

WMU Essential Studies

Advancing WES: Insights,
Assessments, and Future Directions

1

Results from the 2024-25 WES Comprehensive Review

Elissa Allen, Chair WES Executive Advisory Committee
Jonathan Bush, WES Faculty Director



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Merze Tate College

WMU Essential Studies



files > WES Comprehensive Folder Additional Information				
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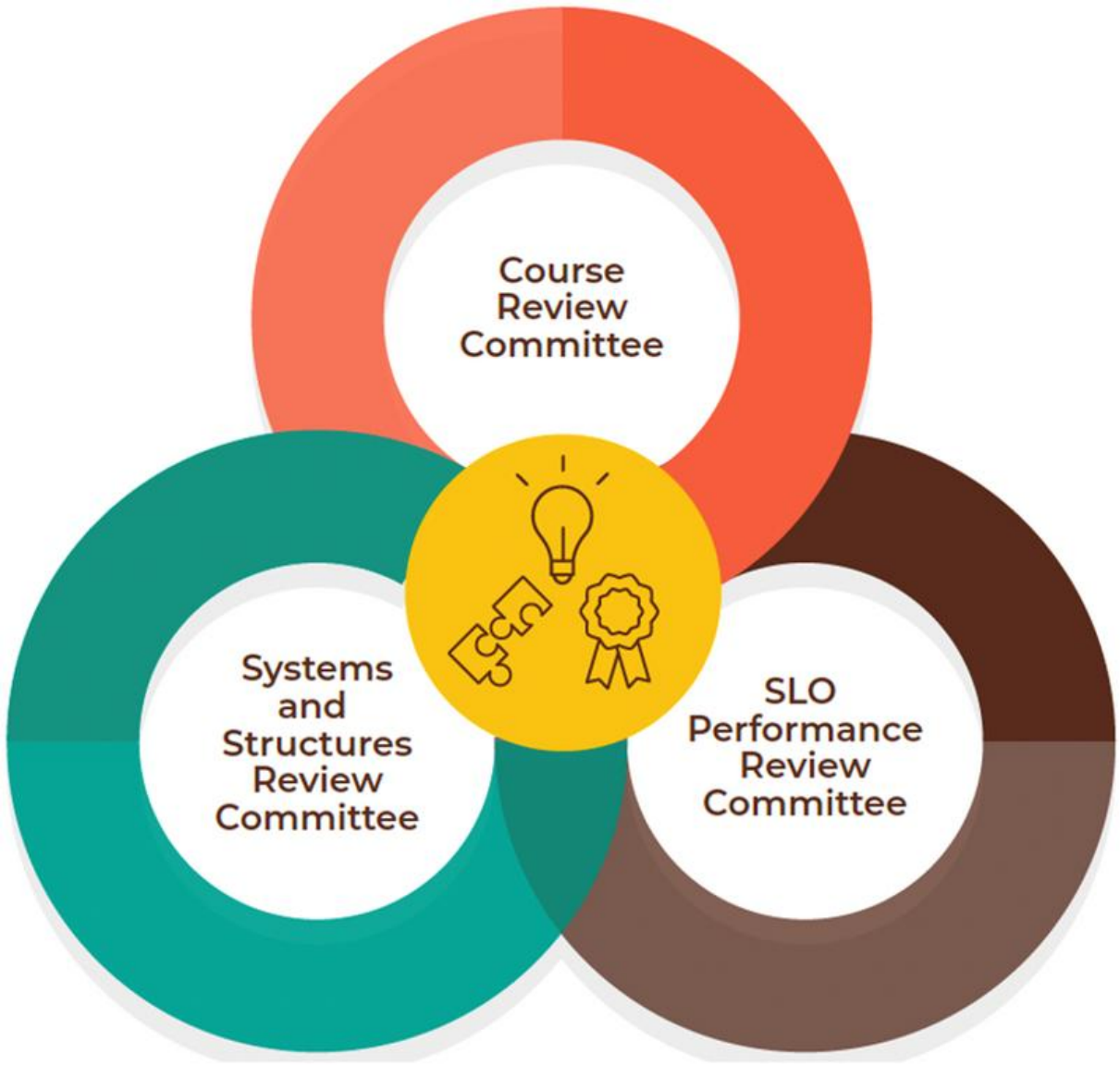
WES Report Archive

- The WES review report is publicly available at the [2024-2045 WES Comprehensive Review](https://wmich.edu/essentialstudies/review).
- The report includes a link to a SharePoint archive of all materials relevant to each committee's work and kept as a record of processes and data.

<https://wmich.edu/essentialstudies/review>

WMU Essential Studies Review Process

Y1 (2021-22)	Y2 (2022-23)	Y3 (2023-24)	Y4 (2024-25) PROGRAM REVIEW
WRITING	LOCAL/NATIONAL	GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES	Subcommittees review core information
SOCIETIES and CULTURE	SCIENCE/TECH with LAB	ARTISTIC THEORY and PRACTICE	
WORLD LANGUAGES/ CULTURES	SCIENCE/TECH	PERSONAL WELLNESS	
ORAL/DIGITAL	INQUIRY/ ENGAGEMENT	QUANTITATIVE REASONING	
*SUSTAINABILITY and D/I SLOs reviewed during the regular review.			



- Academic Year 2025-26 is for review and implementation.
- WES Review cycle begins again in AY 2026-27.

WMU Essential Studies

Timeline



EXPLORATION

Need for the General Education Program to be Assessed. Experts, Lunch forums, surveys, self-study

2011-2015

Over 150 WMU Faculty Involved



PLANNING

Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee Seated and Charged

2016

Framework Developed

Student Learning Outcomes

Rubric Development



MOAs

Multiple MOAs presented to the Faculty Senate for a vote

2016-2018

Program Name Model



PROGRAM GUIDELINES

New Standing Committees (WES EXEC, CRAC), Additional MOAs

2018-2019

Guidelines for course approvals with an assessment

Courses Reviewed



LAUNCH

Program Implementation

2020-2025

Program Launched in 2020

Cyclic Review Framework Developed a 4-year cycle

Articulation Agreements with Community Colleges

Troubleshooting



Assessment at the Core: A Brief History of **WMU Essential Studies**

ESSENTIAL STUDIES TIMELINE

By-the-Numbers: Spring 2025



Overall WES Course

TOTAL COURSES:	364
Level 1	79
Level 2	196
Level 3	89
CAS	236
CoA	2
CEHD	20
CEAS	22
CFA	31
CHHS	27
HCoB	17
LHC	9

WES Course Enrollment:

	Sections	Enrolled	SCH Produced
TOTAL:	656	21,014	66,108
Level 1	186	5,881	18,102
Level 2	360	12,201	38,810
Level 3	110	2,932	9,196
CAS	370	11,682	37,568
CoA	3	67	201
CEHD	70	1,706	4,857
CEAS	32	901	2,837
CFA	32	2,039	6,651
CHHS	72	2,090	6,413
HCoB	67	2,405	7,209
LHC	10	124	372

WES courses

- 78% full;
- produced 43% of total WMU UG SCH. (66,108/153,968)

By-the-Numbers: Fall 2025



Overall WES Course Portfolio

TOTAL COURSES:	407
Level 1	87
Level 2	213
Level 3	107
CAS	258
CoA	2
CEHD	24
CEAS	22
CFA	35
CHHS	29
HCoB	23
LHC	14

WES Course Enrollment: Fall 2025

	Sections	Enrolled	SCH Produced
TOTAL:	742	23,815	74,315
Level 1	271	8,447	25,931
Level 2	356	12,594	39,566
Level 3	115	2,774	8,818
CAS	413	12,981	41,225
CoA	6	400	1,200
CEHD	74	1,853	5,265
CEAS	34	894	2,814
CFA	41	2,072	6,644
CHHS	81	2,638	8,112
HCoB	84	2,824	8,596
LHC	9	153	459

WES courses

- **78% full**
- **produced 43% of total WMU UG SCH. (74,315/171,283)**

2024-2025 WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee (WES EA)

- **Appointed Faculty Members**

- **Elissa Allen** (Vice Chair) (Health and Human Services) (25-26 Chair)
- **Decker Hains** (Business)
- **Elizabeth Isidro** (Education and Human Development) (25-26 Vice Chair)
- **Lindsay Jeffers** Secretary) (Arts and Sciences)
- **Lei Meng** (Arts and Sciences)
- **Brenda Srof** (Health and Human Services)
- **Brian Tripp** (Arts and Sciences) (24-25 Outgoing Chair)
- **Kathryn Wagner** (Fine Arts)

- **Appointed Administrative Members**

- **Jessica Parker** (**Director**, Academic Advising, Merze Tate)
- **Luchara Wallace** (Dean, Merze Tate)

- **Advisory Members**

- **Jonathan Bush** (WMU Essential Studies Faculty Director)
- **Carrie Cumming** (Registrar)
- **Lisa DeChano-Cook** (Curriculum Manager)

2024-2025 WMU Essential Studies Course Review and Approval Committee (CRAC)

- **Appointed Faculty Members**

- **Carol Weideman (Chair)**
- **Kirsty Eisenhart**
- **Beth Ernst**
- **Anne-Marie GuidyOulai**
- **Dana Hammond**
- **Kwangmin Lee**
- **Vincent Lyon-Callo**
- **Matilda McLean**
- **Mustafa Mirzeler**
- **Agatha Slupek**
- **Nathan Tabor**

- **Advisory Members**

- **Jaquelyn Bizzell**
- **Nick Gauthier**
- **Anthony Helms**
- **Melinda Lockett**
- **Christine Robinson**
- **Colleen Stano**
- **Sharon VanDyken**
- **Lisa Dechano-Cook**
- **Jonathan Bush**

- **Ex-Officio**

- **Decker Haines**
- **Brian Tripp**

2024-25 WES Review Committees

WES Course Review Committee

Chairs: *Linda Borish, Cynthia Klekar-Cunningham*
Reviewed all WES courses
to determine placement and status.

WES Systems and Structure Review

Chairs: *Megan Hess, Veronica Rice McCray*
Broadly reviewed the entire WES
program and processes.

WES SLO Performance Review Committee

Chairs: *Daria Orlowska, Eli Rubin*
Conducted a deep dive into all of
WES SLO performance data to seek relevant
trends and issues.

WES Student Perspectives (WSA-led)

Chair: *Liberty Kostrzwa* (with assistance from *Randy Ott*)
Conducted a survey and focus groups
with WMU students to better understand
student perceptions and knowledge of WES.

Some Key Findings and Outcomes

- **WMU Essential Studies is mostly working as developed.**
- The WES Review Cycle is now doctrinal and ongoing.
- Processes, procedures, and institutional knowledge all exist to keep it moving forward.
- This is the first iteration of the process. This was an accomplishment in itself:
 - We built the enduring structure and processes
 - We learned new questions to ask
 - We learned lessons for the next review.

Some Findings and Outcomes (By Topic)

- **Course Review**
 - Over 400 reviewed courses, only 12 were recommended for potential removal.
 - Generally, courses are being offered regularly. Less certainty about data collection and review.
- **Student Learning Outcomes**
 - Students are performing as expected.
 - Flawed data sets hamper detailed understanding (levels, SLOs)
 - More review of specific student audiences needed (1st gen, Pell, etc.).
- **Systems and Structures**
 - Systems are often too complex, detailed, or ill-defined
 - Need to streamline transfer, approval/revision, assessment, and course management procedures.
- **Student Perceptions**
 - Students understand the goals of WES and are following the scaffolded model but often choose courses for non-curricular reasons.

Response: Ongoing Improvement Initiatives

- One outcome is doing the review
- WES EA has begun four ongoing improvement initiatives.
 - **Revised Assessment Plan Templates and Processes**
 - **Revised/Improved SLO Outcome Rubrics**
 - **Improved Faculty Communication**
 - **Improved Transfer Assessment Process**

Key Initiative #1: Assessment and Review Processes

Issue/Need

- Assessment Plan Templates can be confusing and hard to use
- Poor/contradictory instructions for faculty
- No differentiation between large and small course
- Cyclic Review process is poorly defined

Results

- Too many rejected new courses or revisions

Current Initiatives

- New Assessment Plan Procedures and Guidelines:
- broad assessment, more instructor agency
- Redeveloped cyclic review process
- Revised CRAC operations
- Improved faculty communication

UPDATE:

Thanks to 2025-2026 CRAC Chair, Katherine Suender and the current committee, **CRAC approved 100% of submitted courses in Fall 2025.**

Standards were not lowered. The committee collaborated with faculty on proposals and gave opportunity to revisions during the review.

Key Initiative #2: Outcome Rubric Review

Issue/Need

- Some discrepancies/major variances in SLO outcome rubrics leads to confusion
 - Some are very short; others are highly detailed
 - Some include Outcome choices; others are controlled.
 - SSL: Scientific Literacy and “With a Lab:” two categories with same rubric
 - IFKL: Two versions, same SLO: "Humanities" and "Social Sciences"

Current Initiatives

- Reviewing all Outcome Rubrics to (1) simplify and (2) standardize Outcome Rubrics.

Key Initiative #3: Faculty Communication

Issue/Need

- Current faculty resources are scattered and confusing.
- No comprehensive and easy-to-access source. Faculty (Merze Tate and Faculty Senate) to find various information.
- Information is incomplete and contradictory

Result

- Confusion regarding faculty obligations and procedures
- Incomplete faculty understanding of WES goals and strategies

Current Initiative

- 2025-2026 WES Faculty Fellow Professor Beth Ernst is developing a communication plan and infrastructure for all instructors, including user-friendly WES Faculty website ("One-Stop Shop" dashboard for all faculty and advisor information).

UPDATE:

WES faculty website is underway, with plans for **soft-launch in early Spring 2026 and full launch by end of Spring 2026 semester.**

Key Initiative #4: WES Transfer Evaluations

Issue/Need

- Poorly articulated process for granting WES credit for transfer
- Advisors/Advising Directors had to make decisions with
- Departments tasked to make WES decisions beyond the

Result

- Inconsistent transfer credit
- Slow and ill-defined process
- Advisor and faculty confusion

Current Initiative

- New WES Transfer protocol now in place.
- Approved by Advising Director Council and WES EA
- Provides immediate processes for individual transfers, and faculty oversight.

UPDATE:

WES Transfer protocol is **now approved by both advising directors and WES EA.**

Process allows immediate transfer credit for incoming students and faculty oversight via WES EA for ongoing approval and inclusion in TES.

The Next WMU Essential Studies **Review Process**

Y1 (2025-26)	Y2 (2026-27)	Y3 (2027-28)	Y4 (28-29) PROGRAM REVIEW
	WRITING LOCAL/NATIONAL	GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ORAL/DIGITAL	Program review team will include a subcommittee: members of Executive Advisory, CRAC, UG Studies Council
IMPLEMENTATION YEAR	SCIENCE/TECH with LAB WORLD LANGUAGES/ CULTURES	SOCIETIES and CULTURE ARTISTIC THEORY and PRACTICE	
	SCIENCE/TECH	PERSONAL WELLNESS	
	INQUIRY/ ENGAGEMENT	QUANTITATIVE REASONING	
*PSL and DIL SLOs reviewed during the regular review.			

- **Academic Year 2025-26 is for review and implementation.**
- **Cyclic review occurs over two AY.**
- WES Review cycle begins again in AY 2026-27.
- Next WES Comprehensive Review will occur in AY 2028-29.

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