LEAP STATE INITIATIVE
Michigan
Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)
History of LEAP (generally taken form the AAC&U website):
Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) is a national initiative launched by AAC&U in 2005 to promote the importance of liberal education. The main argument is that America needs college graduates with advanced knowledge and intellectual skills to successfully function as responsible citizens. This advanced knowledge and skills can be organized into the following broad areas:

- Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world through study in the natural sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, languages, and the arts.
- Intellectual and practical skills such as inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and problem solving. Ideally these skills should be integrated throughout the curriculum in progressively more challenging formats.
- Active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges that fosters personal and social responsibility, local and global civic knowledge, intercultural knowledge and competency, ethical reasoning, and life-long learning.
History of Michigan LEAP Initiative
Several years ago representative from a couple of Michigan based public universities got together for dinner at an AAC&U annual assessment meeting. One topic of discussion was whether to have Michigan becomes a “LEAP State.” LEAP State designation allows states to have a national voice on liberal education, encourages large-scale scale efforts to apply and assess liberal education learning outcomes, and can help coordinated assessments within and across states. Current LEAP States include: California, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin.
Several representatives from Michigan public universities attended the 2013 LEAP States Summit this past June and participated in workshops on becoming a LEAP State. This past August a meeting of General Education Program representatives from the following universities was held in Gaylord Michigan: Central Michigan University, Eastern Michigan University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University, Lake Superior State University, Michigan State University, Michigan Technical University, Northern Michigan University, Oakland University, University of Michigan – Dearborn, University of Michigan – Flint, Wayne State University, & Western Michigan University. Those who attended the workshop discussed their experience and the decision was made to explore the utility of developing a plan for coordinating general education programming under a Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative. Dave Reinhold, Associate Provost from Western Michigan University, drafted, edited, reedited, reedited, etc… a proposal (Michigan LEAP Initiative appended) that representatives asked him to present at the October meeting of the President’s Council of the State Universities of Michigan.
Michigan LEAP Initiative
September 19, 2013

The members of the Michigan Liberal Education for America’s Promise (LEAP) Initiative acknowledge that the goals of a liberal education are:

- knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world
- intellectual and practical skills such as critical thinking and quantitative literacy
- personal and social responsibility
- integrative learning

These basic skills and knowledge are fundamental to all baccalaureate degrees granted by our institutions. We will work together to continually improve our educational programs and make them meaningful for all students through collaboration and effective learning outcomes assessment. We also respect the individual nature of our institutions and recognize that the goals we aspire to can be achieved in many different ways.

The Michigan Focused on Essential Learning Outcomes (MIFЕLO) steering committee will provide oversight for this initiative. This group will be composed of administrators responsible for general education and/or learning outcomes assessment at the member institutions and will be responsible for engaging faculty, parents, legislators and business leaders in dialogues on critical issues facing students at our institutions.
This initiative has several advantages for higher education across the State of Michigan. These include:

- allowing a mechanism to increase the reach and impact of our limited individual resources through shared efforts. The MIFELO steering committee will work collaboratively to provide programs that are now largely provided by individual institutions or not at all. These programs might involve such things as workshops on assessment, retention, faculty development or other interests of the member institutions.
- developing a stronger sense of community among faculty at member institutions to leverage their expertise in addressing issues that affect every institution.
- instilling an environment of collaboration that will serve as a united front and work with the Presidents Council in communicating, with a common language, the critical role the LEAP essential learning goals listed above play in higher education to external constituents. This includes conveying the basic premise that a greater command of the LEAP essential learning goals is critical to all students, regardless of the major.
- providing a framework for advancing quality learning initiatives in order to prepare students with the abilities to create new and innovative solutions to challenging problems across the state. Sharing ideas/best practices, as well as experiences with respect to common goals such as effective learning outcomes assessment and transfer of credit from community colleges, will help students at all institutions.
- developing a partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) that will allow Michigan universities to work with institutions around the country on creative solutions to issues in higher education. Examples of past and current efforts by LEAP states includes the Compass Project carried out by institutions in Wisconsin, California and Oregon and the Interstate Passport Initiative involving institutions from many states.
The MIFELO steering committee recommends the following projects as a starting point for this LEAP State Initiative. This does not represent an exhaustive list of projects, but simply shows a sample of what can be started in the near future.

- Continue statewide discussions about best practices at member institutions with regards to assessment of general education (closing the loop), the use of high impact practices and rubrics, and attempts at integrative learning.
- Develop a communication plan to explain the value of the knowledge, attitudes and skills developed through an integrated general education program to students, parents, legislators and employers.
- Develop methods that demonstrate ways to integrate the essential knowledge of general education across the curriculum. This will include ways to assess the impact on student learning of any given initiative so that data driven decisions can be made.
- Discuss ways in which the member institutions may help make the high school to college transition easier for students.
Implications of the LEAP Initiative for UM-Flint

The main goal at this point is to decide whether UM-Flint would like to participate in the Michigan LEAP State initiative. We are already a member institution of both AAC&U and the overall LEAP initiative. My understanding is that all of the Michigan-based public universities are considering this proposal. At this stage institutions are being asked whether they can commit to the idea of Liberal Education, as defined in the document, as being important. The process of becoming a LEAP State involves developing a project around LEAP ideals. That is, the project needs to be developed as part of the application process. Because the project(s) have not yet been discussed, it is hard to describe the project or the end product. I have included a couple of examples at the end of this document and more information can be found on the AAC&U website.

https://www.aacu.org
Examples of other LEAP State projects

The California State University System is a part of AAC&U’s project, *Give Students a Compass: A Multi-State Partnership for College Learning, General Education, and Underserved Student Success*. Funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Compass Project is a multi-state collaborative effort to re-map educational aims, educational practices and assessment strategies for general education in public higher education—two-year and four-year—within a set of participating state systems. Within the broad goals of the project, there will be a strong and sustained focus on the educational needs of students who, historically, have been underserved in higher education: first generation students, ethnic and racial minorities, and those from low-income families.

**Wisconsin** was designated the first official partner state in the LEAP campaign in March 2005. In collaboration with AAC&U, leaders in Wisconsin have piloted a series of campus action and advocacy efforts that champion the value of a liberal education for all college students. An initiative of the University of Wisconsin System, LEAP in Wisconsin seeks to increase understanding of the value and purpose of liberal education for UW System students and Wisconsin citizens.

**Indiana**: The Commission and the institutions have already utilized the AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes and VALUE Rubrics as reference points in developing the Statewide Transfer General Education Core. Looking to the near future, AAC&U’s expertise and on-going projects in related areas should also assist Indiana in developing the Single Articulation Pathways, further refining the Statewide Transfer General Education Core, and exploring assessment approaches to demonstrate student mastery of competencies and learning outcomes. By joining the LEAP States Initiative, Indiana will have the benefit of working with other large-scale efforts designed to improve teaching and learning, emphasize learning outcomes and assessment, and produce not just more college graduates, but college graduates with a skill set aligned with the demands of the 21st Century workforce.

**Virginia** became a partner state in the LEAP campaign in 2006. In collaboration with AAC&U, leaders in Virginia are piloting a series of campus action and advocacy efforts that champion the value of a liberal education for all college students. Through a variety of activities, the state leaders are advancing a strategic dialogue on the future of higher education and the importance of liberal education in the state. There are 21 institutions involved in Virginia, including publics and privates.

In March 2012, AAC&U announced the launch of its LEAP States partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Education. The partnership is part of the state’s ongoing Vision Project, through which leaders across the Massachusetts system of public colleges and universities are working collaboratively to achieve two goals: producing the best-educated citizenry and workforce in the nation, and achieving national leadership in research that drives economic development. Through LEAP States, Massachusetts will accelerate its efforts to demonstrate a better approach to assessing student learning.
On the Plus side:

1. At least one LEAP State (e.g., Wisconsin) has been able to coordinate their efforts while allowing for considerable variability across state universities. That is, becoming a LEAP state can be done in a way that is flexible enough to ensure local ownership of general education/liberal studies programs. The Michigan LEAP initiative is committed to maintaining similar flexibility.

2. The initiative provides a framework for public universities in Michigan to work together on general education/liberal studies related goals.

3. A LEAP State designator could help to “legitimize” our general education/liberal studies endeavors and help thwart mandates from people who are largely uninformed about the relevance of general education/liberal studies.

4. Increasing the communication between general education/liberal studies at universities across the state and nation might foster the sharing of best practices and minimize dead-ends, which might help to better focus scarce resources.

5. Increased coordination among general education/liberal studies across state universities in Michigan could make the articulation with two year colleges easier and perhaps more consistent.
If UM-Flint decides to sign on at this time, then I would suggest designating a contact person to monitor the progress and keep various components of the university involved (Coordinator of General Education, General Education Committee, Associate Provost, Provost, etc.). I have functioned in that capacity and would agree to continue to do so.

What Does this Mean for Faculty?

This is more of a statement of support for liberal education. If we become a LEAP State, faculty will contribute as much time to this as they want, and that includes nothing. I suspect here at UM-Flint we will have a number of faculty that take this and run with it, but most faculty will probably see no change in their daily work. This LEAP designation is a platform by which we can leverage support for and knowledge of liberal education across the state.
A Resolution to support the University of Michigan-Flint joining other institutions in the State of Michigan to seek LEAP State designation from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

- Whereas, associate provosts at all fifteen public universities in the State of Michigan have begun exploring the AAC&U Leap State Initiative;
- Whereas, the University of Michigan-Flint supports the basic philosophy and merits of a liberal education as articulated by the AAC&U;
- Whereas, the value of higher education has come under fire in recent years;
- Whereas, higher education institutions in the state have not effectively communicated to the public the benefit of a bachelor's degree;
- Whereas, higher education institutions across the state can benefit from discussions across institutional boundaries of common concerns;
- Whereas, Michigan institutions of higher education could benefit from the facilitated interaction and opportunities for collaboration with other LEAP states through the AAC&U;

There Be It Resolved, that the University of Michigan-Flint formally accepts inclusion into the Michigan LEAP State Initiative and pledges participation in the process to establish Michigan as an AAC&U LEAP State.

UM-Flint could support by resolution but the resolution is not mandated. We could also support by consensus or a vote if we thought that necessary.