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Oregon State U. Adopts 'Baccalaureate Core' Requirement

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In a few years, Oregon State University will know whether its new "baccalaureate core" curriculum will work. Its planners are tentatively optimistic.

New freshmen are the first to study under the plan, which aims to promote general education throughout a student's college years. It will apply to undergraduates in all of the university's 12 colleges, from liberal arts to forestry.

The range of the program demonstrates both its strengths and its liabilities, according to Bruce Shepard, assistant vice-president for undergraduate studies. For example, he said that because students in some pre-professional programs have a limited number of electives available, Oregon State was unable to include a foreign-language requirement.

The university did beef up its writing requirements, asking students to take two lower-level courses and an advanced course that will deal with writing in their major field of study. The curriculum also emphasizes critical thinking, diversity, and international issues. A physical-fitness requirement has been replaced by courses on health, which will include such topics as diet and safe sex.

Most unusual -- especially for a large university -- are the requirements in science, as well as mandatory upper-level seminars. Administrators are already worried that the university will be under a strain to meet the demand placed by 13,000 undergraduates.

Every Oregon State student will have to take one physical-science course, one biological-science course, and a second course in either field. All three will include laboratory sections.

Interdisciplinary upper-level seminars will address two topics: contemporary global issues, and science, technology, and society.

The goal is to get students to realize how their studies relate to a changing world, said Mr. Shepard. "People in eastern Oregon who are going to grow grain for the rest of their lives will be affected by what happens in Asia," he said.

Some 20 courses have already been approved as meeting each of requirements, but many more will have to be created.

Among the global-issues titles: "Medical Anthropology," "Business and Asian Culture," and "Wealth and Poverty." Among the science titles: "Plagues, Pests, and Politics," "Food Law," and "Agroforestry."



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