College of Business Curriculum Committee Feedback

The report of the General Education Task Force identified several issues. For example, the task force observed that there were:

* *inconsistencies in course categories within and across categories*
* *perceptions that some course syllabi do not represent their categories*
* *lack of common assessments within categories*
* *assessment focused on processes rather than outcomes*
* *wide perception of a lack of rigor in liberal studies courses’ reading, writing and thinking requirements*

However, none of these weaknesses speak to the current program itself, but rather to the failure to assess and monitor the current program. In other words, that there are inconsistencies in course categories, courses which do not represent their categories, and a lack of common outcome assessment rubrics does not necessarily reflect poorly on the program but rather on assessment and the ongoing maintenance and review of the program. We would suggest that those weaknesses be addressed and remedied, and then a determination made as to the adequacy of the program once there is a sufficient process in place to remedy inconsistencies and courses which are not reflective of the category. To revamp an entire program based on undocumented perceptions, or a failure to review continually its implementation, seems to be unmerited at this time.

The Task Force also noted that at *“the heart of this proposal is its relationship to the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning. As a guiding principle of the University, the QEP offers a logical and robust way to envision, deliver, and assess the education mandated not only by the QEP, but also by UNC Tomorrow and the Stewardship of Place model.”* However, the QEP to which the report alludes has been completed. The reference to “the QEP” throughout the report suggests that the Plan is entrenched, and it is not: it will change. Our past plan was about synthesis, but a quality enhancement plan must be dynamic, not static. Trying to capture the most recent QEP and institutionalize it in the curriculum seems ill-advised; our QEP initiatives should be institutionalized in university goals and the strategic planning process, not necessarily as a curricular monument. Will we change the general education curriculum every five years, each time the QEP is modified? Moreover, the University’s 2020 Strategic Plan seems more relevant than the now dated UNC Tomorrow.

Generally, the consensus is that College of Business faculty would prefer a smaller general education program than the current Liberal Studies program, and supports the deletion of the ULP. With respect to the actual program proposed, the College has several concerns.

The *First Year Seminar* was recommended for continuation. We offer no recommendation either way because its effect has not been assessed adequately. However, we would suggest that assessment of the FYS be made not only of the students in the courses but also of the faculty teaching the courses. Currently, the way enrollment is managed in FYS courses frequently results in students being in the seminars who have no real interest in the topic. That result can become problematic for faculty and students who are interested in the topic, as well as obviously to first year students who land in a course in which they have no interest. We have no hard data, but, again, perceptions; faculty members enthusiastically develop a FYS only to discover that a substantial number of students enrolled neither selected nor desired the course. Are we sure we are achieving desired outcomes with enrollment managed by inching the availability of seats in sections in increments of three? If these courses are enrolled at less than the break-even funding point is it critical that they be assessed to ensure that the tax paid on SCH production is reaping rewards. We also would caution that the importance of a FYS should be student-centered and learning outcome centered, not program centered; in other words, FYS should not be designed to be a recruiting tool for a major.

Finally, Liberal Studies instructors in the College of Business suggested that a sophomore seminar may be preferable to a FYS given the writing component expected in such a seminar. Often instructors must spend substantial instructional time and resources on remediation in basic grammar, writing, research and analysis skills at the expense of substantive seminar material. If the FYS is to include a substantial writing component, then the seminar should take place after the general education composition and writing skills requirements have been completed successfully. Alternatively, a placement test could be employed to ascertain which students are prepared with sufficient writing skills to take such a seminar in their first year.

The College supports the six hours *Composition* requirement, but advocates in favor of the inclusion of more basic grammar and sentence structure in those six hours. The learning goals outlined are indeed meritorious, but our accrediting body demands that our students demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively, the achievement of which is all too often frustrated by their inability to follow simple rules of grammar. The College also supports the three-hour *Communication* requirement, but suggests that a needs assessment at least be explored with programs outside the Communication department to inform desired content and skills. The College fully supports the *Mathematics* requirement, the *Social Science* requirement, the *Fine Arts* requirement and the *Humanities* requirement, but on average is less enthusiastic about the *Wellness* requirement. Some faculty expressed concern that the Wellness category should be more inclusive, broader in scope and not limited to the category’s current configuration of only two choices.

Generally, an underlying preference of college faculty would be one of flexibility and not rigidity in the satisfaction of program requirements. For example, many faculty members expressed dismay at the deletion of a *Science* course given Section 1.1.2 of the 2020 plan. It would seem desirable to support STEM courses, perhaps by allowing flexibility in meeting a 9-hour STEM requirement, comprised of some combination of math, science and engineering classes, and not one math course and now only one proposed science course. More fluidity in the satisfaction of requirements is preferable to a categorical approach. If learning objectives are clear and there is an effective system of assessing the achievement of desired learning outcomes, then the context or category is less of an imperative. Mature assessment processes can capture progress towards learning outcomes without the need to specify a small range of acceptable courses.

There was no support in the college for the 9-hour *Integrative Experience* for several reasons. Comments suggested that faculty believe it will be difficult to administer with no measurable value-added, will not be “practical” when it comes time for teaching such classes, and will be an unworkable nightmare likely composed of large swaths of our current liberal studies courses.

Our college is required to integrate and assess its core curriculum for our accrediting body, AACSB. Our core capstone, Strategic Management (customized for either the BS or BSBA degree programs), requires that students synthesize what they have learned in the previous 33-hours of core courses by completing a project. Similarly, for SACS, we have a capstone in virtually all of our majors which demands the synthesis of knowledge for each major. All of our learning outcomes are assessed for the BSBA core and each major, as well as for the two BS degrees though our Assurance of Learning program. We believe this curriculum design is a truly integrative experience, and that a 9-hour sequence of random courses that build to no particular crescendo in General Education is not a comparable experience. Our university’s limited resources should not be invested in an ad hoc experience, particularly at any expense to true integration in a major program of study.

The goals of the *Ethical Commitment* component of the sequence are laudable; however, we believe that the study of ethics in context to be of more value. In other words, business majors would benefit from a course in the ethics tailored to their area of study, such as corporate social responsibility, when they are well into their major, not when they are in the first couple of years of general education. The ethics course should prepare them for the ethical challenges that will be faced in their careers, and to do so effectively, students must have some content knowledge. The course will be more theoretical and of less practical value in general education; this principle should hold true for students in the fields of medicine, engineering, education, etc. Each major, particularly in the professional schools, would benefit from an ethics course, but as a part of their major, not as a part of general education. Therefore, if there is to be a mandated ethics component it should be a graduation requirement, not a course in general education.

*Global Awareness* seems similar to the current P6, so we question why that category was not tweaked instead of replaced and included in the integrative experience. Nevertheless, concluding that the global awareness requirement can be met with “fluency in a foreign language” seems somewhat puzzling because fluency can be achieved without “global” awareness in the learning. Therefore, the retention of the current P6 is preferred with the emphasis being on global awareness rather than language skills.

The *Civic Engagement* component seems to be the most problematic. By way of comparison, data since fall 2012 report an average enrollment in service learning designated courses of 16.33, with only two of the nine SL designated courses offered during that period enrolling more than twenty students. Therefore, this course, like the FYS, could be a resource intensive proposition because of the inherent challenges of delivering such a component to large sections of students.

Other questions come to mind as well. What is the standard for this requirement? How many hours? What type of activities will satisfy this component? How will this be administered in the online environment for our distance students (many of whom already have full time jobs and families)? Who will oversee and verify the civic engagement activities of our online students?

Arguably, civic engagement components are a valuable investment of resources; however, we believe that such projects are best completed in the student’s major, not in general education. The project in our strategy course to which we alluded earlier is an example of a community outreach project. Rather than develop an entirely new course, why not require either a service-learning designated course or a co-curricular civic engagement experience as a graduation requirement? A co-curricular experience could involve the Division of Students Affairs and offer a feasible alternative to courses specifically designed to incorporate service learning, if incorporating civic engagement as a graduation requirement is desired.

Should we mandate civic engagement in whatever form, however, we believe that there should be an assessment of potential liability exposure. Not only are there potential professional liability concerns (unauthorized practice of law, unlicensed accounting, engineering, physical rehabilitation, etc.), but also concerns about the safety of our students and those with whom they interact. Risk-exposure from mandatory civic engagement for all undergraduates deserves considerable study prior to approval and implementation.

In sum, this 9-hour sequence is the most objectionable part of the proposal to our faculty by far. We would much rather keep our current P6 and a STEM course instead of this proposed Integrative Experience. How will *integration* be assessed? If we have faced challenges in our assessment efforts thus far, assessing this sequence may prove even more worrisome. What will be measured?

Not only does the sequence seem misplaced in general education, it likely will pose a significant barrier to transfer students from other institutions. What if other universities do not have a civic engagement course? Will we be able to identify an equivalency and how? The 9-hour integrative experience seems far too boutique for a state funded regional comprehensive university, which has in its performance based funding model metrics such as graduation and retention rates.

Another strategic direction for our university includes the growth of our degree completion student body. This 9-hour sequence seems at odds, not only with accepting transfer credit from any other university, but also with our state’s community college system. Will there be a waiver of our general education requirements if students complete an AA or AS from a NCCC? Even assuming that is the case, it still seems unfair and illogical to allow community college student to satisfy our general education program with one of those degrees and to require transfer students or entering freshmen to complete the requirements of the Integrative Experience.

In conclusion, we would prefer that the current program be tweaked until it is assessed to determine whether or not 1) it is achieving desired learning outcomes, 2) the courses included are true to their category, and 3) the rigor and expectations are sufficient and reasonable for the learning goals enunciated. Any wholesale revision of Liberal Studies/General Education requires substantial time and effort in *implementation* resources. What will be our gains for those pains? We do not know because we have not yet measured our shortcomings and our strengths in the current Liberal Studies program. In the absence of evidence about what revisions should be made, we advise a much more conservative approach, which for now might be limited to the deletion of the ULP. Alternatively, there was support from some faculty members to syncing our general education with the 30-hour required curriculum outlined in the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement from Community College of North Carolina.

Respectfully submitted,

Curriculum Committee

The College of Business