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

NOVEMBER 10, 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), Joseph Brown (PSC), Blair Browning (COM), Julie deGraffenried (HIS), Stan Denman (THEA), Steven Driese (GEO), Chris Hansen (FDM), Jeanne Hill (STA), 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), Charles Weaver (PSY/NSC).
- The following were unable to be present: Michael Beaty (PHI), John Howard (alumni representative), Alden Smith (CLA), Sara Stone (JOU), Doug Weaver (REL).
- The following members of the Working Groups of the Taskforce were present: Gary Carter, Kim Kellison, Paul Martens, Joyce Miller, Viola Osborn, Ken Wilkins.

Student Presentation: Austin Hatchet, BA Religion and Film & Digital Media, Minor in Creative Writing

- Austin, who will graduate in May 2017 to begin a career in ministry and/or professional writing, discussed how the core curriculum impacted his life and academic journey. In particular he highlighted his freshman-level Geosciences (World Oceans) course and Physics (Astronomy) course with Dr. Dwight Russell. Though science is not his first love, these science courses were not only enjoyable but impactful in his intellectual and spiritual development. He noted the significance for him of having professors in the sciences who were people of faith and who embodied the possibility that religion and science are not mutually exclusive arenas of knowledge.
Presentations by subcommittees on preferences for a Model

• Chairs of subcommittees made presentations on their preferences for a model for a new core curriculum. The presentations represented the consensus views of their subcommittees. Minority opinions within subcommittees were also stated and given reasoned expression.
• The size of the core and courses within the core were not under consideration during this meeting although some chairs discussed some subcommittee thoughts on both.
• Each chair expressed the process by which their subcommittee had reviewed the various models available and they highlighted the reasons why some models were eliminated from their consideration. All arguments were supported by references to the A&S Core Curriculum Vision.
• All 5 chairs disclosed that their subcommittees had reached consensus that the most appropriate model to express the Core Vision is a modified distribution list. This model would include some common courses (that all students are required to take without exception) and distribution lists that could be organized in different ways. Each subcommittee has explored innovative ways to fulfill the common courses and the distribution list courses that included: thematic pathways, interdisciplinary courses, co-curricular courses, two-semester courses, credit/no-credit courses, freshman and senior seminars, flags for skills content, capstone courses, and a number of other ideas.
• There are no plans to reach final decisions regarding the model until after the Executive Committee receives feedback from the 3 working groups on December 1. Once a decision on a model is finalized, the subcommittees will begin considering which courses will populate the model.

UPCOMING

November 14-30 Working Groups
• The Oversight-Integration Working Group, the Curriculum Development Working Group, and the Analytics-Budget Working Group will meet to construct “tests” for the modified distribution list model that the Executive Committee seems to be favoring at this point. These initial “tests” will consider potential impact on students, faculty, and advisors.
• 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, subcommittee, 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?
  - Should all core courses have a generic prefix? At present the prefix follows the department. Having a generic prefix might alleviate the idea that departments have “ownership” over core courses.
- Are there courses that may not be adjusted or eliminated from the current core due to University 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?
- 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, BEA, 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 subcommittees 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 subcommittees (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?

• Will a modified distribution list model adequately support the A&S Core Curriculum Vision requirements?

A WORD FROM PROJECT MANAGER

Colleagues,

If you’re building a house you typically consult with an architect to discuss with him or her the vision you have in mind. From that vision, the architect draws plans. Once you’re ready to act on those plans, you must get approval from the proper authorities to make sure your house will meet code once it is built. Approval from the authorities results in a building permit. That approved permit anticipates the fact that inspectors will eventually become involved in your construction project. The inspectors will want answers to questions such as: Will this house be safe? Will this house last? Will it accommodate the desired appliances that will be plugged in? Will it meet the conventional needs of those who will occupy it? And so on. At the next stage of our core curriculum building project we will receive feedback from our inspectors—members of our 3 working groups. I’m looking forward to their analysis of the model that you are working towards.

Blake Burleson
November 11, 2016