# NAU_PrimH_K Liberal Studies Program

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**Major prefix prohibition policy change**

In Fall 2011, the Liberal Studies Program completed its program review which culminated in a campus visit on September 18-21 by two prominent figures in liberal education. The September site visit was preceded by four open campus forums on the LS Program held throughout February and March 2011.

**Recommendation**

Our external reviewers wrote that “The LSC and Curriculum Committee **should re-examine the policy that students cannot double count courses with their major prefix within the liberal studies requirements**. This policy **confuses students when they change majors** and find out that a distribution block they had previously completed becomes one in which they are required to take additional courses. This change in policy may also result in fewer students needing distribution block courses.” Ann S. Ferren (Association of American Colleges and Universities) and David Reinhold (Western Michigan University), recommendation 3 in Chapter 4 in *Program Review of* [NAU] *Liberal Studies: External Evaluators Report* (<http://www2.nau.edu/~d-ugstdy/lsprogramreview/>).

**Why make this change?**

In open sessions during the campus visit Dr. Ann Ferren observed that having **such a prohibition** on students taking a LS course in the major **was quite unusual.** It goes ultimately to the heart of several key concerns:

**Potential Pitfalls for students**

* Under the old policy, if a NAU student elects to change to a major after taking a course from that department, **they may lose the completed LS distribution block course credit**.
* The prohibition may cause some students to **take additional courses** which will **delay progress to graduation**—a real concern to students, parents, and NAU stakeholders.
* Needing to take extra courses represents a **real extra cost to students**.
* Students are forced to enroll in LS courses to retake units previously earned in the distribution block—**taking seats that other students could use.**

**We have a liberal education program**

This issue also goes to the heart of liberal education, where the focus is on

**preparing students to meet student learning outcomes**—in our program those that define the **distribution blocks and essential skills** (critical thinking, writing, oral communication, and so forth). General education programs focus on breadth of course taking, while liberal education programs align courses to achieve defined learning outcomes.

**Does this not apply to only a few NAU students?**

No—for students who enter as first year students at NAU, **57-58% will change majors in the first two years**. Not surprisingly, **most students change their major to one in which they have some experience**, usually gained through a Liberal Studies course. Under the old policy, any student who found their way to a new major through a Liberal Studies course loses their LS credit once they elect the new degree plan. This policy change would allow students to keep their earned LS credits, irrespective of their major.

**Won’t students then take all of their Liberal Studies courses in their own major?**

No—of the 63 major prefixes in the LS Program (MAT or ENG, for example), **only 11** have courses in **more than 2 distribution blocks**. Many of these disciplines are **very interdisciplinary** in approach, such as Ethnic Studies, Applied Indigenous Studies, and Humanities, for example. There are **only 2 prefixes** that have courses in all **four distribution blocks**—Anthropology and Philosophy which have a **smaller number of majors**. The **largest majors** such as Business, Education, Hotel & Restaurant Management, and Biology, either **do not offer LS courses or only a very few**. So, **the majority of students would not be able to take many of their LS courses in major**.

Anthropology, Philosophy, or any **department always remains free to ask their students**, either informally through advisement or formally through a curricular change, **to seek out non-major courses for their experience in LS**. This shaping of LS course options is encouraged as part of the Global Learning Initiative for those departments that need to seek particular experiences for their students to fulfill GLI outcomes through a subset of LS courses. Ultimately, **the department retains control on this issue**.

**Actions**

The Liberal Studies Committee voted at its January 21, 2014 meeting to change the policy on the prohibition of students taking courses with the prefix of their home major to meet Liberal Studies distribution requirements. If passed by the Senate, Fall 2014 is the intended effective date for the new policy

**Policy language, effective Fall 2014**

You may use 9 units with the course prefix of your major to meet liberal studies distribution requirements.

**NOTE**: The Liberal Studies Director will maintain data on all students affected by this policy to determine how the policy contributes to student achievement, enrollment patterns and if it meets the needs of LS Program and the departments.

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