Many of the groups felt that a liberal education should be balanced and they commended the breadth of current LE requirements and course offerings. This set of individuals was content with the existing LE framework, but sought adjustments to the implementation and perception of LE requirements. One group recommended a complete overhaul to the current model, saying it is too restrictive to faculty and students, and results in shallow introductions to a broad range of subjects rather than in-depth exploration of different ways of knowing. They suggested a bare-bones, flexible guideline for LE requirements; for example: students must take three courses in the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences. Another group offered a method to reduce requirements for students while maintaining a broad core: require a list of “ideas” that can apply to multiple subjects (akin to the current “theme” requirement) rather than discipline-specific core subjects. In changing the structure of LE, faculty acknowledged that choosing a simpler approach could affect the number of course offerings. One group preferred a variety of courses that are limited in number, another questioned whether LE courses should be vetted or automatically certified if they present a core or theme topic, and another thought that changes to the course catalog could improve student access to course offerings. Most groups agreed that the “core” and “theme” topics are important components to a liberal education, but hoped for implementation that is less burdensome to students and faculty.

Several participants proposed a common core of coursework for all University students, grounding LE in the University’s overarching goals and values; one going so far as to state that every course offered at UMN should align with the University’s liberal education requirements. There was some variation in the skills that faculty participants deemed invaluable to graduates, many citing critical thinking, reading and writing, and a diverse set of transferable job skills. Post-graduation success was discussed at length, centering on a holistic career competency encompassing “real-world” applications of learning, civic engagement, and a sense of self beyond marketable job skills. With this topic, however, there was a lack of agreement between groups. The most extreme viewpoints were that the University is not meant to provide vocational training, and that the University’s focus on a “research” mentality rather than a “business” mentality is detrimental to students entering the job market. One group felt that the humanities are imperative to a well-rounded education, and that they are not prioritized by legislators and University of Minnesota administrators.
Social justice and public/community engagement, including service learning, were frequently brought up as topics to prioritize. One group suggested an empathy and emotional-intelligence enhanced curriculum. Integrity, responsibility, and the ability to have a discussion were also mentioned as important LE skills. Addressing evolving tech and information literacy was another prominent topic, with one group suggesting an integrated technology component similar to the current writing requirement. While improving a student’s writing overall was a focus of the conversation, one group suggested a discipline-specific approach to the writing requirement to foster skills particular to potential careers paths.

Five tables discussed the topic of discipline-specific versus interdisciplinary learning, with the minority suggesting that LE requirements should be integrated into majors, and the majority considering the merits of making connections between fields. Many participants found that students often stay within their comfort zones rather than taking courses outside of their disciplines, and hoped to encourage students to think beyond their majors. Adopting a team teaching model, similar to the GCC, was one suggested solution. The current funding model was mentioned several times as creating financial barriers to thoughtfully constructed curriculum, including interdisciplinary classes. Timing the implementation of LE into an undergraduate’s career was another topic of conversation; some groups suggested incorporating the majority of requirements into the first year experience while others wanted to ensure that the entire undergraduate experience is steeped in LE thinking.

Overall, participants were more concerned with providing a thorough education than they were with protecting students from stress. They noted an academic gap in student achievement at the University, as well as a cognitive gap between high school and college learning modes. As a result, some students have difficulty processing college-level information and do not understand the value of “intangible” LE skills. Faculty want to ensure that all students have the opportunity to immerse themselves in their education and to learn adaptability. One group remarked that faculty, too, need to become aware of the resources available to them in order to better serve an increasingly diverse student body.