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**GREENSBORO**

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MAR 26 2007

TO: Dean Timothy Johnston  
KPK

FROM: CAR Task Force: Porter Aichele, Rebecca Adams, Nancy Bucknall, Roberto Campo, Bob Hansen, Mark Hens, Michael Kane, Paul Knapp, Terry McConnell, Gene Rogers, Scott Romine, Susan Shelmerdine, Lisa Tolbert

RE: Report on Examination of CAR

DATE: March 25, 2007

Members of the CAR Task Force met three times during the Fall 2006 semester to discuss the questions you posed to the committee and to develop a plan for soliciting faculty opinions about the effectiveness of CAR. After agreeing that we would host focus groups organized by related disciplines and enlist the help of department heads for breadth of coverage, we drafted sets of questions calculated to generate discussion.

In December heads of undergraduate study or advising were invited to participate in focus group sessions where moderator Rebecca Adams presided over discussion and two task force members took notes. Meetings were scheduled by Lori Wright during the second and third weeks of February. Each group represented a sub-group of the liberal arts: Humanities, Sciences, Social Sciences. There was good attendance at all three groups, and discussion was substantive. Bob Hansen sent department heads a list of four questions to pose at departmental faculty meetings, requesting that a summary be sent to task force chair Porter Aichele. Fourteen heads or faculty appointed by heads responded.

The attached report consists of Porter Aichele's collations of responses to questions posed in department faculty meetings and focus groups and an executive summary that isolates major areas of consensus, incorporates points made in task force meetings, and highlights suggestions that emerged as recurring suggestions. The executive summary includes two recommendations made by the task force at its final meeting on March 21, 2007.

Attachments

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

It is clear from my participation in all focus groups and my review of the summaries of departmental discussions that faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences understand the distinctive character of the College's curriculum and the role of the College within the University. All departments in the College offer courses in the liberal arts, whereas UNCG's professional schools provide university-level professional training, in addition to selected general education and liberal arts courses. All UNCG students take liberal arts courses in the College to satisfy the requirements of the University's general education curriculum (GEC). GEC is designed to give students the basic knowledge and skills that constitute the foundation of learning in all specialized areas of study, including majors in the professional schools. Most students who choose to specialize in a discipline within the College are required to satisfy the College's additional requirements (CAR). From my perspective, these requirements mark the first level of difference between a "general" education and a "liberal" education; major requirements mark the second level of difference.

As a historian, I make note of the fact that the College's liberal arts education has a history dating back to the *artes liberales* of classical antiquity, which were originally divided into the *trivium*, consisting of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and the *quadrivium*, encompassing geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music. A humanist education in the Renaissance included some these disciplines, expanding grammar to include history and literature. Another Renaissance model, Raphael's fresco cycle on the walls of Pope Julius II's personal study in the Vatican, references theology, justice, poetry, and philosophy as the basic realms of human knowledge. Over the centuries a liberal arts curriculum has become even more expansive in its disciplinary scope, but the principal objectives have remained the same: 1- to teach the ways of learning and the habits of mind that are essential for intellectual freedom, and 2- to explore what it means to be human in the context of specific humanist disciplines.

***CAR Task Force members and faculty throughout the College concur that the skills taught in liberal arts course are applicable across the university curriculum, but also in a student's future career choice, public life, and personal development.*** These include the general skills of intellectual inquiry, critical thinking, and reasoning based on both empirical evidence and theoretical concepts, as well as discipline-specific skills of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation. The additional liberal arts requirements taken by students pursuing the BA and BS degrees in the College give them:

- exposure to a wider range of coursework, which ideally promotes the kind of integrative thinking that allows them to make connections across disciplinary boundaries;
- more opportunities to practice the writing skills they will apply in every aspect of their lives;
- intermediate-level proficiency in a language other than English, which facilitates communication in a global society and enriches the global perspectives introduced in other GL marker courses.

A number of task force members and focus group participants underscored the fact that these liberal arts requirements are *not* “additional,” but were, in fact, securely in place before the institution of the more reductive GEC.

*Although there was enthusiastic support for CAR across the College, there were also suggestions made in the interest of clarifying objectives and alleviating perennial challenges.* After considering the attached summaries of discussions about CAR within departments and in focus group sessions, the CAR Task Force makes **two recommendations:**

**1- Clarify the rationale for CAR.** Suggestions for clarifying the rationale among faculty and students include:

- conducting an open discussion, perhaps in a College Assembly or a series of meetings among College faculty, focused on both the philosophical rationale and the practical reasons for distribution requirements;
- rewriting the attached rationale, which is a collation of available historical and contemporary documents related to GEC and CAR and publishing the rationale in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*;
- using introductory class sessions as a forum for discussing the rationale among students and reinforcing it throughout their undergraduate educations.

**2- Continue College-wide discussion of suggestions for change on which there was consensus.** Below I summarize those that transcend special academic interest groups, beginning with the general and proceeding to the specific.

*Suggestions for communicating the benefits of CAR to students include:*

- creating cluster or core courses designed to 1- close the gap between what we want our students to learn and what they in fact do learn and 2- establish common goals within disciplines;
- requiring capstone courses that break down compartmentalized thinking and encourage students to make connections across disciplines.

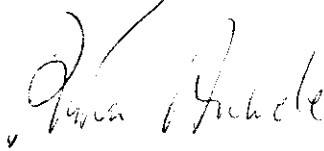
*Focus group participants and department heads cited the language and writing intensive requirements as major challenges posed by CAR, and data analysis in CASA confirmed that these requirements are the most likely to keep students from clearance for graduation. Suggestions for addressing these:*

- survey students to ascertain why so many are taking languages at community colleges; make the placement exams a requirement rather than an option; offer additional “transitional” courses that compress the first two semesters into one; train advisors to schedule the language requirement in a timely manner and break down the perception that it is onerous; track completion rates by introducing intermediate in addition to graduation clearance audits;

- impose a structure on the WI requirement that would include 100-level courses with an emphasis on fundamentals, including grammar, followed by upper-level courses focusing on different kinds of writing (e.g. narrative, persuasive, analytical) and/or types of papers (e.g. research or position papers).

*The one suggestion for an additional requirement that crossed all disciplines was a course in applied mathematics or statistics.* This requirement could be an alternative to the third required science course or a marker that would fall into the category of 'life skills' or satisfy major requirements in discipline-specific computational analysis.

K. Porter Aichele

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "K. Porter Aichele". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

## **SUMMARIES OF DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSES TO CAR**

Department heads or designated faculty in the following departments responded to the questions listed below: African-American Studies, Art, Broadcasting and Cinema, Chemistry, Classical Studies, Communications Studies, English, History, Mathematics, Philosophy, Physics, Psychology, Sociology, Theatre.

### **How should the College's curriculum goals differ from those in the professional schools?**

There was general consensus that the College's curriculum goals should remain firmly grounded in the liberal arts as opposed to vocational training. A number of respondents pointed out that for millennia the liberal arts have constituted the education of free people, and they will remain a vital necessity for citizens of 21<sup>st</sup>-century democracies. Responses indicated a ringing endorsement of the belief that a broad education in the liberal arts provides a critical context for more narrowly focused study in any discipline or for professional training.

### **What is your understanding of the rationale for CAR?**

Although some faculty were not entirely clear about the rationale for additional requirements in the liberal arts, a majority believes that these requirements help students hone transferable skills and acquire a knowledge base that can be broadly applied. Faculty generally concurred that liberally educated people are critical thinkers who will take what they have learned beyond the classroom. They are self-disciplined but not self-centered; rather, they are keenly aware of the society in which they live. They are thoughtful, creative, ethical citizens who are prepared to lead successful lives and make contributions to civic life.

### **Should the College continue to have additional requirements?**

A significant majority of faculty endorsed additional requirements, some noting that these requirements are minimal in their existing form, others making specific mention of the importance of the foreign language requirement in our global society.

One department noted that changes in GEC could affect the current structure of CAR. Another department expressed concern about the proposed changes in the GEC committee, urging the College to institute its own area committees to retain decision-making authority over liberal arts courses within the GEC curriculum.

### **Would you recommend any changes in the current set of College requirements?**

Faculty in two departments advised deferring this question until GEC is reviewed.

Individual faculty in other departments suggested the following changes, some of which were reiterated in focus groups:

- a “visual literacy” requirement or marker;
- a writing proficiency requirement geared toward research papers;
- additional WI courses focused on different writing skills at different levels of the curriculum;
- a math marker that might cross disciplines instead of adding additional hours;
- clusters of related courses or an interdisciplinary core course designed to teach freshman students the habit of making connections early in their liberal arts education;
- a capstone course focused on the integration of accumulated knowledge;
- more flexibility in the distribution of courses in required areas;
- a clear distinction between the social and behavioral sciences, with one course required in each;
- streamlined markers.

## **SUMMARIES OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

In attendance at Humanities Focus Group: George Dimock (Art), Jay Parr (BLS), Susan Shelmerdine (Classical Studies), Scott Romine (English), Colleen Kriger (History), Gary Rosenkrantz (Philosophy), Derek Krueger (Religious Studies), Carmen Soto-Mayor (Romance Languages), Tom Humphrey (Theatre)

Notetakers: Porter Aichele and Gene Rogers

In attendance at Sciences Focus Group: Amy Adamson (Biology), Jerry Walsh (Chemistry/Biochemistry), Mark Armstrong (Computer Science), Mike Lewis (Geography), Rich Fabiano (Mathematics and Statistics), Steve Danford (Physics and Astronomy)

Notetakers: Porter Aichele and Paul Knapp

In attendance at Social Sciences Focus Group: Frank Woods (African-American Studies), Art Murphy (Anthropology), Jody Natalie (Communication Studies), Roberto Campo (International Studies), Nancy Myers (Linguistics), Dave Holian (Political Science), Ed Wisniewski (Psychology), Sandra Westervelt (Sociology), Kathy Jamieson (Women's Studies)

Notetakers: Porter Aichele and Michael Kane

### **What is your opinion of how the College's goals should differ from those of the professional schools?**

Participants in all groups concurred that the College's goals should focus on the benefits of a liberal education rather than the technical skills and certification requirements of professional training.

Participants in the Sciences and Social Sciences groups defended the benefits of a liberal education in general terms, referring to "things a well-educated person should know" and to well-rounded "Renaissance" students with exposure to a broad range of academic disciplines. Participants in the Humanities group were more specific in naming what they perceived as the benefits of a liberal education, e.g. understanding multiple disciplinary perspectives and methodological diversity; learning the skills necessary to analyze information, weigh evidence, and synthesize conclusions; developing the intellectual curiosity of a life-long learner; acquiring the habits and values of the "wise and good citizen."

### **What is your understanding of the rationale for CAR?**

Participants in the Humanities and Sciences groups pointed out that CAR is a misnomer since the College requirements are not "additional" but *continual* in that they have not fundamentally changed in twenty-five years. One member of the Social Sciences group added that the number of major requirements in the professional schools makes GEC + CAR onerous for students, whereas students in the College can accommodate more liberal education courses because of comparatively fewer major requirements.

Participants in the Humanities group cited as rationales the students' need for a more structured, in-depth education in the liberal arts than GEC provides and the faculty's role as a defensive rear guard against the erosion of the liberal humanities. A majority of participants in the Sciences group noted that CAR is limiting rather than broadening, restricting choices for students pursuing BS degrees with major requirements dictated by external certification boards. Although some members of the Social Sciences group reiterated the rationales and limitations cited by the other two groups, two members professed to have no understanding of the rationale for CAR, one adding that the current distribution smacks of enrollment protection. Other participants in the Social Sciences group questioned the value of markers in adding depth to CAR.

### **What value does CAR add to GEC?**

Though not unanimously, participants in all three groups cited the language requirement as an added value—one that conforms to educational standards around the world, where most university-educated students learn a second language. More specifically, one faculty member also noted that this requirement prepares students for entrance into PhD programs that require proficiency in a second language.

Humanities group participants framed added value in general terms, citing the liberal tradition of interconnected knowledge bases as a means of teaching different modes of inquiry, encouraging life-long learning, and internationalizing the university curriculum.

Some participants in the Sciences group expressed the opinion that the added value of CAR is skewed toward the humanities and languages, whereas two argued that the third science requirement creates a balance.

Participants in the Social Sciences group noted the potential of adding greater value by expanding the choices offered to students, including comprehensive courses emphasizing practical knowledge and life skills.

### **How would you describe the benefits of CAR to students?**

Members of all groups agreed that CAR defines the intellectual framework in which students contextualize their major courses of study. In naming benefits, Humanities group participants listed specifics, notably the skills of analysis, interpretation, and communication learned in specific academic disciplines and transferable to situations outside the academy, and also referred more generally to the development of intellectual curiosity. Participants in the Sciences group added enhanced creative thinking and experiences that contribute to fuller lives. The Social Sciences group elaborated on the language requirement, one member making the point that learning about different cultures through language breaks down our students' ethnocentricity, another that learning grammar by studying a second language helps students with English.

### **What evidence do we have or could we gather to demonstrate the benefit students gain from additional requirements?**

Participants in all groups generally concurred that the value of the liberal arts can only be assessed five or more years after graduation.

This question provoked a lively and lengthy discussion among participants in the Humanities group, most of whom voiced strong resistance, citing the fallibility of attempting to measure the benefits of the liberal arts with numerical data as opposed to the qualitative judgments specific to humanist disciplines. Woven into what devolved into a debate about assessment were references to various forms of assessments that have been discussed in the university, among them standardized testing, portfolio reviews, capstone seminars and essays.

Responses in the Sciences group ranged from the anecdotal to a general tendency toward deferral until post-graduation. One participant challenged another's observation that the foreign language requirement encourages students to travel abroad, noting that we do not know what motivates students' choices. Most echoed the opinion that the benefits cannot be immediately measurable but should be assessed by interviews with graduates five or ten years after degree completion.

Participants in the Social Sciences group introduced the idea of documenting the marketability and salary potential of students who fulfill the language requirement.

### **What problems are posed for students by CAR?**

Across the board completion of the language requirement was named as the major challenge posed by CAR, especially for non-traditional and transfer students, including those who transfer into the College from the professional schools. Although students admitted to UNCG are required to have two years of a foreign language at the high-school level, many either do not place into intermediate courses or do not take the placement tests and choose to take entry-level courses, making the language requirement a four-semester sequence. Despite the challenges posed by the language requirement, a majority of participants in all groups defended it, both as a widely applicable skill and as an example of the kind of sustained commitment to intellectual inquiry that is essential to a liberal arts education.

The WI requirements were also cited by participants in all groups as a challenge, caused in part by poor advising and in part by students not taking responsibility for keeping track of degree audits. A participant in the Social Sciences group noted that faculty in upper-level WI courses are frustrated that students cannot write and questioned who is responsible for teaching the fundamentals of writing. The mathematics representative noted insufficient WI offerings in departments like his in which the WI goals might seem incompatible with course content.

Several participants cited markers as posing problems of staffing and student enrollments at inappropriate levels (e.g. seniors in 100- and 200-level marker courses).

A number of participants, especially in the Sciences group, expressed concern that students are being advised to fulfill GEC requirements in their first two years at the expense of beginning major requirements, which results in a loss of majors for departments with tight sequences of coursework.

### **How might we alleviate these problems?**

Suggestions ranged from better advising and monitoring of student choices to reducing the language requirement to two semesters at any level. In the interest of retaining the current language requirement, some participants suggested more “transitional” language courses that compress two semesters into one.

A number of focus group participants acknowledged that WI and SI requirements would be easier to complete if sufficient numbers of upper-level courses with these markers were offered in every department.

### **What additional requirements should the College continue to require as supplements to GEC? Should any requirements be eliminated?**

Participants in all three groups suggested adding hours, but the only common suggestion was an additional math course, possibly in applied mathematics.

In contrast, one participant in the Sciences group suggested fewer required hours to accommodate disciplines with certification-driven major requirements.

Most participants generally agreed that CAR should be retained, even if changes are made in GEC. There were, however, a number of proposed modifications to the existing structure, most reflecting the disciplines of those making the suggestions:

- give students choices in the existing four-course Humanities/Fine Arts requirement so that English is not privileged;
- reduce the required hours in Humanities/Fine Arts or allow exchanges to accommodate the choice of a “numeracy” option;
- decouple foreign language and global marker requirements;
- require two rather than three science courses, both with labs;
- separate the social and behavioral sciences, requiring one course in each category.

### **Is there any advice you think is important to include in our report to the Dean?**

Only participants in the Humanities and Social Sciences groups offered advice, namely:

- consider a course or some other means of teaching students to be “civil” as well as “wise and good”;
- consider cluster courses in general education or design interdisciplinary courses with the goal of making connections among and across disciplines;
- clarify the mission statement of the College and the rationale for CAR.

## **RATIONALE FOR CAR**

The College of Arts and Sciences offers students the opportunity to pursue degrees in the liberal arts. A liberal arts curriculum includes courses and programs in the fine arts and humanities, mathematics, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. Each of the academic disciplines represented within the College's comprehensive curriculum has its own knowledge base, modes of intellectual inquiry, and ways of acquiring knowledge. Because a liberally educated person can demonstrate breadth of knowledge as well as mastery of a specialized field of interest, the College has instituted distribution requirements across disciplines. In addition to satisfying the degree requirements of their major fields of study, students in the College complete a range of courses that allow them to acquire the general knowledge and intellectual skills of a liberally educated person. The distribution requirements listed below are intended to help students:

- learn the vocabulary of diverse disciplines;
- practice the skills of intellectual analysis and critical thinking;
- interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information and concepts as a means of constructing meaning and communicating ideas;
- integrate knowledge across disciplines into an understanding of the tradition and potential of a liberal arts education.

### **Reasoning and Discourse (GRD)**

The ability to communicate clearly is essential for functioning successfully in both social and professional settings. The basic elements of effective verbal expression are taught in courses that focus on reasoning and discourse. Students are required to complete two courses in this category, including an introductory course or seminar in English composition. In these courses students read, write, and engage in discussion as the means of interpreting and evaluating arguments constructed by others, as well as developing and communicating their own arguments.

### **Writing-Intensive Courses (WI)**

Students continue to practice the skills of written communication in courses designated as writing-intensive. At least one of the four required courses in this category must be in the student's primary major, and at least one must be at the 300-level or above. These courses give students the benefit of instruction, practice, and enhanced learning through informal and formal writing assignments. Informal writing promotes thoughtful exploration of course-specific subject matter. Formal writing assignments require students to research, organize, draft, and rewrite papers on topics that pertain to the course content.

### Speaking-Intensive Courses (SI)

Students acquire additional practice in the skills of oral communication by completing two courses designated as speaking-intensive; at least one of these must be in the student's major field of study. In these courses students apply the principles and techniques of oral communication to demonstrate their knowledge of the course content. Informal speaking activities allow students to engage actively in course content while practicing delivery skills. Formal presentations are designed to help students acquire proficiency in speaking to a specific audience in a clear, coherent, and effective manner.

### Foreign Language Courses (GFL)

Students earning BA and BS degrees in the College must demonstrate intermediate-level proficiency in one language other than English. This requirement is intended to help students:

- understand language as structure and process;
- learn to communicate in a global, multi-cultural society;
- recognize and understand cultural distinctions expressed through language.

### Global and Global Nonwestern Courses (GL/GN)

By completing the foreign language requirement, students in the College fulfill two of the four required general education courses (**GEC**) in global, international perspectives. At least one of the four required courses must carry the Global Nonwestern (**GN**) marker. Courses in these categories are designed to give students some knowledge of the interconnections among regions of the world by introducing them to countries other than North America and Great Britain. Because curricular content focuses on cultural, social, political, economic, and historical developments, these courses complement other course requirements in the general education curriculum.

### Humanities and Fine Arts

Every educated person commands some knowledge of the creative, philosophical, and ethical traditions that have shaped our diverse aesthetic values and belief systems. To acquire a basic intellectual foundation in the academic disciplines that explore the meaning of human experience, students are required to take four courses – two in literature (**GLT**), one in the fine arts (**GFA**), and one in philosophical or religious perspectives (**GPR**).

- In literature courses students learn to analyze literary texts as creative distillations of the aesthetic, historical, and social contexts in which they were written and have since been read and interpreted.
- In fine arts courses students study the visual and performing arts as forms of individual expression and as reflections of both change and cultural continuity.
- In courses that fulfill the distribution requirement in philosophical, religious, and ethical perspectives, students learn to identify, compare, and contrast the

intellectual, spiritual, and moral concepts that inform how we process knowledge, what we believe, and why we make the choices we do.

### Mathematics (GMT)

Because mathematical concepts have both theoretical and practical applications across a liberal arts curriculum and in our daily lives, students are required to demonstrate proficiency at a basic level by completing one introductory course in algebra, calculus, or statistics. In these courses students are taught to:

- perform computations using appropriate tools;
- apply mathematical principles to theoretical models and empirical problems;
- analyze and evaluate solutions based on numerical data.

### Natural Sciences (GNS)

Scientific inquiry uses empirical information to conduct systematic studies of the physical and biological aspects of the natural world. Results of such studies enhance our knowledge of living things and the environments in which they exist. To understand the impact and potential of scientific research, students are required to complete three courses, including one in the physical sciences (GPS), one in the life sciences (GLS), and one that incorporates laboratory-based experimentation. In these courses students:

- learn the basic principles and tools of scientific inquiry;
- acquire a fundamental understanding of the aims and methods of primary scientific research;
- analyze and interpret scientific data.

### Social and Behavioral Sciences (GSB)

Because humans are social beings, it is our individual and collective responsibility to understand how people relate to and function in society. To acquire a broad knowledge base about the social, political, and economic principles that structure our lives, students are required to complete three courses in at least two different academic departments. In courses that fulfill the requirements in social and behavioral sciences, students learn to apply the theories and methodologies used in systematic investigations of the complex interrelationships between individuals and society.

### Historical Perspectives on Western Culture (GHP)

The encompassing nature of history makes this academic discipline relevant to every area of intellectual inquiry. Knowledge of history is also necessary for understanding the complexities of the world in which we now live. Students begin to develop a historical consciousness in two courses that focus on aspects of the history of western culture – one in pre-modern history (GPM), one in modern history (GMO). In these courses students:

- analyze and evaluate theories about the forces that determined the historical past;

- integrate political, economic, social, and intellectual currents into a coherent historical perspective on western civilization as it developed from classical antiquity through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.