

APPENDIX A: A brief history of some of the reasons Fort Lewis College shifted to a curriculum made overwhelmingly of 4-credit hour courses *(Prepared by Dr. Kathleen Fine-Dare, who has been on the FLC faculty since 1983 and is has served as past Chair of the General Education Council and twice as Chair of the Department of Anthropology. She is an affiliated professor of Native American & Indigenous Studies, and has twice served as Coordinator of Gender & Women's Studies).*

SOBA and Mathematics

The first program that shifted to largely four credit hour courses, sometime in the mid to late 1980s, was Accounting. The rationale for this was presented to the Faculty Assembly Executive committee in the early 1990s and a suggestion made by the chair of the Accounting program, Dr. Joe Colgan, that other programs might consider looking into this because it would a) allow for more time to present more material in the courses and to work with students on working on problems; and b) allow faculty members to juggle one fewer course in providing quality teaching. The Department of Mathematics followed shortly thereafter.

Non-Western course instruction

Some programs, such as that of political science, had begun shifting to four credit hour courses independently of the discussion of a more general move because of the necessity of providing more depth and breadth to the one course students were required to take to fulfill their "E" or non-Western studies requirement under the General Distribution program. For example, the political science course in Comparative Politics was designed to be 4 credit hours earlier than 1984 because of this issue. The Department of Anthropology considered following suit, considering it problematic that an institution dedicated to educating Native American students and offering programs of study that would raise student consciousness regarding human diversity only required 1 course in non-Western studies. Because increasing these "E" courses to 4 credits would add fourteen additional hours of non-Western contemplation to a student's college career, the Department of Anthropology began increasing some courses, such as Ethnology of South America, from 3 to 4 credits.

Freshman learning experiences at a liberal arts college

In order to enhance freshman learning experiences in a manner that would mitigate the "silo" effect of majors, make the liberal arts experience at FLC more writing oriented and interdisciplinary, and to enhance overall diversity education, two major initiatives were founded by deans and funded externally that influenced the curriculum well into the new century. One was the Ford-Foundation funded Southwest I and II program, and the other was the National Endowment for the Humanities-funded Human Heritage I and II program, which built on the experience of the Southwest I and II program. Human Heritage was conceived as something that would be required of all freshmen students, who would read original intellectual works spanning antiquity to the present day. These works illustrated intellectual, cultural, political, historical, aesthetic and other creations of humanity in societies and eras ranging from ancient Greece to the Holocaust. Students read about Native North America, Native South America, Revolutionary United States history, and Chinese voyages of discovery. Both sections of this course—taught by faculty ranging from the School of Business Administration to programs in biology, psychology, anthropology, history, English, and art, to name a few—were each four credit hours in length, to provide the time needed to work in depth with freshmen students in a seminar format.

The experience of teaching in this program inspired many faculty members to revisit their course curricula and to provide similar breadth, depth, critical thinking, interdisciplinary insights, and writing. A move towards 4 credit hour courses thus was enhanced in the mid 1990s.

Interdisciplinary programs

As many faculty members increasingly participated outside their disciplinary “comfort zone” in realizing the challenging Southwest, Human Heritage, and burgeoning Honors programs, serious work also began on finding ways to realize a **national, ongoing trend** towards interdisciplinary programs that would address areal (e.g., Latin American studies), topical/social justice (e.g., gender & women’s studies, environmental studies), and ethnic (e.g., Native American & Indigenous Studies) realms of inquiry and action. As faculty members in primarily the humanities and social sciences began designing courses that would have MULTIPLE uses—i.e., count towards fulfillment of requirements in other disciplines, such as environmental or gender & women’s studies or Native American studies—they realized that they needed extra time in the classroom to cover BOTH the “disciplinary” and the “interdisciplinary” content and concepts. The college received a significant financial savings through this administratively-approved strategy as it did not have to hire additional faculty to cover new interdisciplinary program needs. This logic worked well during the era of the Thematic Studies and Education for Global Citizenship interdisciplinary general education programs, which were built on the basis of experience in the Southwest, Human Heritage, and other interdisciplinary programs.

The “move” towards four credit hour programs

In the mid- 1990s, several programs began moving towards four credit hour programs. Because of the faculty of some of these programs were also heavily committed to interdisciplinary programs, it made sense that a) fourteen credit hours’ worth of instructional time be added to most courses; and b) that faculty members be able to concentrate their “out of comfort zone” intellectual preparation on three rather than four course preparations.

The dean of Arts & Sciences at that time was supportive of a move to four credit hours, ONLY if the following conditions were met:

- a) That each course going from 3 to 4 credits be significantly modified in title, description, syllabus, and or other matters that would demonstrate the soundness of the rationale. In other words, courses could not just add an hour and stay significantly the same;
- b) That 4-credit programs be significantly restructured so that students would NOT be taking any extra course credits to fulfill the requirements of the major. They would thus take fewer, richer courses to fulfill the major in the same number of hours; and
- c) That course caps be increased so that FTE production would remain flat.

A great deal of hard work went into the realized of the above by all departments. For instance, the Department of English condensed a requirement of two 3-hour courses into one 4-hour course. To then reduce that one four hour course by fourteen instructional hours down to three would take an additional amount of very difficult conceptual work.

It was also assumed that faculty scholarly production would and should increase as a result of the HOURLY load staying the same but the number of preparations being reduced.

Additional programs that shifted to a four-credit hour model over the years included several in business administration, plus anthropology, philosophy, sociology, political science, English and communications, art, modern languages, history, psychology, and Native American & Indigenous studies.

Challenges to four credit hour courses over the years (i.e., challenges to the majority of the FLC curriculum)

When the state mandated a change from 128 to 120 credit hours for Colorado programs of instruction in the early 2000s, departments were instructed to reduce major requirements accordingly. Some did this and restructured in good faith, while others found ways to double count several general education courses in both the major and the general education requirements, which effectively forced students to take only certain general education courses if they wanted an on-time graduation date in their major. Some heavily-loaded majors began looking to the 4-credit hour general education courses as the primary culprit in their students graduating from a liberal arts college with almost no electives and little to no exploration possibilities outside of their major. This began what can be called a “culture” or “labor” wars era in FLC history, where a push towards reducing four credit hours to three was escalated, based on disciplinary expedience that did not take into account the history of the administratively-approved move to four credit hour disciplines and remains with us today.