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MEMORANDUM

TO: Sub-Councils (Academic Affairs, Faculty, Student Affairs) and Presidents

FROM: Kay Clark  
Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
  
Chair, *Ad Hoc* Committee to Establish Common Lower-Division General Education Core Curriculum

SUBJECT: Affirmation of Principles

DATE: November 8, 2002

The accompanying attachments to the e-mail message contain the final proposal to establish a common lower-division general education core curriculum and a summary of revisions that were made to the proposal based upon suggestions provided the Committee. The reports received from each campus indicate that thorough institutional reviews were conducted, and excellent suggestions for improving the proposal were made. As the summary document denotes, many suggestions have been incorporated into the final document, which is now ready for consideration by the Sub-councils.

The summary document lists numerous concerns that recurred in a majority of campus reports and the responses of the Committee to these prevalent issues. The subject of this memorandum, however, is to devote especial attention to a dominant concern noted by several community colleges that the Forty-One (41) Hour Core limits the number of pre-major courses that can be taken, given the effect of the related initiative to reduce hours in associate degrees to sixty (60) hours and baccalaureate degrees to 120 hours. The Committee considered very carefully each suggestion for modification of the Forty-One (41) Hour Core, but it remains firm in recommending the Core as presented. Listed below are significant reasons that the Committee believes the Forty-One (41) Core should remain as proposed:

- The initiative from *Defining Our Future* directs the establishment of a common general education core and clearly states that it should be at “the lower division (freshman and sophomore) [and] fully transferable within the TBR system.” A related action states: “Require universities to accept the A.A. and A.S. degree as fulfilling lower division general education requirements for students who are transferring.”

Various proposals suggest lowering the number of general education hours at community colleges and reassigning a certain number of general education hours to be taken at universities. Such proposals violate the intent of “lower division” and “transferability requirements” set forth in *Defining Our Future*. The Forty-One (41) Hour Core as proposed by the Committee and the related provision establishing block transfer of general education courses accomplishes the intent of the actions directed in *Defining Our Future*.

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- The determination of forty-one (41) hours was determined with careful thought.

Currently in TBR community colleges and universities, general education is composed of the courses comprising the subject categories in the Thirty-Two (32) Hour Minimum Degree Requirement plus additional courses as designated by each institution. At many institutions, the number of general education hours range through the forties. Given the directive to decrease degree hours to sixty (60) and 120, the Committee believes that the Forty-One Hour Core represents a correct proportional decrease from current requirements. Further, the Forty-One (41) Hour Core is actually somewhat below the national average of general education requirements. As stated in The Status of General Education in the Year 2000: Summary of A National Survey (Ratcliff, James L., et.al.), "the average general education requirements is 37.6 percent of the baccalaureate degree, or 45.1 credit units, assuming 120 credits are required for graduation. The median is 40 percent of a 120-hour baccalaureate, or 47.8 credit units."

The effect of forty-one (41) hours on the community college curricula is obviously more pronounced, but the plan also would align our system with those in neighboring states. For example, the Georgia Regents System provides a Forty-Two (42) Hour General Education Curriculum with eighteen (18) hours slotted for pre-major or elective courses. The resulting sixty (60) hour aggregate is fully transferable within all Georgia Regents institutions. Georgia also permits block transfer of completed subject categories, similar to the provisions in the Committee's proposal. Likewise, Georgia has the 60/120 arrangement with exceptions for programs affected by licensure or accreditation.

Kentucky has a common core of thirty-three (33) hours with fifteen (15) more hours to be selected from additional general education courses. The remaining twelve (12) hours are designated for pre-major courses. The sixty (60) hours is again transferable within the Kentucky system. All Associate's degrees in Kentucky contain sixty (60) hours.

Alabama community colleges have a general education core of forty-one (41) hours in subject categories very similar to those in the Committee's proposal. The remaining 19-23 hours are for pre-major courses. Associate's degrees in Alabama range from 60-64 hours

- The learning outcomes developed for each category are designed for basic general education courses offered at the lower division. Moving some general education courses to upper division would diminish the goal of assuring a common lower-division exposure as envisioned by the outcomes and would represent a step back toward a distributive model.

The approach to general education utilizing learning outcomes also permits institutional autonomy in selecting courses to fulfill subject categories. Course titles and subjects may vary widely but with assurance that the appropriate learning outcomes are met.

- The proposed general education core is based on a psychology of intellectual development that will lose coherence if lower division courses are simply delayed until a student reaches the university level.
- The proposed Forty-One (41) Hour General Education Core greatly simplifies communication of transfer procedures. If the Core is adopted, no longer will advisors

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have to explain the complex maze of courses that institutions require beyond the Thirty-Two (32) Hour Minimum Degree Requirements nor try to describe the assured transferability of courses fulfilling the Minimum Degree Requirements. Simplified communication about transfer practices will help to alleviate legislative and constituent concerns that now frequently occur.

- Moving some hours to the upper division could have a negative effect on course offerings in particular majors. General education courses would take precedence. Further, with the reduction to 120 hours, no room may be found for additional general education courses at the upper division in particular majors. Also, moving lower-division courses to the upper division will infringe upon possible plans at universities to develop culmination or capstone courses.
- Moving some hours to the upper division also will produce increased cost of instruction, since appropriations are at a higher level of funding. It also contradicts the spirit of actions specified in *Defining Our Future*. Action # 3 under Academic Programs in *Defining Our Future* advocates an increased percentage of undergraduates in community colleges, "where education is less costly to state and students."
- The 41+19 model accommodates the curricular needs of the majority of Areas of Emphasis in the University Parallel Major at community colleges.

The Committee recognizes that certain programs in the sciences, mathematics, allied health, engineering, and perhaps other areas have difficulty in accommodating both the general education requirements and pre-major courses that are also prerequisite to upper division courses. The Committee recommends that disciplinary task forces composed of community college and university faculty convene in the upcoming spring semester to develop plans for coordinating curricula both in light of the Forty-One (41) Hour Core and the reduction to 60/120. As you know, a limited number of programs may eventually qualify for exemption of the 60/120. Faculty collaboratives in relevant programs will be invaluable in devising solutions to the pressures of the proposed core curriculum and the reduction in degree hours.

- The proposed general education core offers the possibility of enhanced transferability with the University of Tennessee System. Representatives of UT and THEC have participated in the development of the proposed core, and discussions with UT are ongoing.

Again, the Committee affirms strongly its belief in the Forty-One (41) Hour General Education Core. As stated by Jerry G. Gaff and James L. Ratcliff, "Transfer challenges general education thinking to expand beyond institutional initiatives to embrace programs across institutions and still attempt to meet the needs of coherence, comprehensiveness, and commonality."\* The core curriculum, as proposed by the Committee, accomplishes the forward thinking noted by Gaff and Ratcliff. Almost one year has been spent in developing the proposal and campus examination of it. Both the Committee and campus entities considering the proposal have worked diligently and expended many hours on the project. The Committee, therefore, requests your consideration of the proposal as now revised but with major tenets of the original proposal intact.

\**Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass and AACU, 1997, pp. 567-568.