cluster courses are 4 credits, but some are 3 credits. A total of 12 credits must be taken to fulfill this portion of the UNST requirement.

Senior Capstone

In the Senior Capstone courses, students bring together their collection of talents and variety of knowledge to create a cooperative learning community. These courses are designed to take the student out of the classroom and into the community where they can pool their skills and work on a Community Project. Students work with their faculty member as well as community leaders to understand and create solutions for issues that affect them as citizens.

Like Upper Division Cluster courses, there are no Mentor Sessions for Senior Capstone coursework.

Senior Capstone courses are 6 credits each and, depending on the course, may extend over one, two or three quarters. Senior Capstone courses are offered only to seniors. Nonetheless, students can take their Capstone during their third year.
Faculty Expectations

Since the University Studies (UNST) curriculum was approved by the faculty senate 20 years ago, almost 150 faculty members have created the Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) curriculum and more than 300 faculty have contributed to the Sophomore Inquiry (SINQ) courses. These contributors have established expectations for success in the first and second years of this program and developed a series of suggested best practices to make these classes successful. Some best practices can be found at the Faculty Resources webpages.

UNST welcomes faculty from a variety of backgrounds to teach FRINQ and SINQ courses. Many of the basic responsibilities of any PSU faculty member remain the same in UNST. Please familiarize yourself with PSU policies on student privacy, sexual harassment, the student conduct code, etc. by following this link.

Some responsibilities of FRINQ and SINQ faculty may differ from the traditional responsibilities of other university faculty. For example, when teaching within their own department, faculty can often count on students having some sense of the basic course expectations. UNST students, on the other hand, often require a greater degree of clarity in the course expectations and the faculty’s plan for evaluation and grading. In FRINQ and SINQ, half of our students are first-generation college students who are just beginning to learn about the expectations of university life, in general. Transfer students who have not taken FRINQ account for approximately 50 percent of students in SINQ courses. Please keep in mind, these students may need clarification regarding the role of these courses in the context of their overall academic program.

In the UNST curriculum, we hold to a set of goals and a general program design approved by the PSU Faculty Senate. The following expectations have been set by faculty teaching in UNST over the years as a way of meeting PSU’s general education goals.

1. Teach to University Studies program goals.
2. Teach in an interdisciplinary framework.
3. Supervise mentors and work with them to develop curriculum for mentor sessions.
4. Make use of inquiry-based (or project-based) teaching practices.

1. Teach to University Studies Program goals.

The UNST curriculum has four program goals, which all faculty that teach in the program are expected to address in their course design: 1) inquiry and critical thinking, 2) communication, 3) the diversity of human experience, and 4) ethics and social responsibility. The following table contains statements for each goal, which is taken from the UNST website, along with some examples of how the goals are translated into Freshman Inquiry and Sophomore Inquiry learning objectives. Program faculty have also developed rubrics to assess student progress towards each of the goals. Rubrics are linked to each goal’s heading within the chart on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT OF GOALS</th>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES FRESHMAN INQUIRY</th>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES SOPHOMORE INQUIRY</th>
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| Inquiry and Critical Thinking | - Identify and explain issues & salient arguments.  
- Describe contexts and assumptions.  
- Accurately interpret evidence (i.e., statements, graphics, & observations). | - Analyze and evaluate alternative points of view.  
- Generate novel explanations and conclusions.  
- Describe interconnections among specialized areas of knowledge encompassed by disciplines and programs. |
| Communication | | |
| Writing | - Write with control of structure, usage, and grammar.  
- Interpret, summarize and respond in writing to ideas and arguments generated by reading and discussion.  
- Implement editing and revision to produce effective writing. | - Employ disciplinary forms and conventions in written work.  
- Accurately and effectively reference source material. |
| Quantitative literacy | - Describe & interpret quantitative information.  
- Generate meaningful and precise representations (visual, numeric, verbal) of quantitative information.  
- Use arithmetical, algebraic, and statistical methods to solve real-world problems & generate conclusions. | - Evaluate conclusions based on quantitative information to determine reasonableness.  
- Interpret statistical relationships differentiating between causation and correlation. |
| Ethics and Social Responsibility | - Compare and contrast differing ethical perspectives.  
- Identify avenues for personal action on social and ethical issues.  
- Describe how ideologies and assumptions can influence ethical perspectives. | - Identify and analyze real world ethical problems or dilemmas.  
- Analyze the social consequences of individual and collective behaviors.  
- Describe current ethical issues in a disciplinary field or profession. |
| Diversity of Human Experience | - Identify the contributions of diverse groups to social, cultural, and scientific knowledge.  
- Collaborate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds. | Explain interrelationships among the concepts of power, bias, prejudice, and discrimination.  
- Identify and analyze examples of discrimination at personal, societal, and institutional levels. |
2. Teach in an interdisciplinary framework.

A central aspect of General Education reform at PSU is the commitment to interdisciplinarity throughout a student’s entire course of study. Freshman Inquiry and Sophomore Inquiry faculty work in multidisciplinary teams and can expect to do some teaching outside of their area of expertise.

FRINQ faculty work with professors of different disciplinary backgrounds in theme-based teams. These teams meet as needed to collaborate on text assignments and common learning outcomes for the course. To ensure that students are introduced to different disciplinary perspectives within the theme, faculty are encouraged to visit one another’s classes throughout the year.

SINQ faculty also work within teams under the guidance of the Cluster Coordinator to develop courses that prepare students for the junior-level courses in the Cluster. Examples of team collaboration among different sections of a SINQ include: meeting shared learning outcomes, having a common assignment, and sharing a common text. Because these courses serve as introductions to Upper Division Clusters that consist of courses from multiple departments and disciplines, SINQ courses are expected to represent that interdisciplinarity.

**Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

As University Studies curriculum emphasizes interdisciplinary content and the knowledge and application of teaching and learning strategies, it is expected that the scholarship of discovery within a discipline and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) are appropriate areas of emphasis for the shared faculty. SoTL means integrating the experience of teaching with the scholarship of research. It is the ongoing and cumulative intellectual inquiry, through systematic observations and ongoing investigations, by faculty into the nature of learning and the impact of teaching upon it. This definition by Hutchings & Schulman in *The scholarship of teaching and learning: New elaborations, new developments* shapes the evaluation standard developed by Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Campus Program and with the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE).

“I truly believe that I have demonstrated learning in all four of the University Studies’ goals... The most important goal I have achieved this year, however, has been the development of my ethics, and my newfound understanding of what it means to be socially responsible. I have learned this year, through many assignments and readings, that being an ethical person and being responsible not just for your own well-being, but for the well-being of others, are some of the most noble goals a human being could have.”

—FRINQ Student, final reflection “On Democracy”
3. **Supervise mentors and work with them to develop curriculum for mentor sessions.**

The University Studies Mentor Program engages upper division undergraduate students and graduate students to partner with faculty and act as mentors for all Freshman and Sophomore inquiry courses. Undergraduates connect with students as *Peer Mentors* while facilitating semi-weekly sessions, and graduate students perform the *Grad Mentor* role while facilitating weekly sessions. These mentor sessions provide opportunities for subsets of students from the main class to interact in smaller groups.

The central intention of the Mentor program is that Peer Mentors be “expert students” who can model strategies for academic success, while helping students through the course and refining their learning strategies along the way. The intent of the Grad Mentor program is to build on the concept of the “expert student” by emphasizing advancement of students’ skills in writing, research, critical thinking, and quantitative literacy. In addition, developing students’ academic skill set, both Peer and Grad mentors coach and assist students in adapting to PSU, work to increase students’ sense of community within PSU, and help students learn the language of professors’ expectations and university culture.

A mentor’s work is successfully carried out through a close working relationship with their faculty partner. Faculty members supervise the mentor to develop lesson plans for mentor sessions that enhance and extend the skills students need to be successful in the main class.

The following guidelines are intended to clarify mentor roles and responsibilities and serve as a starting point for discussion toward an effective and positive collaboration.

**Mentor Position Descriptions**

**Peer Mentors** – Peer Mentors are awarded for work up to 20 hours per week and their awards are based on their attending main sessions (2.5 hours/week), the teaching they perform in the mentor sessions (6 hours/week), meeting with faculty to plan mentor sessions (approx. 1 hour/week), and attending ongoing mentor development sessions (approximately 1 hour/week). Peer mentors do not do any grading for the course other than to evaluate student participation in the mentor sessions.

**Grad Mentors** - Grad Mentors are contracted to work up to 10 hours per week per course and their stipends are based on their attending main sessions, the teaching they perform in the mentor sessions, grading a small amount of student coursework generated in mentor sessions, and attending ongoing mentor development sessions. As a result, assuming responsibility for leading main class sessions and taking on large amounts of course grading are *outside the purview of the grad mentor contractual agreement*. That said, one objective of the Grad Mentor Program is to provide graduate students with opportunities to further their professional development. Thus, regarding grad mentors leading main class sessions or grading can be made if done so with the specific intention of enhancing the grad mentor’s professional development for example:

- Grad Mentors may take responsibility for one or two main class sessions in a term on topics related to their area of expertise. In this case, faculty should work closely with mentors to develop lesson plans for these classes.

- It may be appropriate for a graduate student to participate in the grading of a major assignment (such as one short research paper), but this should only be undertaken when the professor is willing to work closely with the graduate student to discuss grading practices and expectations. In such cases, the faculty member should also participate in grading the assignment.

- If a Grad Mentor is assigned to grade, the task should focus on “low-stakes” assignments (e.g., journals, short papers, informal writing) and not for “high-stakes” grading (e.g., major papers, exams, final projects).
- The hours per week for Grad Mentor grading tasks ideally should be limited to no more than 1 hour per week on average given the .25 FTE appointment.

- The advantages and goals of NOT having a Grad Mentor grade are these: (a) the mentor can truly be a “peer” to all students in the class without the biasing effect of being an evaluator of their work (i.e., a student getting “A”s can feel just as comfortable approaching the mentor as a student getting lower grades), and (b) mentors are best trained and able to assist ALL students in writing within mentor session with focused writing workshops versus spending individual hours grading.

As a general rule, the Director of Mentor Programs should be advised of any work (e.g., grading or leading of main class sessions) that is outside the grad mentor contractual agreement. The Director of Mentor Program will keep track of these activities for the purpose of writing detailed letters of recommendation.

Mentor Responsibilities

1) Lead mentored inquiry sessions by implementing lesson plans that have been developed with the faculty partner.
2) Provide feedback to students on their work in the mentor sessions and provide faculty with information on students’ grades as related to these sessions.
3) Attend all faculty-led class sessions and help track attendance.
4) Assist in the faculty-led class, as agreed upon by the professor and mentor (e.g., by modeling appropriate student behavior in the classroom or by facilitating discussion groups).
5) Attend regularly-scheduled meetings with the faculty partner to plan curriculum for mentor sessions and discuss student progress.
6) In consultation with their faculty partners, provide informal coaching, advising, and referral for students to connect them with PSU resources.
7) Deal with problems with students, faculty, and program in a constructive and direct manner, seeking assistance when necessary.
8) Assist students in the development of ePortfolios.

Mentor Skills List

Mentors have been trained specifically in the following areas:
1) Elements of the writing process (idea generation, thesis construction, drafting, editing techniques, citations, plagiarism, and using the Ways of Writing text)
2) Critical reading
3) Basic quantitative literacy (data recording, basic interpretation, and basic use of Microsoft Excel)
4) Facilitating small group discussion
5) Facilitating cooperative group work
6) Unpacking assignment expectations
7) Basic library research
8) Accessing ePortfolio technology

“Inquiry and Critical Thinking was probably the area I think I grew the most in. First of all, no matter what subject the class is on, in every single class we ever had, we had to use inquiry and critical thinking skills. The word Inquiry is even in the title of the class, and for good reason.”

FRINQ STUDENT REFLECTION, WAYS OF KNOWING 2007-08
4. Make use of inquiry-based (or project-based) teaching practices.

University Studies is based in constructivist educational philosophy, which encompasses active learning models. Many faculty draw on the work of Paulo Friere, Alexander Astin, John Dewey, and William Perry in their curriculum development.

What follows are some quick strategies for incorporating active student learning in the classroom, many of these are adopted from Karen Timberlake.

**Pick-A-Passage** (from Prof. Martha Balshem, PSU): Students are asked to bring a notecard to class which references a particular page number from their reading. Remind them NOT to copy the passage but only to cite it. They then write a short reflection on why this passage stood out for them. The reasons might be personal, intellectual, emotive, or otherwise. These cards are their “tickets” into class. Especially early in the year, these passages form the basis of classroom discussions. Faculty can ask students to share their passages and use these points to generate questions, ideas, identify common interests, etc.

**Clarification Pause**: The professor takes a lecture break every 15-20 minutes. During the short break, students discuss the ideas from the lecture with each other, clarify their notes, and ask questions. The faculty circulates about the room and helps them review the ideas.

**Shared Paragraph**: During class or at the end of class, students are given a few minutes to write a short paragraph in their own words that explains what major ideas discussed that day. They share their paragraphs with other students and give feedback. They may turn the paragraphs in as they leave class, if the professor chooses. Faculty returns them the next day and discusses any topics that were not clear. Faculty obtains instant feedback and students learn to summarize information.

**Fish Bowl**: Usually a small group of students (4-5) come to the front of the room and begin a conversation, often using “pick-a-passage” cards as a starting point for their discussion. Students discuss a question for 10 minutes, then select other students from the audience to replace them in the front of the room. This is a good way to get otherwise quiet students to participate.

**One-Minute Paper**: During a short pause in class, students are asked to write for one minute about a section in the chapter or about a concept they just worked on. These papers are turned in and the faculty quickly looks them over. Students learn to clarify the ideas in the reading or lecture material. The paper provides feedback to the instructor on student’s ability to understand the concepts in the text.

**Structured Questions in a Round**: Every student writes a question about the discussion or the reading on the top of a piece of paper, they then pass their question to the person on their right (or left), their neighbor answers the question and asks a further related question before passing it again to their right. This exercise gives students practice to respond in writing, summarizing their ideas.

**Case Studies**: These can be great resources for interdisciplinary learning, teamwork as well as bringing active learning to the classroom. Cases can be simple or complex and usually draw on interesting and engaging problems in the “real world.”

**Problem Based Learning**: This uses a “case study” approach to help students learning “active” problem solving strategies. The University of Delaware has a great evolving clearinghouse of problem-based case studies for teaching students to analyze problems [here](#).

**ePortfolios**: Google Sites and other free platforms have many tools with which student progress and reflections may be tracked each term. Electric portfolios aid faculty in seeing how students engage with the four University Studies goals and whether they are meeting expectations of the program. For students portfolios act as a tool to process the classroom and mentor session experience as they apply the UNST goals to life off the PSU campus.
Assessment Purposes and Protocols

The UNST assessment program is a means for improving student learning and enhancing faculty reflective practice. It seeks to encourage faculty to take productive and creative risks in the classroom to maximize the learning potential of the class. [The questions for each of these assessment instruments will be made available on the University Studies web page]

FRINQ Assessment Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment activity</th>
<th>Week of Term</th>
<th>Type/Purpose</th>
<th>Mentor Role</th>
<th>Administration details</th>
<th>Results Back</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior Learning Assessment</td>
<td>Week 1 – Fall only</td>
<td>Survey - assess students’ prior learning, educational practices and background</td>
<td>Direct students to on-line survey during mentor session. Be sure students get correct log-in number. Survey takes about 10-15 minutes.</td>
<td>Each student needs to be given their assigned log-in number. Survey takes about 10-15 minutes.</td>
<td>By week 3, summary report of class responses to faculty and mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Term On-line Assessment</td>
<td>Week 3-4</td>
<td>On-Line survey - assess student’s experiences in the course, course improvement</td>
<td>Administer survey to students during mentor session if your class is going to do the assessment</td>
<td>Instructions are provided to faculty. Faculty may do In-class or On-line assessment. They will not usually do both. Survey takes about 5-10 minutes.</td>
<td>Report including student comments to faculty and mentor within a few days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Term (these are developmental and the questions change each quarter to reflect the year-long nature of FRINQ)</td>
<td>Week 7-10</td>
<td>On-line Survey - students' experience in the course, response to pedagogy and curriculum, evaluation of progress toward UNST goals, course improvement</td>
<td>Direct students to on-line survey during mentor session.</td>
<td>Instructions are provided to faculty. Survey takes about 5 minutes.</td>
<td>Report summarizing results for class sent to faculty and mentor after grades are posted.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## SINQ Assessment Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment activity</th>
<th>Week of Term</th>
<th>Type/Purpose</th>
<th>Mentor Role</th>
<th>Administration details</th>
<th>Results Back</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior Learning Assessment</td>
<td>Week 1 – Fall only</td>
<td>Survey - assess students’ prior learning, educational practices and background</td>
<td>Direct students to on-line survey during mentor session. Be sure students get correct log-in number. Survey takes about 10-15 minutes.</td>
<td>Each student needs to be given their assigned log-in number. Survey takes about 10-15 minutes.</td>
<td>By week 3, summary report of class responses to faculty and mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Term</td>
<td>Week 3-4</td>
<td>On-line survey - assess student’s experiences in the course, course improvement</td>
<td>Direct students to on-line survey during mentor session.</td>
<td>Required for all SINQ courses. Instructions go to faculty and mentors. Survey takes about 5 minutes</td>
<td>Report including student comments to faculty and mentor within three days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Term</td>
<td>Week 8-10</td>
<td>On-line Survey - students’ experience in the course, response to pedagogy and curriculum, evaluation of progress toward UNST goals</td>
<td>Direct students to on-line survey during mentor session.</td>
<td>Required for all SINQ courses. Instructions go to faculty and mentors. Survey takes about 10 minutes</td>
<td>Report summarizing results for class sent to faculty and mentor after grades are posted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Work Sample Collection</td>
<td>Week 8-10</td>
<td>A sample of student writing will be collected from one course per faculty for the year. Investigate types of SINQ written assignments, students’ performance related to UNST Writing outcomes.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Cluster Coordinator or Assessment Director will coordinate collection of a random sample of 5 papers. Cluster coordinators and SINQ faculty will review student work together.</td>
<td>Within a month after review.</td>
</tr>
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Support for Faculty

To support faculty in addressing program expectations regarding teaching, University Studies offers a variety of faculty development opportunities including workshops and brownbags. The Center for Academic Excellence also offers a series of workshops throughout the year specifically geared towards learner-based teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning. The Freshman and Sophomore Inquiry Coordinators are also available to discuss ideas for course development and implementation.

Faculty facing special teaching challenges are invited to request assistance from the University Studies Program Director, the Director of Freshman Year Experience, Director of Sophomore Inquiry and Clusters, Cluster Coordinators, or the Director for Mentor Programs. The University Studies Program Director has the final responsibility for assisting faculty members facing intractable problems. In such cases, the University Studies Program Director and the faculty member share the responsibility of working cooperatively towards the best resolution of the situation.

For more information about University Studies visit [www.pdx.edu/unst](http://www.pdx.edu/unst)