**Proposal to Eliminate Symbolic Systems courses from General Educational, 4/20/17**

Background: The General Education Framework currently describes Symbolic Systems courses as an alternative to the Foreign Language requirement for students in high-credit majors. High-credit majors, or *extended majors*, are defined by OCHE as undergraduate majors that exceed the normal range of required credit hours (30-48); thus extended majors require students to complete 49-80 credits (BOR policy 303.1). The current practice requires majors seeking an exemption to (1) demonstrate that the major requires more than 48 credit (not including courses that fulfill general education requirements), and (2) submit a proposal for a General Education “symbolic systems” designation for a course or sequence of courses.

According to the current General Education framework, Symbolic systems courses are defined as follows:

Each of these courses presents the foundations of a symbolic system, defined as a relationship that maps real-world objects, principles and doctrines with abstractions of the real-world.

Symbolic systems facilitate communication in specialized ways but do not comprise a spoken or written language by which members of a culture typically communicate with each other.

Upon completion of a symbolic systems course or courses, students will be able to:

1. demonstrate an understanding of the symbols and the transformations of the system;
2. relay and interpret information in terms of the given symbolic system;
3. apply creative thinking using the symbolic system in order to solve problems and communicate ideas;

In most cases, this equates to a sequence of math or statistics courses that are required for the major, while a few majors require students to learn computer languages or other highly specialized coding techniques that are relevant to the discipline.

During the spring 2015 rolling review, the committee found that the review process for symbolic systems exceptions consisted primarily of performing an independent count to verify eligibility; i.e., checking that the major is an extended major exceeding 48 credits. The further review of the actual symbolic systems courses submitted for designation was either nominal or problematic due to the nature of the courses. On the one hand, many proposals consisted of a statistics sequence, which rendered review a nominal process of noting these. Based on current precedent, it would be unreasonable to disallow one statistics sequence when other majors count these. Any further argument about whether this was “appropriate to the major” goes beyond the scope of the General Education Committee to decide – since that decision belongs to the professionals in the major. On the other hand, if the courses are more technical, such as coding languages, review becomes problematic because General Education reviewers tend to lack the specialized expertise needed to understand such proposals or to evaluate what is appropriate to the major. In both cases the review seemed to go beyond the scope of the General Education Committee or reduce this to a nominal process. This led reviewers to question the purpose of reviewing these courses. In each case, the courses were already requirements of the major and added no additional requirements that were “general.” This appears to place an unnecessary burden on both the faculty required to submit the forms and the committee members tasked with reviewing them. We have also heard from students and advisors that this element of the GE framework is often confusing for students to navigate.

In addition, some broader questions have arisen concerning the validity of the idea of viewing symbolic systems courses as an alternative to traditional languages. Some faculty question whether this is valid or potentially misleading to students. Since many of the approved symbolic systems courses consist of math or statistics, this may lead students to infer that mathematics or statistics is equivalent to learning a foreign language, when in fact these are very different intellectual skills with very different learning outcomes. Accordingly, it makes sense to eliminate a requirement that has these confusing elements and adds nothing but nominal designations to the General Education Framework.

Impact:

This would not change any of the current requirements for four years majors, but does stand to simplify the advising process and make the General Education requirements easier to navigate.

* Symbolic systems courses remain listed as major requirements
* Exemptions to language requirement are based on high number of credits
* Reduces burden on faculty in majors by requiring only one form for requests for exemption
* Reduces workload for faculty participating in General Education review subcommittees workload by eliminating a nominal review of courses that are already major requirements.
* Improves the integrity of course review by eliminating a meaningless or nominal component.
* Eliminates unnecessary and confusing information from GE framework, thereby making it easier to navigate for students and advisors.

In the case of students seeking the two-year Associate of Arts degree, the impacts require special consideration. Because no foreign language courses are currently offered at Missoula College, the completion of this requirement places a significant hardship on many of these students. As a result, some students have been encouraged to complete a symbolic systems sequence as an alternative requiring approval by the Graduation Appeals Committee. Accordingly, the elimination of Symbolic Systems will eliminate this option. While the two-year degree does not fall under the definition of extended majors, we believe this unique situation merits a special exception from the Group III requirement for students graduating with the Associate of Arts degree. Students transferring into four year majors without graduating would still be required to complete the foreign language requirement unless they transfer into an excepted major.

* Eliminate a barrier to graduation for AA students, which could have a positive impact on enrollment and degree completion.
* Reduce burden on Graduation Appeals committee.
* Associate of Arts graduates who seek to enroll in four year degrees would be subject to the same requirements as similar graduates from other institutions.
* Students who transfer into four-year degree programs without completing the Associate of Arts degree would still be required to complete Group III.

Proposed Revision:

Group III: Exceptions to the Modern and Classical Language requirement

The majors listed below have been granted exceptions to the Modern and Classical Language requirement. Students graduating in any one of these majors are not required to complete the Modern and Classical Language requirement. Students graduating with an Associate of Arts degree have also been granted an exception to the Group III requirements. Missoula College students who continue to Mountain Campus without completing the AA degree will need to complete Group III unless their declared four-year major has been granted an exception.

[Table of excepted majors]