THE CHARGE OF THE TASKFORCE

“The core curriculum for all degrees offered by the College of Arts and Sciences will be evaluated when appropriate, at least once every ten to fifteen years by a committee of Arts and Sciences faculty members appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. This review will evaluate the size and content of the core curriculum in light of this vision statement. Following this review, the committee will make recommendations for revisions of the core curriculum to the Arts and Sciences Council of Chairs.”

College of Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum Vision, p. 4.
Approved May 2016, Council of Chairs, College of Arts and Sciences

SEPTEMBER 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Attendance

- The following members of the Executive Committee of the Taskforce were present: Tamarah Adair (BIO), Sara Alexander (ANT), Michael Beaty (PHI), Joseph Brown (PSC), Julie deGraffenried (HIS), Stan Denman (THEA), Steven Driese (GEO), Chris Hansen (FDM), Jeanne Hill (STA), John Howard (alumni representative), Kristin Koch (student representative), Heidi Marcum (ENV SC), Thomas McGrath (CHE), Alex McNair (MLC), Carson Mencken (SOC), Jeffrey Olafsen (PHY), Brian Raines (MTH), Lisa Shaver (ENG), Alden Smith (CLA), Sara Stone (JOU), Charles Weaver (PSY/NSC), Doug Weaver (REL). The following were unable to be present: Blair Browning (COM), Mark Anderson (ART).

- The following members of the Working Groups of the Taskforce were in attendance: Frieda Blackwell, Blake Burleson, Burt Burleson, Gary Carter, David Clinton, Lana Conder, Kim Kellison, Deanne Kramer, Wes Null, Paul Martens, Frank Mathis, Joyce Miller, Viola Osborn, Anne-Marie Schultz, Ken Wilkins.

Lee Nordt, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

- Dean Nordt presided over the one and a half hour meeting. He reviewed the two previous years of activity by the A&S faculty noting that initial acts of determination for a review of the core were called for in ASPIRE: The College of Arts and Sciences Strategic Plan: Acts of Determination in Support of Baylor University ProFuturis. These acts culminated in the unanimous acceptance in May 2016 by the A&S Council of Chairs of College of Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum Vision written by taskforce chaired by Dr. Paul Martens, Associate Professor of Religion.

- The Dean stressed the importance of the newly-appointed 39-member Core Curriculum Review Taskforce asserting that it was the “most important committee of the College since World War II.” Since liberal education
is central to the mission of the University, periodic revision of the core should be a standard operating procedure for the College.

- Now into the third year of this process, the Dean read the charge to the taskforce (see above) and said that the earliest date they should expect to complete their assignment would be May 2017; their work will conclude with a recommendation to the Council of Chairs, the governing body of the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Noting that there is understandable anxiety whenever major changes to the core are contemplated, the Dean stated that there should be no plan or expectation that faculty lines would be created or eliminated based on curricular changes to the core.

Paul Martens, Chair of 2015-2016 A&S Core Curriculum Vision Taskforce

- Dr. Martens reviewed the year-long process by which the taskforce arrived at the recommended vision statement that was approved by the Council of Chairs.
- He stressed salient points of the Core Curriculum Vision including the call for:
  1. a unified core across all degrees,
  2. implementation throughout the four-year experience,
  3. non-burdensome core requirements relative to the student’s total degree requirements, and
  4. inter-disciplinary and inter-departmental courses.

Blake Burleson, Project Manager, A&S Core Curriculum Review Taskforce

- Dr. Burleson discussed the role of the project manager as: (1) determining an initial structure and schedule, (2) creating a culture of active listening, and (3) insuring that the process is transparent.
- He introduced the 3 working groups—Analytics & Budget, Oversight & Integration, and Curriculum Development—and reviewed their responsibilities of provide reports, expert advice, and recommendations to the executive committee. The 15 members of these groups have been at work over the summer working on reports that will soon be presented to the executives.
- Noting that the project manager would be guided by an elected steering committee, he reviewed responsibilities of the steering committee. Steering committee members who will be elected by their respective sub-committees will meet bi-weekly with the project manager.
- Following a review of the fall schedule, Dr. Burleson offered his hopes that the executives would
  1. keep student needs rather than department needs as their priority,
  2. seek to build bridges across departments and disciplines, and
  3. be confident to make crucial and long-lasting decisions that would affect generations of students and faculty.

Question-Answer

- Dean Nordt fielded questions for 20 minutes from the taskforce.
- The questions and comments have been recorded below in the “Referred Questions” and “Emerging Issues” sections.
- Dr. Doug Weaver, executive member representing the Department of Religion, concluded the meeting with a prayer of dedication.
UPCOMING

September 13, Executive Plenary meeting

- The members of the executive committee will receive
  1. a report from the Oversight-Integration Working Group on how the current BA, BS, BFA, and BSAS cores meet Vision requirements,
  2. a recommendation from the Oversight-Integration Working Group on the optimal size of the A&S core, and
  3. a preliminary report from the Analytics-Budget Working Group on areas impacted by a change in the size of the core.

September 14-28 Sub-Committee Meetings

- The 5 sub-committees (Scientific Method, Critical Thinking, Civic Engagement, Creativity, and Christian Tradition) have been scheduled by the project manager who will attend all sub-committee meetings.
- There will be two main items of business at the first sub-committee meeting:
  1. election of a chair (who will then serve on the steering committee) and
  2. discussion of the recommended size of the core presented by the Oversight-Integration Working Group.

September 29 Executive Plenary

- The 5 chairs will provide responses from their subcommittees on the recommendation on size of the core.
- Taskforce manager will provide a report on questions referred to working groups (see below).

QUESTIONS REFERRED TO WORKING GROUPS

The following questions were asked at executive plenary, sub-committee, or working group meetings and have been referred to the working groups:

Analytics-Budget Working Group

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Oversight-Integration Working Group

- In revising the core are there issues that must be addressed with SACS and the University’s General Education Council? If so, how will coordination occur?
- What impact would changing the A&S core have on the core curriculum requirements for other academic units at Baylor?
- What is the relationship of the A&S Core Curriculum Vision to the University’s general education requirements?
Curriculum Development Working Group

• Have other academic units at Baylor changed their core requirements recently and, if so, what can we learn from them?
• If core requirements are required to be the same no matter what the degree, what distinguishes the BA and BS in departments that offer both degrees (e.g., BIO)?
• What kinds of structural-advising pieces must be in place to insure that seniors are not taking freshman-level core requirements?
• Could there be common core requirements (for all degrees) and then a second-level of requirements based on the type of degree (i.e., BA, BS, BFA, BSAS)?

EMERGING ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED BY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

This is a list of issues emerging that are being addressed by the executive committee in sub-committees or plenary sessions:

• Balancing required common core courses with the desire for students to have flexible exploration
• Including co-curricular requirements (e.g., service, fine arts) in the core
• Including study abroad as a core requirement

A WORD FROM PROJECT MANAGER

Colleagues, I look forward to working with you and supporting your efforts to improve our core curriculum. We have outstanding faculty members and outstanding students and they deserve the finest liberal education in the country. We are not alone in our efforts to improve in this area. A survey this year by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that general-education revision has grown as a priority on college campuses since 2008, with two in three academic officers reporting that general education is receiving greater attention at their institution. “A majority of our members are relooking at their general-education programs, and that’s been true for a while,” said Debra Humphreys, senior vice president for academic planning and public engagement at the AAC&U.

I admire your willingness and courage to engage in the task before us. Good luck and God speed.

Blake Burleson
September 6, 2016