

DOCUMENTS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE FACULTY SENATE

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE
FACULTY SENATE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

H. Eldon Sutton (Zoology) Chair of the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee, has filed with the Secretary of the Faculty Senate the report and recommendations set forth below.

It will be presented to the Faculty Senate for discussion and action at its meeting on April 23, 1990.

Kenneth W. Kirk
Kenneth W. Kirk, Secretary
The Faculty Senate

Distributed to members of the Faculty Senate on April 18, 1990.

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The Curriculum Committee selected for special consideration three areas that, for various reasons, are of current concern.

Core Curriculum

There has been much urging by national figures involved in education as well as by State groups that a core curriculum be established. Often these urgings follow some revelation of the extent of ignorance of college students or others about some topic, such as geography. The call for action may be accompanied by a list of specific information to which the advocate was exposed as a student and to which all students should therefore be exposed in order to become truly educated.

The issue of a core curriculum gained immediacy for Texans with a report submitted by the Subcommittee on Core Curriculum of the Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Education, established by the Commissioner of Higher Education in March 1989. This report, undertaken pursuant to various legislative actions, was prepared by a committee that included consultants from educational institutions within the State. The report, in short, recommended that each institution of higher education develop a core curriculum of forty-five hours exclusive of the major for all baccalaureate degrees. Objectives of the core curriculum were described, and it was recommended that such curricula be submitted to the Coordinating Board for approval.

At its meeting on October 26-27, 1989, the Coordinating Board adopted a rule requiring that each institution evaluate its core curricula every five years, the first such report to be due not later than May 1, 1991. The Board also encouraged institutions to adopt core curricula with a minimum of fifty-four semester hours exclusive of the major and noted the exemplary objectives of core courses as set forth in the committee report. The Board did not adopt the recommendation that core curricula be subject to approval by the Coordinating Board or its staff.

One issue that often clouds discussions of core curricula is lack of agreement on the courses that should be allowed to satisfy requirements. Some would limit the choice to a few specific courses designed as core courses. (See, for example, the report released by the National Endowment for the Humanities under chair Lynne V. Cheney, October 1989.) At the other extreme, some would accept a variety of courses as meeting the objectives of a core curriculum. The present basic education requirements at UT Austin reflect the latter approach. We note also the enormous logistical problems that would be generated if all students were required to take the same courses - problems that have confronted the English department for many years.

RECOMMENDATION I: The committee recommends that UT Austin continue to adhere to its present system of basic education requirements as meeting the desirable purposes of a core curriculum. We urge further that the administration resist efforts to subject UT Austin core curricula to external review, particularly when that review has as its goal the imposition of uniformity among institutions in the State.

Multicultural Courses

There is a nationwide concern for greater understanding of the diversity of cultures. This concern has its origins in a variety of issues, but most of us surely agree that we achieve greater understanding of our place in our own culture and the place of our culture in the universe of cultures by the study of other cultures. This has long been an argument for the study of foreign languages and world history, even though the sample of languages and history has been heavily biased toward western European traditions. Many persons have awakened to the fact that, whatever the common elements of our cultures, the United States itself is a multicultural society, with many aspects of our cultures ignored or suppressed.

There are numerous courses at UT Austin that can properly be labeled multicultural. They can be found especially in the social sciences but also are offered in fine arts, humanities, and other departments and colleges. Many of the multicultural courses are co-listed as offerings of area studies or ethnic studies centers.

Contrary to the beliefs of some, these courses can be counted to satisfy basic education requirements. There is a difficulty, however, because of the existence of the legislative requirements for government and history. The current BA Plan I basic education requirement in the social sciences is for six hours of course work in anthropology, economics, geography, linguistics, psychology, or sociology in addition to six hours of American government and six hours of American history. The total of 18 hours is generally regarded as the maximum that can be allocated to social sciences out of the 36 or more hours of the basic education requirements. Any additional course in social sciences can only be counted as an elective. We note this particularly in the case of history and government. With the heavy curricular demands of major areas, few students can seriously contemplate elective courses beyond those needed to fulfill degree requirements. Yet, many of the desired multicultural courses fall within the social sciences. The options are even narrower in the case of BS degrees.

There is one solution to the problem: reduce the required courses in American government and history. The Fowler committee, in reviewing the basic education requirements, recommended that the Legislature reduce its total requirements in this area to 6 semester hours (University Council D&P 11715-11758). We propose that the requirement be dropped entirely. Virtually all students who enter The University have had courses in American government and history in high school. Some have had more than one. Undergraduate students should already have been exposed to much of the material in the required courses. The opportunity to take other courses in the social sciences, including other courses in history and government, should be of greater educational benefit than repeating much of the material from high school courses.

The committee strongly urges the administration to support aggressively the abolition of the legislative requirements of government and history. While the Legislature has a proper concern for the quality of education offered in State institutions, the development of curricula is best left to those who must balance the overall educational benefits against the costs of various actions. For many students, the cost of the present requirements is inability to take other courses that may be of greater educational value.

Until such time as the legislative requirements are modified, the committee is opposed to the adoption of additional requirements for courses. Indeed, the committee supports as much freedom of choice in course work as is consistent with a sound, broad-based education. Under the present circumstances, it does not recommend adoption of a multicultural course requirement.

At the same time, the potential value of multicultural courses is great. Students should be encouraged to take them, and any hindrances should be identified and removed. One such hindrance, in addition to the courses mandated by the Legislature, is lack of awareness on the part of many students of courses that are offered and that can count toward basic education requirements. We recommend that a university committee on multicultural courses be appointed by the president. The committee's purpose will include the identification among existing courses of those that are multicultural. The committee should also encourage the development of new courses in areas where they are needed. In particular, the committee should make available to all students a list of multicultural courses, including descriptions of the courses and the degree requirements that the courses will satisfy.

RECOMMENDATION II: The committee recommends that the University administration seek to have the legislative requirements in history and government dropped, thus creating space in the curricula for greater options in the social sciences, including multicultural courses. The committee also recommends that a committee on multicultural courses be established for the purpose of identifying existing multicultural courses, preparing a list of such courses with indications of degree requirements satisfied by them, and encouraging the formation of new courses.

Substantial Writing Component (SWC) Courses.

The issue of how best to teach writing to college students, given finite resources, continues. The major restructuring of basic education requirements that occurred in the early 1980's as a result of recommendations of the Vick committee still shape the current approach, although some modifications have been introduced to solve logistical problems. Degree programs currently require two three-hour courses that are listed as SWC; at least one of the courses must be upper division. In some instances, two-hour laboratory courses are now approved as fulfilling the requirement.

The problems of SWC courses are several and severe. A list of problems was recently included in a report of the subcommittee on SWC. (See *Appendix* of the Fowler committee report, UC D&P 11745-11758, distributed 18 April 1988.) We will not repeat that litany here. The present committee has surveyed the status of SWC courses, presented in *Appendix A*. Although some programs have sufficient offerings to satisfy SWC needs, many are inadequate, some woefully so.

The previous subcommittee made several recommendations that, with the exception of designating some laboratory courses as SWC, have not been implemented. The reason is easy to identify: The recommendations cost substantial amounts of money. Even if the money were available, some of the recommendations assume a plentiful supply of graduate students for new TA appointments. In many parts of The University, most graduate students - in some departments, all graduate students - already have some form of support that is more relevant to their interests than would be the grading of composition papers.

A solution to the problem of faculty and TA's not being prepared (for whatever reason) to teach SWC courses has been attempted in the College of Engineering by means of hiring special lecturers and TA's to provide such instruction. (See *Appendix B*.) It is noteworthy that the TA's are non-Engineering graduate students. Although the approach may be of value to some other colleges, it does not remove the need for money. The College of Natural Sciences has suggested the possibility of specially trained TA's functioning in much the same way across courses and departments, but that suggestion has yet to be tried. At the other extreme, some programs, such as those in the College of Communication, have no difficulty in satisfying the need for SWC courses.

The provision of adequate instruction in writing remains an unsolved problem. It has never been funded at levels sufficient to achieve the objectives of the original Vick committee recommendations. It is possible that, given such funding, staffing would continue to be a problem in many areas. Under the present circumstances, many students take courses that they do not want in order to satisfy the writing requirement. In the process, they deny access to those courses for students who do want them. However desirable the goals of the writing requirement, the process has led to distortions of the educational system.

The committee is divided in the choice of which bandage to apply to this problem. The two extreme positions - abolishing the writing requirement entirely or doing nothing in hopes the money and staff will appear - are not attractive. Both have been tried. However, the need for instruction in writing is real, and we agree on the need to keep trying.

Part of the difficulty may lie in the attempt to solve the problem on a university-wide basis, when the problem varies greatly from one program to another. Perhaps it is time that consideration be given to development of writing instruction on a program by program basis tailored to meet the special requirements and resources of each program.

RECOMMENDATION III: The committee recommends that the requirement for substantial writing courses be reaffirmed as part of the University-wide basic education requirements. The committee further recommends that each college be directed to develop programs to provide instruction to its majors and be given the flexibility to respond in ways that may be especially suitable for its own students. A University committee should approve the operations of these programs and should submit an annual review of the status of writing instruction to the University Council. Finally, the central administration and the colleges should make every effort to fund these programs at meaningful levels.

APPENDIX A

Substantial Writing Courses (SWC) by College

	Spring 1988	Fall 1988	Spring 1989	Fall 1989	Number of Majors Fall 89	Total SWC Courses Needed
Architecture	3	2	3	2	381	3
Business	13	25	31	29	2818	
Communication	34	34	30	35	3018	35
Education	6	6	>2	3	1892	3
Engineering	16	16	15	15	2772	15
Fine Arts	10	11	17	7	1499	37
Liberal Arts	213	223	228	247	7398	155
Natural Sciences	23	20	21	17	5830	24
Nursing	4	4	4	4	250	4
Social Work	2	2	2	2	200	10

No response has been received from Pharmacy.

APPENDIX B

Excerpts from Report of the College of Engineering

The College of Engineering assists the faculty who are teaching SWC courses by providing what we call an English or Writing TA to provide grading support for the writing component of the course. Additionally, the College has employed four full-time faculty to teach communication skills, including writing. They teach CE 333T, CHE 333T, EE 333T, ME 333T and PEN 333T. Each of these courses meets the qualifications for a Substantial Writing Course, but to date, only the ECE Department has chosen to seek certification. These courses were generated as a result of the decision by the Department of English not to offer E 346K. The cost of the grading TA's and graders for all engineering substantial writing and 333T courses is approximately \$147,000 per year. The cost of the full-time faculty and their associated TA's is approximately \$272,500 per year.