

University Council Committee on Basic
Education Requirements
December, 1980

In the fall of 1979 this committee was established by the University Council and charged with examining the basic education requirements for all undergraduate degrees at the University and reporting its findings and recommendations to the Council. As a part of our extended deliberations we have conferred with many elements of the University community, including student groups, the senior cabinet, departmental committees or delegations, chairmen, deans and their college representatives, and the president and vice presidents, as well as with individual students and faculty. Our preliminary reports to the Council last February and April elicited numerous responses. We have carefully considered the opinions and concerns of our colleagues in arriving at our conclusions. No votes were taken among the committee; we discussed and modified proposals on each issue until a consensus was reached. While some individual differences may remain, we strongly support the recommendations indicated in this report, and we believe that the matters they address are of fundamental importance to the University.

I. SURVEY OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

The most recent general legislation dealing with basic education requirements was adopted by the UT Faculty Council and the General Faculty in the spring of 1955 and approved by the Board of Regents in July, 1955. The details of the proposal, usually called the Graham Committee Report, are included as an appendix. In essence it required that every undergraduate degree program include a minimum of 45 hours in basic courses, to be chosen with considerable flexibility from several specified categories. Through the years all introductions of new programs and modifications of existing ones have been measured against these standards.

It is the judgment of our committee that the Graham Committee Report is no longer fulfilling the role for which it was originally intended, i.e., to assure that all of our undergraduates develop the characteristics of an

educated individual. The categories prescribed are very broad, and the increasing emphasis on specialization among both students and faculty has led to choices that de-emphasize or eliminate the study of basic topics we believe to be essential.

Many examples of this may be cited. In some programs the only substantial writing required of students occurs in freshman English. It is possible for a strong student to place out of these courses and complete a degree without ever facing a significant writing assignment. Alternatives are offered that make it possible for a student to avoid science courses entirely. Even our distinguished Plan II program does not require any exposure to mathematics. Others require no analysis of literature or limit this to English 307. Although all degrees include the legislative requirement in U.S. Government and U.S. History, some require no additional social science. Many programs require no foreign language proficiency or permit a wide variety of alternatives. Most professional degree plans include very few electives, and there is apparent pressure to use these in areas with maximal job-related benefits. Table 1 presents a sample of undergraduate programs from various schools and colleges broken down according to requirements in basic areas.

Another aspect of this situation is the general feeling of our faculty, supported by trends in national standardized tests, that the level of preparation of entering students is declining. While this may have many causes beyond the purview of our committee, it seems clear that a student's course selection in high school may be substantially affected by the awareness of the demands that student will face in college.

II. THE PURPOSE OF BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Once we accepted the hypothesis that our current system of basic requirements is inadequate, we spent considerable thought and discussion on the goals that these programs should be accomplishing. Specifically, what are the essential characteristics of an educated individual? What traits should be common to all recipients of baccalaureate degrees from The University of Texas at Austin?

Degree	Total Hours	English (Incl. Literature)	Social Science Beyond Legist. req.	Natural Science	Math	Foreign Language	Fine Arts & Humanities	Electives
BS Mechanical Engineering	131	9	none	14	12	none	none	6
B. Architecture	164 or 166	12	none	6 or 8	8	none	100	18
BS Nursing	129	9	6	18	3	none	3	6
BS Pharmacy	160	6	3	40	6	none	none	17
B. Social Work	132	9	6	15	none	none	6	13

Table 1. (Cont.)

Degree	Total Hours	English (Incl. Literature)	Social Science Beyond Legist. req.	Natural Science	Math	Foreign Language	Fine Arts & Humanities	Electives
BA Plan I	120	9	6	15	none	14	6	38
BA Plan II	120	6	9	12	none	14	12	40
BA Art	120	12	12	18	none	8	42	16
BFA Dance	121	6	none	-----total of 6-----				9
BBA Accounting	120	9	6	6	6	none	3	15
BBA Petroleum Land Management	120	9	6	19	6	none	none	3
BS Advertising	120	12	none	15	none	14 or substitute	none	25
BS RTP	120	12	none	15	none	14 or substitute	none	28
BS Chemistry	132	9	none	56	9	11	none	32
BS Education (Elementary)	126	12	6	6	6	none	none	12
BS Electrical Engineering	132	12	none	14	16	none	none	15

Of primary importance is the ability to express one's thoughts clearly and correctly in writing. This skill can rarely be achieved simply by taking courses in freshman composition, especially in the case of students who read little and thus have neither models to imitate nor ideas to express. One should be capable of reasoning effectively from hypotheses to conclusions and logically analyzing the arguments of others.

One should have a critical appreciation for the social framework in which we live and the ways it has evolved through time. An understanding of our traditions in America is essential, but American History and Government should be viewed in the broader context of western civilization and the history of ideas. One should have experience in thinking about moral and ethical problems, particularly in the context of modern society.

One should have an understanding of some facets of modern science and of the ways we gain and apply knowledge of the universe. One should also be able to cope with some aspects of modern mathematics and the ways they are applied to solve problems. These are essential tools for arriving at sound judgments on complex scientific and technological issues.

It is no longer possible to conduct our lives without reference to the wider world in which we live. An educated person must have familiarity with and sensitivity to a foreign language, including an insight into how other cultures think and feel. This has recently been stressed in recommendations of prominent groups including the President's Foreign Language Commission, a panel of national leaders in government, business, academe, and foreign affairs.

Finally, one must have insight into the creative side of the human spirit. An educated person must acquire early some lasting appreciation of literature and the arts in order to make life more meaningful and enjoyable and to assure support for the continuation of our humanistic and artistic heritage.

It should be stressed that we do not seek to make every graduate a universalist with highly developed skills in multiple fields. We do not

seek fluency in a foreign language, mastery of advanced scientific methods, or talent as a creative artist. Nor are we concerned with the direct professional utility of any of these proposed traits. Rather we feel that they form a minimal set of characteristics which should be common to all of our graduates regardless of their field of specialization. Collectively they form the foundation for concentration and deeper study as well as for future adaptation and development in response to our ever changing environment.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

The crucial first steps in accomplishing these objectives should be completed in the secondary schools. Indeed, by the time a student enters the University many of these traits should be acquired. For most students this is unfortunately not the case. We strongly urge that the University use whatever means are available to encourage better preparation of secondary school students in English, social and natural sciences, mathematics, and foreign language. A proposal to require more thorough preparation of students prior to admission to the University is now being considered by the Educational Policy Committee. We strongly support this proposal.

Our principal concern, however, must lie with the undergraduate curriculum. We believe that the stated objectives may be accomplished through a carefully planned selection of existing courses. It is not difficult to design a satisfactory curriculum in the absence of other restraints, but many professional programs are so tightly structured with extensive requirements in the major and in supporting fields that the number of hours set aside for basic courses is quite limited. The 45 hours satisfying the Graham Report are not necessarily available since the choices within each category resulted in several of these hours being absorbed into the major or into related work. In response to the serious concerns expressed by the professional schools and programs, we have made every effort to reduce the number of hours necessary to satisfy our proposed general education

requirements.

We recommend that the University adopt a new set of requirements which would be common to all undergraduate degrees. These would be minima in the sense that schools and colleges would be free to retain or institute more stringent requirements through normal procedures. Our proposal addresses six basic areas.

1. Writing

Students must not only be trained in basic composition, but they must also be expected to continue the development of their skills in their advanced work. This should not be viewed as the exclusive responsibility of the English Department; all members of the faculty should be concerned with the writing of their students.

It is our opinion that students with sufficient high school preparation should be able to obtain credit for E. 306 by advanced placement, although presently only 18% of the entering freshmen do so. Consequently our writing requirement is formulated in terms of courses beyond E. 306.

We recommend a writing requirement of 12 semester hours beyond E. 306, including 6 hours in upper-division courses. The first 6 hours could be satisfied by completing a normal lower-division English sequence such as E. 307 and E. 314K. The remaining 6 hours could be fulfilled by any upper-division courses certified to have a substantial writing component. These would not necessarily be courses designed to teach writing, but they would require substantial writing by students, and the written work would be evaluated on form as well as content. We urge all departments to develop courses of this type or to modify existing courses to have these characteristics. Since feedback from the instructor is fundamental to improving writing skills, it is essential that the courses satisfying this requirement be taught in small classes.

It is our intention that a student selecting E. 307 and E. 314K will simultaneously be satisfying 6 hours of literature as stipulated below. By doing so, and completing the upper-division work within the major field, the entire writing requirement (beyond E. 306) could be absorbed into other areas.

The English Department has recently proposed a new sequence consisting of E. 306, a sophomore literature course, and an upper-division course designed to develop writing skills in specific disciplines. We find this proposal to be entirely compatible with our objectives, and we support its adoption. If it should be approved, our requirement could be formulated as the English sequence followed by 6 hours of upper-division courses which have a substantial writing component.

2. Social Science

As a consequence of the legislative requirement, all undergraduate degree programs currently include 6 hours of U.S. Government and 6 hours of U.S. History. These are important subjects in which high school graduates often exhibit inadequate knowledge. However, this commitment of 12 hours places a formidable additional limitation on the availability of time for other areas. Some flexibility now exists through a variety of topics in Gov. 312L and an extensive list of courses dealing with aspects of American History. We recommend that the university administration explore the possibility of seeking greater flexibility in satisfying this requirement.

We propose that every program include 3 hours beyond the legislative requirement, to be chosen from Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Linguistics, Psychology, or Sociology.

3. Mathematics

We recommend a requirement of 3 hours of mathematics. It is not our intention to specify a course or topic. A strong case could be made for the need to understand the methods of statistical inference or the basic principles of calculus. One might also argue for courses containing linear programming, mathematical modeling, or other important applications. Our only stipulation is that certain courses not be allowed to satisfy this requirement: M. 301, an algebra course covering topics a student should learn in high school; M. 302, an introductory course in the cultural aspects of mathematics that may be primarily historical; M. 303F, the mathematics of finance; and M. 316K & L, techniques of mathematics for

elementary education.

4. Natural Sciences

The recent report of the Commission on the Humanities states, "Liberal education must define scientific literacy as no less important a characteristic of an educated person than reading and writing." Everyone is aware that science is playing an ever expanding role in our daily lives, yet it has been argued that some of our current programs allow students to graduate while remaining technologically illiterate. An attempt to convey specific aspects of modern technology to students may be futile in that continuing developments rapidly convert innovation into history. We feel that a student will be best prepared to adapt to change with an understanding of basic scientific principles and techniques.

We propose a requirement of 9 hours of natural science courses. At least 6 hours must be taken in one subject to assure a greater depth of coverage. A maximum of 3 of these 9 hours could be taken in mathematics, and these 3 hours would not overlap with the previous required 3 hours of mathematics. Students should be strongly advised to acquire a basic knowledge of how to use a computer.

5. Foreign Language

The decline in the role of foreign languages in the secondary and post-secondary curriculum over the past two decades has caused serious national concern. In its report released in 1979, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Affairs expressed alarm concerning "a serious deterioration in this country's language and research capacity at a time when an increasingly hazardous international military, political, and economic environment is making unprecedented demands on America's resources, intellectual capacity, and public sensitivity...Nothing less is at issue than the nation's security." The Commission and the recent Task Force of the Modern Language Association have both recommended various steps for improving language study in America's schools. They have now been joined by the Commission on the Humanities in calling for increased foreign language requirements for college admission and for reinstatement of foreign

language requirements in degree programs.

We believe that an acquaintance with a foreign language and culture should not be considered merely a utilitarian requirement or a social grace, but as one of the most efficacious means of broadening one's horizons and enabling one to judge our own culture and language. In an ideal situation most or all of this work should be completed in high school. We support the proposal currently being considered by the Educational Policy Committee to institute an admission requirement of two years of foreign language in high school. Recent reports indicate that approximately 75% of our current freshman class meet this standard.

We propose that each of our undergraduates should be required to master the basic grammar in a foreign language. Initially students could satisfy this requirement by presenting two years of high school language credit. Beginning in the fall of 1986 those submitting secondary credit would also be required to demonstrate proficiency at a specified level on a standardized examination. This would offer high schools a period of time to strengthen their foreign language programs. Students without high school credit and those unable to perform at the appropriate level would be expected to complete the second semester freshman course (407 in most languages). Records for advanced placement during the 1977-78 testing period appear in table 2.

Table 2.

Language	Number Examined	Credit for 406	Credit for 407
French	586	482 (82%)	338 (57%)
Spanish	2119	1828 (86%)	1080 (52%)
German	318	220 (69%)	43 (11%)

A strong minority of the committee favored requiring students to complete the second semester freshman course in a foreign language or to otherwise demonstrate proficiency at this level.

6. Fine Arts and Humanities

The oft-heard contention that Americans do not know how to use leisure

time is a severe indictment of our contemporary culture. The University and the Austin community offer a wealth of opportunities for students to develop an interest in literature and the arts.

We propose that every student be required to complete 6 hours of literature and 3 hours chosen from art, music, classics, archaeology, architecture, or philosophy (other than logic). As indicated in our discussion of the writing requirement, by choosing courses appropriately a student could simultaneously complete these 6 hours of literature. If the proposed English sequence is adopted, we would consider the sophomore literature course together with the upper-division writing course taken in the humanities or the social or natural sciences as satisfying the literature requirement.

General Discussion

The various aspects of the proposal may be summarized in the following example. Assuming that a student takes the upper-division writing courses in the major and that proficiency in a foreign language has been established, the remaining requirements could be satisfied by completing

- E. 307 and E. 314K,
- 6 hours U.S. Government,
- 6 hours U.S. History,
- 3 hours Social Science,
- 3 hours Mathematics,
- 9 hours Natural Science, and
- 3 hours Fine Arts and Humanities,

a total of 36 hours. Note that the lower division writing courses have been chosen so as to simultaneously satisfy the literature requirement. Students who do not place out of E. 306 would face an additional 3 hours.

In designing these requirements we have endeavored to accomplish each objective with the smallest possible number of hours, yet within each area there is considerable breadth from which students may choose. Consequently we feel strongly that exceptions or substitutions should not be allowed.

For some introductory courses, such as E. 306, M. 305G, Gov. 310L, or foreign language, advanced placement should be encouraged. However, we have serious reservations concerning the expansion of advanced placement further into the curriculum since there is much more to be gained from courses in residence than the ability to pass an examination.

If the University is to stress the importance of basic courses in the curriculum, then it must also commit itself to making these courses as effective as possible. President Flawn has already taken steps in this direction by recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence in these fields. Departments should be encouraged to give high priority to these courses in the assignment of faculty. The University as a whole should address the many needs that arise: reducing class size, furnishing graduate or clerical assistance, or supplying instructional aids and equipment. The condition of these courses should be such that they become a source of pride, both on the campus and in the broader community.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

As we consider these recommendations, it is essential that we be aware of the means by which they would be implemented, the time periods involved, and the effects they could have on our existing undergraduate programs. While some of these are quite specific, others are subject to rather broad interpretation.

The writing requirement we have proposed states that the 6 upper-division hours must be taken in courses that have been "certified" to have a substantial writing component. We recommend that the certification of such courses be the responsibility of a standing university committee. Its membership should be broadly representative of our faculty, and its charge could be expanded to include the overall supervision of the writing requirement. A closely related body with similar responsibilities, the English Composition Board, is now in operation at the University of Michigan.

If these recommendations are adopted, they would be implemented by each individual school and college through its catalogue. Final catalogue

copy is now being prepared for the various 1982-84 editions. Consequently, the earliest that these changes could be instituted would be in the 1983-85 catalogues. This would mean that the first students subject to the requirements would be those entering in the fall of 1983, or the fall of 1984 for those colleges changing catalogues in even numbered years.

This delay offers the University the opportunity to communicate the changes to the high schools in the state. Students who will enter UT as freshmen in 1983 are currently in their sophomore year in high school. If we accurately convey the implications of the requirements to these students and those who will follow, they will have sufficient time to plan their academic preparation.

Perhaps the most immediate concern among the faculty and administration is the impact these changes would have on existing programs. We have not performed a detailed study of the effects on each major and degree plan on our campus; this would best be done by the faculty members directly involved. However, we have examined each of the undergraduate degrees listed in Table 1 and determined the primary modifications that would be necessary in order to comply. In the discussion below we have assumed that the student selects the lower division writing courses so as to simultaneously satisfy the literature requirement and takes the upper-division writing courses within the major. We also assume that foreign language proficiency has been established.

BA Plan I:

Area requirements may be adapted to satisfy the proposal; at least three hours of natural science would be taken in mathematics.

BA Plan II:

Although the freshman English sequence is different, and there may be no major area, it should not be difficult to meet the writing requirement. Three hours of science would be taken in mathematics.

BA Art:

Of the eighteen hours in science, three hours would be taken in mathematics.

BFA Dance:

The impact here is more substantial than in any of the other degrees surveyed. Three additional hours of literature and three of social science would be required. The six hours in science, mathematics, or foreign language would be forced into science or mathematics and expanded by six additional hours, with an overall minimum of three hours of mathematics. This would add twelve hours, of which only nine could be fulfilled by converting electives.

BBA Accounting:

Only minor adjustments would be necessary.

BBA Petroleum Land Management:

Three hours would be added in fine arts and humanities. Only three hours of electives are available.

BS Advertising:

Three hours of science would be taken in mathematics. Three additional hours of social science and three hours of fine arts and humanities would be required. Twenty-five hours of electives are available.

BS Radio-Television-Film:

Three hours of science would be taken in mathematics. Three additional hours of social science and three hours of fine arts and humanities would be required. Twenty-eight hours of electives are available.

BS Chemistry:

Three additional hours of social science and three hours of fine arts and humanities would be required. Thirty-two hours of electives are available.

BS Education (Elementary):

Three hours of fine arts and humanities would be added. While the other requirements appear to be satisfied, a problem arises due to the use of M. 316K, L as the six hours of mathematics. As our proposal is stated,

three additional hours of mathematics would be required. Twelve hours of electives are available.

BS Electrical Engineering:

Three additional hours of social science and three hours of fine arts and humanities would be required. Fifteen hours of electives are available of which six hours must be taken in approved non-technical courses.

BS Mechanical Engineering:

Three additional hours of social science and three hours of fine arts and humanities would be required. Six hours of non-technical electives are available.

B. Architecture:

Three additional hours of social science and three (or one) additional hours of science would be required. Eighteen hours of electives are available.

BS Nursing:

Only minor adjustments would be necessary.

BS Pharmacy:

Three additional hours of literature and three hours of fine arts and humanities would be required. Seventeen hours of electives are available.

B. Social Work:

Three of the fifteen hours of science would be taken in mathematics.

These comments are not comprehensive; they may overlook subtle changes in course selection that are of major importance. However, they should give a general picture of the impact of our recommended changes.

Another area that must be analyzed in detail is the capacity of the current faculty and staff to meet the resulting demands. The extent of the enrollment increases in basic courses should be predictable. We are strongly opposed to the prospect of expanding class size to accommodate these increases; in fact, we are specifically recommending that some class sizes be reduced in order to accomplish our goals. The time delay built into the implementation process would offer the University a brief period to begin addressing these needs.

Serious concern has been expressed that more stringent admission or degree requirements will have a negative effect on the recruitment of students into our programs, that talented students will select other institutions with less demanding curricula. This is certainly open to discussion and debate. In fact, we believe the effect will be positive rather than negative. These are not precipitous changes erecting insurmountable barriers, rather they are an indication that the University is committed to giving each of its students a solid educational foundation. Students are aware that the value of the degree is inseparably linked with the academic standards of the institution. It is in their interest, as well as our own, and in the interest of the people of Texas that we urge the adoption of these recommendations.

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James W. Vick, Chairman

*These professors were appointed to the committee on November 20, 1980. Since they were only involved in the final stages of our deliberations, they do not necessarily concur with our recommendations.

APPENDIX. Summary of the Graham Committee Report on basic education requirements, adopted by the Board of Regents in July, 1955. (See page 6572, Documents and Proceedings of the General Faculty).

The requirements for each Bachelor's Degree offered by the University of Texas (except the Bachelor of Laws Degree based on a Bachelor's Degree from another institution) include the subjects and hours specified in sections 1 - 4 below, to a total of at least 45 hours:

1. Area of Basic Courses: 12-15 hours, to include
 - A. Six hours of English Composition, and
 - B. Six to nine additional hours selected from the following list of subjects, provided that a student presenting three or more high school units in mathematics (except arithmetic or general mathematics) will be absolved from three hours of this requirement, and provided that a student presenting two or more high school units in a foreign language will be absolved from six hours of this requirement:
 - (1) Accounting
 - (2) Logic
 - (3) Mathematics
 - (4) Statistics
 - (5) Foreign Language
 - (6) Drawing
 - (7) Music Theory
2. Area of Social Sciences: 12-15 hours selected from the following subjects:
 - (1) Government
 - (2) History
 - (3) Anthropology (except physical anthropology)
 - (4) Classical Civilization (except literature in translation)
 - (5) Economics
 - (6) Geography (except physical geography)
 - (7) Philosophy (except logic and aesthetics)
 - (8) Psychology (except experimental psychology)
 - (9) Sociology

3. Area of Natural Sciences: 6-9 hours, selected from the groups and subjects listed below, provided that 6 hours be from Group A.

Group A

Bacteriology
Biology
Botany
Chemistry
Geology
Physics
Zoology

Group B

Anthropology (physical)
Astronomy
Geography (physical)
Psychology (experimental)

4. Area of Arts and Literature: 6-9 hours selected from the groups and subjects listed below.

Group A: Aesthetics, Architecture, Art, Drama, Music

Group B: Literature in English or in another language. (Courses in B are above the freshman level.)

Group C: Composition, Creative Writing, Linguistics, Speech, Technical Writing. (Courses in C are above the freshman level.)

NOTE: Candidates for the Bachelor of Music degree and for the Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees in Drama and Art who present 15 hours in Area 2 (Social Sciences) and 6 hours in foreign language or in natural science or in mathematics may be absolved from 6 hours of the requirements set forth above in 1-4, provided the departments concerned designate the 6 hours to be so absolved.