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

OCTOBER 11, 2016: 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), Chris Hansen (FDM), Jeanne Hill (STA), John Howard (alumni representative), Heidi Marcum (ENV SC), Alex McNair (MLC), Carson Mencken (SOC), Jeffrey Olafsen (PHY), Brian Raines (MTH), Lisa Shaver (ENG), Alden Smith (CLA), Charles Weaver (PSY/NSC), Doug Weaver (REL). The following were unable to be present: Steven Driese (GEO), Kristin Koch (student representative), Thomas McGrath (CHE), Sara Stone (JOU).

• The following members of the Working Groups of the Taskforce were present: Gary Carter, Viola Osborn.

Alumni Presentation: John Howard, BA English, member of the Executive Committee of the A&S Core Curriculum Review Taskforce

• John, BA in English from Baylor and JD from the University of Texas, is the Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy at Dell. He discussed the importance of a liberal education on his career in law and public service in various capacities including as advisor to the Texas governor and the U.S. President. In particular he mentioned the impact that Professors Bud Barker, Ann Miller, Wally Christian, Ruth Belew, Robert Reed, and Robert Packard on him through their teaching of core courses in A&S.

Blake Burleson reviewed the answers to the Referred Questions.

• 9 of 17 questions referred from the Executive Committee to the Working Groups have been answered. See list of referred questions below.
• Future questions to Working Groups will be submitted through subcommittee chairs.
Introduction of Models: Blake Burleson reviewed the core curriculum models developed by the Analytics-Budget Working Group

- Over the summer months, the Analytics-Budget Working Group of Blake Burleson, Gary Carter, and Viola Osborn explored various models used by American universities to deliver their core curricula. Three basic models (with multiple variations) are available. These were described as: (1) Distribution Model, (2) Interdisciplinary Model, and (3) Thematic Pathways Model.
- Blake suggested that the eventual model (to be selected by the taskforce) should fit the A&S context as a major research university and a church-related institution emphasizing the liberal arts and concept of the core as expressed in the A&S Core Curriculum Vision.
- These 3 models, for example purposes, were populated with existing Baylor courses in a 43-hour curriculum.
- NEITHER THE MODELS NOR THE COURSES WERE PRESENTED AS RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WORKING GROUP.

UPCOMING

October 13-26 Subcommittees

- The 5 sub-committees (Scientific Method, Critical Thinking, Civic Engagement, Creativity, and Christian Tradition) meet to discuss the models. The primary discussions will center on the questions: Does the A&S Core Curriculum Vision suggest a particular model for delivering the core curriculum? Are some models incompatible with the Vision?
- Note: While it is difficult to completely evaluate the models without considering the courses that populate the models, the focus of the next subcommittee discussions will be on the models themselves.

October 27 Executive Plenary

- Reports from subcommittee chairs on preference(s) for model(s).

October 28-November 22 Meetings by Workings Groups

- Review of model or models under consideration by Executive Committee
- Continued work on referred questions

December 1 Taskforce Plenary

- Reports from Working Groups
- Dean Nordt attending

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. Questions lined through have been answered and provided to the taskforce in their notebooks.
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?
• 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 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?

• Does the A&S Core Curriculum Vision suggest a particular model for delivering the core curriculum? Are some models incompatible with the Vision?

A WORD FROM PROJECT MANAGER

Colleagues,

I’m writing this message from the writer’s cabin that I recently built in my backyard. It took two years for me to construct the 8’ by 20’ tiny house. Since we began our taskforce work in September, we’ve been thinking about our task as similar to that of building a house from the ground up. If that’s the case, then our process might be similar to that of an architect that (1) studies the context (environment), (2) develops a concept (vision), (3) selects a model (style), and, lastly, (4) draws house plans (containing the various elements of the house—rooms, windows, doors, etc.).

Last year, our colleagues on the Core Curriculum Vision Taskforce—Jacqueline Duke (BIO), Hope Johnston (ENG), Paul Martens, chair (REL), Lorin Matthews (PHY), Ann McGlashan (MLC), Brian Raines (MTH), and DeAnna Toten Beard (THEA)—studied our context and wrote a vision. This vision was unanimously approved by the Council of Chairs. Their outstanding work constituted stages 1 and 2 of the building process.

This year’s taskforce has as its charge the completion of stages 3 and 4. As we think about models (and, later, plans that contain actual courses) it seems to me that we should continue to look back at the context and the concept for guidance. In summary, the A&S Vision is our plumb line. The question that is most immediate now is: Does the A&S Vision suggest a particular model for delivering the core curriculum? If so, what is that model?

I’m looking forward to seeing what you determine.

Blake Burleson
October 12, 2016