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

DECEMBER 1, 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), Steven Driese (GEO), Chris Hansen (FDM), Jeanne Hill (STA), John Howard (alumni representative), Kristin Koch (student representative), Heidi Marcum (ENVS), Thomas McGrath (CHE), Alex McNair (MLC), Brian Raines (MTH), Dwight Russell (PHY), Lisa Shaver (ENG), Sara Stone (JOU), Charles Weaver (PSY/NSC), Doug Weaver (REL). The following were unable to be present: Carson Mencken (SOC), Alden Smith (CLA).

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

- Also attending were Dean Lee Nordt, former Dean Bill Cooper, and Jim Hare.

Reflection and Prayer of Dedication: Burt Burleson, University Chaplain

- Reverend Burleson observed that the undertaking of the taskforce had similarities to the wilderness wandering of the children of Israel in which fatigue, regrets, and mutiny were always possibilities. Arriving in the Promised Land, he noted, will surely take both courage and love.
Update on Referred Questions: Blake Burleson

- The Project Manager provided an update on the referred questions that have been answered by the working groups. To date 14 of the 18 referred questions have been answered. See referred questions below.

“Tests” by Working Groups on the emerging Modified Distribution Model

- At the previous Executive Committee plenary (November 10), chairs of subcommittees made presentations on their preferences for a model for a new A&S core curriculum. The presentations represented the consensus views of their subcommittees. All 5 chairs disclosed that their subcommittees had reached consensus that the most appropriate model to express the A&S 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. Since the November 10 meeting, the 3 working groups have been “testing” the modified distribution model.

- Stress Test. On behalf of the Analytics-Budget Working Group, Viola Osborn provided a preliminary analysis of the modified distribution list model. The primary question of this “test” was: how many core course sections would be needed to support the new model? The team examined the model with total credit hours of 33, 45, and 51 and considered the impact of various class sizes. By varying the overall size of the core and class size for each course, in addition to variables such as the credit hours for each course and course level, the total course sections needed with a modified distribution list model could compare favorably with the existing core course sections needed to support the current A&S core (BA, BS, BFA, and BSAS).

- Advising Scan. Joyce Miller, representing the Curriculum Development Working Group, provided an initial scan of the emerging model with the following questions in mind: (1) would the model allow for students to complete a degree in 4 years?, (2) is the model flexible enough so that students could attain second majors and participate in co-curricular experiences and engaged learning?, and (3) is the model non-burdensome with respect to large majors and pre-professional programs. This initial scan was done by creating three sample degree MAPs to examine these questions. The scan suggested probable application for the questions above. Two variables need further review: transfer courses and major/school migration.

- Vision Test. On behalf of the Oversight-Integration Working Group, Paul Martens presented a report that concluded that a modified distribution model could meet the standards set forth by the A&S Core Curriculum Vision. The following Vision requirements were considered: unity, efficiency, non-burdensome, flexibility, interdisciplinary, shared knowledge, 5 content/skills requirements (Scientific Reasoning, Critical Thinking, Civic Engagement, Creativity, Christian Tradition), and inspiration of moral, intellectual, and spiritual virtues.

- Questions asked after each of the presentations were recorded.

- While the modified distribution model “passed” these very preliminary “tests,” the working groups stressed that more extensive and determinative tests cannot be conducted until the model is populated with courses.

Remarks from Dean Nordt

In concluding the taskforce’s work for the semester, Dean Nordt provided a heartfelt thanks to the members for their success thus far. He reminded members that their primary focus should continue to be on what is best for A&S students. While that focus is absolutely essential to the process and progress, he also stressed that he would not expect that the taskforce’s final recommendation would harm the work of any of the 24 departments that are charged with teaching undergraduates. Keeping those foci in mind, he said that the members should feel free to be creative in their mutual efforts. In conclusion, he thanked the members for their demonstrated ability to debate and negotiate difficult and vital issues in collegial and respectful ways.
UPCOMING

December 13 Steering Committee meeting
• Planning the schedule for the Spring semester

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 common prefix? At present the prefix follows the department. Having a common 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, 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 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 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?
- How might the modified distribution list model fail to support the A&S Core Curriculum Vision requirements?
- What courses will populate the core curriculum? How many core course sections in each department will be needed to support the new core?

A WORD FROM PROJECT MANAGER

Colleagues,

I’m grateful and proud for the effort and results of your work over the fall semester. While there is much left to be accomplished, you have created the possibility for us to make important progress on our assignment during the spring semester.
I'll be meeting with the Steering Committee next week to chart the next steps. They will be in contact with you after that meeting. It has been a pleasure to serve with you. I wish each of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Blake Burleson
December 2, 2016