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 29: 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), 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), Sara Stone (JOU), Charles Weaver (PSY/NSC), Doug Weaver (REL). The following were unable to be present: Alden Smith (CLA)

• The following members of the Working Groups of the Taskforce were present: Kim Kellison.

Student Presentation: Kristin Koch, recent graduate in Mathematics & Statistics, member of the Executive Committee of the A&S Core Curriculum Review Taskforce

• Kristin who graduated Summa Cum Laude in May 2016 with a BS in Mathematics and Statistics discussed the importance of the required core courses Christian Scriptures and Christian Heritage in her spiritual and intellectual formation as an undergraduate.
Project Manager Blake Burleson announced the election of a steering committee to assist him in guiding the review process:

- Sara Alexander (Chair, Civic Engagement), Stan Denman (Chair, Creativity), Brian Raines (Chair, Critical Thinking), Doug Weaver (Chair, Christian Tradition), and Chuck Weaver (Chair, Scientific Reasoning) were elected by their respective subcommittees.

Reports on size of core curriculum from Subcommittees

- The chairs of the 5 subcommittees reported their respective subcommittees’ responses to the Oversight-Integration Working Group’s suggestion (from the September 13 meeting) of a range of 41 to 51 hours for the core curriculum.
- Following an hour long discussion, the Critical Thinking subcommittee offered the following motion:

  We concur that it is a good time to consider revising the Arts and Sciences core curriculum. In order to give students more flexibility to choose more electives, to have a minor, or to have a second major (and the like), as a starting point for our discussion we recommend that the core be 43 hours. We insist that the 43 hours is provisional and in no way binding. The final size of the revised core curriculum may be larger or smaller as required by the ends it aims to achieve and, thus, the content required to achieve those ends.

- After discussion, the motion was approved by a vote of 22-1. One member was not present for the vote.

UPCOMING

October 11 Executive Plenary

- The Analytics-Budget Working Group will provide a report on typical models used in America universities today for core curricula.

October 13-26 Subcommittees

- The 5 sub-committees (Scientific Method, Critical Thinking, Civic Engagement, Creativity, and Christian Tradition) meet to discuss options for models.

October 27 Executive Plenary

- Reports from subcommittees on preference(s) for model.

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 ways?
- Taking into account transfer courses (including dual-credit courses brought in by freshmen), what is the average number of general education credits earned at Baylor University by Baylor graduates and by graduates in the College of Arts and Sciences?
- Does the A&S Core Curriculum Vision address “second-level core” 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)?
- What does the core curriculum entail for BFA degrees from some of our peer institutions?
- What would be the impact on retention or graduation rates if the BA in BIO (or other science majors) is eliminated?

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?
• How is the desire for electives, undergraduate research, study abroad, and secondary majors to be balanced with the desire for a substantive common core? How is the imperative for a large number of hours in the major (such as in the BFA) to be balanced with the desire for a substantive common core?
• To what extent should practical, extrinsic factors be considered in determining the size of the core curriculum? To what degree is the large core curriculum of A&S an issue in the recruiting, retention, and graduation of undergraduates in A&S?
• In what way, if any, is the size of the core curriculum related to the quality and rigor of the core curriculum? Can the core be improved and reduced in size?

A WORD FROM PROJECT MANAGER

Colleagues,

It is an honor and a privilege to watch you, my colleagues, at work on this important task. As I observe the diversity of talents you bring to this project, I am reminded of the Apostle Paul’s word to the church at Corinth when he wrote: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” Keep up the good work. We need each department, each discipline, and each teacher to be fully expressed in a common core that shapes our students.

Blake Burleson
September 30, 2016