

Explore Lehigh Proposal

January 31, 2025

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The proposed program

Explore Lehigh offers students the opportunity to spend one semester taking courses that are part of the typical first semester experience, such as Math and Writing, alongside an integrative course that is designed to introduce students to diverse fields across the four undergraduate colleges. At the heart of the program is personalized, high-touch advising paired with a course designed to show how different disciplines can come together to confront real-world challenges.

The Development Process

The initiative was developed as part of the strategic planning process led by the *Education with Purpose* Working Group, which included faculty and staff across disciplines (Himanshu Jain, Sabrina Jedlicka, Michael Raposa, Greg Skutches, Andrew Ward, Bill Gaudelli, and Mark Wilson). The group engaged extensively with the university community, including faculty meetings across all five colleges, discussions with 20 academic departments, and consultations with other faculty groups (e.g., RCEAS DEI Council, CITL, and the Center for Academic Success). Input was also solicited from undergraduate and graduate student senates and the Pride Center student workers.

The group's January 2023 report proposed a first-year, college-neutral cohort experience as part of a scaffolded undergraduate model. After further discussions and recognizing practical considerations, the model was refined to a one-semester program for a small cohort of students.

Subsequent consultations involved 57 faculty and 40 staff through lunch discussions, two faculty-focused town halls, and meetings with representatives from various academic units. Faculty input significantly shaped the proposed curriculum, which was developed in collaboration with Krista Liguori, Joseph Manzo, Jenn Winnikus, Nandini Deo, and Lindsay Reuben, who formed the working group stipulated by the 1 March 2024 senate resolution.

Impetus for the program

This initiative is not a reaction to a problem but a proactive step in addressing the evolving needs of students as demographics shift. We know that a significant, albeit small number of students currently arrive at Lehigh uncertain about their educational path. We also know that their efforts to explore different colleges within the university can sometimes delay their graduation. Appendix A highlights the number of students who transfer from one college to

another, underscoring the challenges some face in making an informed decision. Rather than waiting for these challenges to grow, this initiative aims to offer students a structured program that supports their exploration of Lehigh's undergraduate colleges and helps them make thoughtful, timely decisions about their academic direction.

Although it is possible for students entering the College of Arts and Sciences to take courses in other colleges, such as Engineering and Health, the proposed program offers the guidance and structure that many students need. As Lehigh's student population becomes increasingly diverse, we must be prepared to welcome individuals who do not fit the traditional student profile. We have a responsibility to ensure all students receive the support necessary to navigate their educational choices effectively, recognizing that some may require more tailored guidance. This program is designed to provide that support, helping students identify their interests and goals while selecting the college that best aligns with their aspirations.

This program will not alter the admissions process for all students, nor will it change our curricular structure. Rather, it is a thoughtful initiative aimed at making our institution more inclusive by addressing the evolving needs of a small but equally important group of students.

Supporting Data

Appendix B, a report from the Office of Institutional Data, makes the following conclusions:

- *Based on the study sample, there is a very small but positive correlation between time to declare and time to graduation. However, when considering other factors, this relationship becomes insignificant.*
- *More significant predictors of time to graduation are average credits, transfer credit hours, Summer and Winter semesters enrolled and the number of changes in major.*
- *Where time to declare may have an impact is with regard to STEM majors. There is an indication that STEM majors could be inadvertently affected by a prolonged time to declaration. Consider what we know about STEM majors: On average, they declare much earlier than non-STEM majors. They also tend to take higher credit loads and start with a higher-than-average number of transfer credits. On the other hand, they are also more likely to change majors than non-STEM majors. Could it be that these students are on a tighter timeline (higher credit demands) and, therefore, by prolonging their time to declaration it actually inadvertently impacts them? Or could it be that increasing their time to declaration would lead to them choosing better majors and switching majors less often, which could ultimately lead to decreased time to graduation?*
- *The significant relationship that we found between time to declare and the number of changes in major appears to be mostly driven by the STEM majors. However, it is not clear why STEM majors, on average, have a higher likelihood to change majors. Is it due*

to the nature of these programs (high credit demands/difficulty) or is it somehow related to how early they declare majors? Upon further inspection, when looking only at STEM majors and categorizing each STEM major into time to declare buckets, there is a pattern between the number of major changes and how early the first major is declared.

The qualitative data were supplemented by a focus group completed in January 2023, in which students made the following statements/recommendations/observations:

- Encourage students to choose courses before the majors
- More structure before getting to Lehigh to figure out how things work
- Include advising on the first-year checklist
- All intro courses should be open to all students, especially the undecided students
- High-impact programs have been the most valuable
- Not enough flexibility to explore courses
- Encourage students to embrace the ambiguity

Appendix A shows the number of students who change colleges while at Lehigh. While changing colleges does not necessarily hinder a student's academic progress, Appendix B indicates that it may lead to a delay in time to graduation. Given Lehigh University's curricular structure, this impact is often more significant for those who switch colleges. Changing majors or colleges isn't always a disruptive experience, but Explore Lehigh offers students the opportunity to explore their options within a framework of guidance, advising, and support.

Core Components of the Proposed Program

Summer introduction

Prelude

Advisor + faculty mentor + peer mentor

Fall semester curriculum

Spring semester reunion

Annual check-in

Summer introduction:

- Regular optional office hours on zoom
- Connect with advisor (one-hour required meeting)
- Read assigned book
- Do Aleks math sequence (self assessment program to determine calc placement)

Prelude:

- Partner with [Lehigh 360](#) and/or [design labs](#)

- Scavenger hunt to familiarize students with key people/offices
- Familiarize students with catalog to explore interests
- Have students interact with a student from each college
- Create an atmosphere that encourages a sense of belonging

Add ons:

- Biweekly lunches with resource persons from various campus offices and organizations
- Periodic social connection activities (trivia nights, dinners, team activities)
- Online discussion board/community (slack/discord/piazza/groupme/ect.)
- Personal journal

Foundational Course

INTC 096: Intercollege Experience (3 credits), ideally team-taught

Course Description:

The three-credit Intercollege Experience course is designed to introduce students to a small sample of the wide range of disciplines available to students at Lehigh University while encouraging them to examine their own interests and academic goals. This module-based course emphasizes community-building through group work that promotes cross-disciplinary collaboration. Students are asked to consider solutions to complex problems, which the instructor of each iteration of the course will determine, taking into consideration the interests of students in the cohort. Faculty from each undergraduate college serve as guest speakers, who help students to understand how the arts, humanities, sciences, health, engineering, and business can intersect to resolve local and global problems. Students are required to engage in regular reflection to discern their academic interests.

Learning outcomes:

- Describe the role of each college and learn how majors can collaborate to create solutions
- Examine and analyze a complex problem and collaborate with peers and experts to develop a solution utilizing design thinking
- Articulate ideas to diverse audiences
- Identify interests and connect them to one or two colleges

Overview:

- Module 1: orientation to college work
- Module 2: puzzle/problem to solve; design thinking

- team-based
- Module 3: spend 2 weeks using ideas from each college to solve the assigned problem
 - Session 1: hypothesize what each college can do towards solving the problem, what questions will they ask
 - Session 2: meet the college team- faculty and students, present their problem and potential solutions, ask questions
 - Session 3: work with college team to integrate solutions to the broader process
 - Session 4 work within cohort to build solution
- Module 4 debrief and reflect
 - What did each college contribute to our work?
 - How viable is this solution?
 - What was it like to explore each college?
 - Is this a solvable problem? What's it like to try and solve it?
 - What did I learn from this experience?
 - What would I advise another team starting out with a similar problem to solve?

All students will need to take (10 credits)

- WRIT 01 (3)
- Math (area of interest and ALEKS will determine which course, likely 4 credits)
- Foundation Course - Intercollege experience (3)

Take 2 of the 4 courses listed: (3-7)

- COH: HEALTH 95: COH Freshman Seminar: The Value of a Career in Health (3)
- RCEAS: ENGR 5 (2)¹
- COB: BUS 1 (1)
- CAS: BQ 90 (3-4)

Impact Statement

The initiative requires one additional course, which may be taught as part of a faculty member's regular load and possibly rotated among members of the program faculty, depending on departmental capacity. The Office of the Provost has committed to providing resources to

¹ Although this will change under the new FYRE curriculum, it will remain in the pilot pending the final FYRE curriculum.

support this effort and will work with individual faculty to provide those resources in a manner that best supports that faculty member's work.

Students not in this initiative will experience no additional impacts beyond those inherent to any program's targeted offerings. The program is designed to serve a specific cohort, similar to other specialized opportunities on campus, without detracting from broader student experiences.

Given the relatively small number of students and the intensive advising, we do not anticipate that any department, including the Math Department, will need to offer additional sections, or that colleges will need to change their policies. The process will be similar to that applied to transfer students who begin in the second semester of their first year.

One concern that has been expressed is that this proposed program could delay students' graduation. Appendix D includes sample curriculum maps for several majors across the colleges to illustrate the possibility of completing the first semester program and the degree programs within four years.

Another concern that has been shared is the perception that the proposed program already exists in the College of Arts and Sciences. It does not. The purpose of the program is to provide students with a college-neutral experience. Matriculating into the College of Arts and Sciences is inherently not a college-neutral experience. There will still be the opportunity for other students to opt for the CAS, whether or not they have chosen a major.

Advising

Emily Ford, Director of Coordinated Advising, will serve as primary advisor for the cohort of students. A faculty member will be asked to mentor each student depending on their interests. A career coach in the Center for Career and Professional Development will be assigned to each student. Appendix C details the description of the advising plan.

Governance

A faculty group, with representation from each of the four undergraduate colleges, will oversee the program's academic and co-curricular components. This group will handle the leadership and administration of the program. The Office of the Provost will support assessment. The Office of Coordinated Advising has committed to supplement advising efforts by providing additional advising resources and the Center for Career and Professional Development will provide career coaching. As is the case for other university programs, faculty will be invited to participate based on their interests and their contributions will be recognized as a form of service to the institution.

Timeline and Assessment

Pending Faculty Senate endorsement, the program is planned to begin provisionally with a cohort of 30 students in Fall 2025 as a two-year pilot. Based on AY25-26 outcomes and level of demand, the provisional course and program may be submitted for consideration by the Course and Curriculum Committee in Fall 2026. The pilot will be assessed in each of the two years. Outcomes will be tracked through measures such as student progress in selecting a college, retention rates, and adherence to a four-year graduation timeline. Annual assessments will guide program improvements. After the initial two years, the provost will evaluate the program's effectiveness and determine whether it should be continued, modified, or concluded and the Faculty Senate will, if appropriate, be asked to consider the program for permanent approval to begin in Fall 2027. The program will be reassessed in spring 2029 to ensure that it does not impede students' progress to graduation.

In addition to timely selection of a college and major and retention and graduation rates, assessment of the program will include metrics such as students' academic performance and their adherence to a timeline of successful course completion. We will conduct focus groups with each cohort to better understand their experience of the program and to determine areas for improvement.

Summary

This initiative has the potential to support students who are undecided about their academic path, fostering exploration in a structured, low-pressure environment. Some concerns were raised about potential impacts on graduation timelines and overlaps with existing programs, which were addressed through program refinements and targeted advising strategies.