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 13: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Attendance

- The following members of the Executive Committee of the Taskforce were present: Tamarah Adair (BIO), Sara Alexander (ANT), Mark Anderson (ART), Michael Beaty (PHI), Joseph Brown (PSC), Blair Browning (COM), Julie deGraffenried (HIS), Stan Denman (THEA), Steven Driese (GEO), Chris Hansen (FDM), Jeanne Hill (STA), John Howard (alumni representative), Heidi Marcum (ENV SC), Thomas McGrath (CHE), Alex McNair (MLC), Jeffrey Olafsen (PHY), Brian Raines (MTH), Alden Smith (CLA), Sara Stone (JOU), Charles Weaver (PSY/NSC), Doug Weaver (REL). The following members of the Working Groups of the Taskforce were present: Blake Burleson, Gary Carter, David Clinton, Kim Kellison, Wes Null, Paul Martens, Viola Osborn, Anne-Marie Schultz, Ken Wilkins.

Student Presentation: Jade Connor, Senior Biology Major

- Jade, who has a 4.0 GPA and is interviewing with 5 medical schools this fall, explained how core courses in English and Spanish have shaped her academic and vocational trajectories in significant ways.

Oversight-Integration Working Group Presentation: Paul Martens

- Over the summer, this 8-member working group of Blake Burleson, Burt Burleson, David Clinton, Kim Kellison, Wes Null, Paul Martens, Anne-Marie Schultz, and Ken Wilkins produced a document (enclosed) that explored the ways that the current core curricula for the BA, BS, BFA, and BSAS are dissonant with the A&S Core Curriculum Vision.
- On behalf of the working group, Dr. Martens noted that the A&S core:
1. is not unified across all degrees,
2. is not implemented throughout the student’s 4-years,
3. is not similar in size to peer institutions, and
4. is not interdisciplinary.

• Numerous questions emerged during the Q&A with Dr. Martens. These questions are listed in the Referred Questions and Emerging Issues sections below.

Oversight-Integration Working Group Presentation: Wes Null

• Over the summer, this 8-member working group produced a document (enclosed) titled: Suggested Range Regarding Size of the A&S Core Curriculum. Dr. Null presented this document to the executive membership.
• The working group suggested a range of 41 to 51 hours for the core for the following reasons:
  1. The current core for BA and BS students is large.
  2. A smaller core would make Baylor more competitive with both public and private universities.
  3. Quality can be maintained, indeed improved upon, with a well-integrated smaller core.
  4. A smaller core would assist Baylor in achieving our goals of improving four-year graduation rates and addressing the issue of affordability.
  5. The general education core needs to be adjusted because of the growth in the number of required hours for majors.
  6. The suggested lower range of 41 hours derives primarily from the recognition that A&S already has one degree (the BFA) that accepts 41 hours as a minimum.
  7. The suggested upper range of 51 hours is drawn from comparing the size of the cores at other institutions as well as the size of general education requirements for other degrees at Baylor.

Analytics-Budget Working Group Presentation: Viola Osborn & Gary Carter

• Dr. Osborn, A&S Director of Information Analysis and Planning, and Mr. Carter, A&S Senior Financial Manager, presented a preliminary “what if” audit for a core of 46 hours. See enclosed. As more firm commitments to a target size emerge, more extensive analysis will be assigned to this working group.
• Questions and comments from the executive committee regarding the size issue have been recorded below in the Referred Questions and Emerging Issues sections.

UPCOMING

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.
- The 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. The most recent questions are added to the end of the list **in bold.**

**Analytics-Budget Working Group**

- What impact would a smaller core have on opportunities for graduate students to teach?
- What impact would smaller class sizes have on classroom space utilization?

**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? **Would a smaller core curriculum entice departments to add required courses in their majors?**
- What is the relationship of the A&S Core Curriculum Vision to the University’s general education requirements?
- Is there evidence that the large core for the BA or BS degrees (given its size as compared to peer and Texas institutions) is having a negative effect on enrollment in those degrees? What does the term “non-burdensome” as related to size in the A&S Core Curriculum Vision actually mean?
- Are there courses that may not be adjusted or eliminated from the current core due to University requirements?
- If our core curriculum is the foundation for a degree from Baylor and has as its end educating men and women to be informed and productive citizens of a democracy and to be servant leaders in faith communities, then what kind of curriculum achieves those ends?
- How will the core be unified? Common courses for all students? Common texts within common courses? Other?

**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)?
- **What does the core curriculum entail for BFA degrees from some of our peer institutions?**
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. The newest issues are added to the end of the list in bold.

- 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
- Should a required core course also be required in a student’s major?
- What percentage of be core might reasonably be upper-level?
- To what extent can the 5 sub-committees (Scientific Method, Critical Reasoning, Civic Engagement, Creativity, and Christian Tradition) separate their work since all courses should be mutually-supportive and interconnected?

A WORD FROM PROJECT MANAGER

Colleagues,

I’d like to share a word of wisdom from my chair Bill Bellinger who begins departmental meetings by saying that he expects everyone to contribute to the conversation equally. This generally means that talkative colleagues try to moderate their input and less-talkative ones try to increase their input. This simple guide seems to work well for our department. I was pleased yesterday that there were not dominating voices in our discussions. Shared governance, to my way of thinking, means active listening and moderated input from everyone. All voices are important and necessary as we proceed. Thanks for such a good start towards that goal.

Blake Burleson
September 14, 2016