Curriculum Best Practices

Task Force Report

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Task Force Members

- Manal Ahmidouch (’17)
- Christy Buchanan (Psychology, Sr. Associate Dean)
- Sherri Clark (Anthropology)
- Drew Finley (’19)
- Jay Ford (Religious Studies)
- Joseph Ford (’18)
- Stavroula Glezakos (Philosophy, Chair of Curriculum)
- Amanda Griffith (Economics)
- Anne Hardcastle (Spanish, Chair of CAP)
- Peter Kairoff (Music)
- Nina Lucas (Theatre/Dance)
- Sarah Raynor (Math and Stats)
- Jose’ Villalba (Counselling, Sr. Associate Dean)
- Mark Welker (Chemistry)
- Brian Hart (’16), Presidential Fellow
- Michele Gillespie (History, Dean)
Reasons for the Creation of the Task Force

• Last formal review of college curriculum was 2006
• Prudent to ask how well our current curriculum serves our students
• Task Force charged with:
  • exploring the curricula of peer and aspirational universities which have undergone curricular restructuring in recent years
  • reflecting upon ways that our own curriculum might differ from, or be similar to, recent curricular innovations.
A liberal arts education…

…provides students with broad knowledge and inquiry alongside in-depth study in a specific area of interest. To this end verbal and quantitative competence are crucial, but also historical, aesthetic, and linguistic competencies. A liberal arts education also helps students develop a sense of social responsibility and engagement. Ultimately, a liberal arts education facilitates how students see the world - intellectually, morally, spiritually, and physically - from a multi-dimensional standpoint while also acknowledging wider contexts, experiences, and perspectives.
The Task Force assessed a wide spectrum of curricular models, from least to most proscriptive, reflecting an equally wide range of educational philosophies and goals…

This presentation synthesizes the task force’s investigations and discussions to offer useful context from which to consider the strengths and weaknesses of our own curriculum…

- Divisionals, Areas of Knowledge and Modes of Inquiry
- First Year Experience
- Diversity Requirement
- Quantitative Literacy Requirement
- Interdisciplinarity
- Capstone Experience
Questions about Divisionals

• Do our divisionals encourage students to take courses they would not otherwise take?
• Do our divisionals encourage the integration of knowledge? If not, where/when/how does that integration happen?
• How can we make sure that divisionals do not lose out to the interests of the majors?
• How do curriculum reviews/shifts change the way students decide which courses they take? What impact might a review have on different departments?
• Do we keep divisions (“areas of knowledge”) or move to “modes of inquiry” or incorporate a combination of the two?
## Structuring a Curriculum: An Example

### Areas of Knowledge and Modes of Inquiry

**Acquisition of knowledge of humanity, societies and cultures, and the physical and natural world**
- Arts, Literatures, and Performance
- Civilizations
- Natural Sciences
- Quantitative Studies
- Social Sciences

**Development of intellectual abilities, competencies, and skills**
- Critical Thinking
- Analytical Reasoning
- Writing
- Quantitative Literacy
- Foreign Language and Transcultural Understanding
- Synthesis/Integration of Knowledge

**Development of Personal and Social Responsibility**
- Civic Engagement (Using Knowledge in the Service of Society)
- Ethical Reasoning
- Engaging Difference
Current Practices among Peers Compared to WF Structural Challenge Looms Largest

- WF divisionals/gen ed structure seems out of date with peer and aspirational schools
- Underlying issues with the divisionals/gen ed structure exist (i.e. WGS as Division 1 Debate)
- To prepare for SACS in an expeditious way we defended our divisions as a way of meeting our learning outcomes
- Can WF propose a new structure that begins with our learning outcomes?
First Year Experience

Trends
• Many schools already have or are creating FY interdisciplinary courses
• FYS requirements in half the schools
• FYE rarer but an upward trend

Questions
• How does our First-Year Experience pilot course fit into our curriculum?
• Do we need to revamp/revisit FYS from the Class of 2000? Can we make the FYS more truly interdisciplinary?
• Should we incorporate aspects of the FYS and FYE and leadership and character development into 1 FY course; make it two semesters of freshman year?
Cultural Diversity Requirement

Trends
- Few clear national patterns on CDR
- Harvard, UVA, other top schools do not have explicit CDR courses, covered by modes of inquiry instead
- Most schools’ CDR courses address either “plural societies” or “cultural competence,” or have dual requirements addressing both.
- At some schools these dual requirements are more explicitly divided into a US diversity and a global culture requirement.

Questions
- What benefits does a formal CDR serve?
- Is it possible for 1 or 2 courses to do everything we want/need a CDR to do?
- Should we create dedicated CDR courses?
- How should we evaluate CDR courses for appropriateness? What criteria do we need to ensure consistency over time?
Quantitative Literacy Requirement (QLR): application of basic mathematics skills, such as algebra, to the analysis and interpretation of real-world quantitative information in the context of a discipline or interdisciplinary problem to draw conclusions that are relevant to students in their daily lives.

Trends
• Most schools make a distinction between a QLR and a Math/Science requirement
• Most schools have modes of inquiry that correspond to a QLR
• Many current QR classes at WF do not really support quantitative literacy

Questions
• What benefits does a formal QLR requirement serve?
• Should we create a dedicated QLR course or courses?
• If not, should we make changes to the courses that satisfy our QR?
• How should we evaluate QLR courses for appropriateness? What criteria do we need to ensure consistency over time?
Interdisciplinarity

Trends
• Strong movement toward interdisciplinarity at all levels (FY, core, majors)
• Duke the most heavily interdisciplinary; UVA moving strongly in that direction
• Chicago’s core is wholly interdisciplinary
• Emory’s gen ed includes a shared learning experience for all students and expanded opportunities for creative and artistic production

Questions
• Do we need more interdisciplinarity in our curriculum at Wake Forest?
• How can we better support our current interdisciplinarity?
• Do we want to encourage more students to develop their own interdisciplinary major?
• Do we want to encourage the offering of more interdisciplinary majors for students to choose from?
Capstone Course

Trends

• Claremont McKenna requires a senior thesis.
• Pomona has a “Senior Exercise” requirement
• Duke proposed a “Mentored Scholarly Experience”
• William & Mary requires a capstone where all students must synthesize and apply critical analysis, solve problems, create original material, and communicate effectively with diverse audiences.

Questions

• Is there value in providing capstone courses in all majors?
• Do we want more students to have a capstone experience?
• Do we need to establish key criteria for capstone courses?
Lingering Questions…

• Where and when in our curriculum are students asked to put the pieces together in order to better understand or solve important problems?

• Where and when are students encouraged to make links among their academic, personal, and community lives?

• Can we provide more opportunities for linking/integrating independent learning beyond the classroom, i.e. academic internships, study abroad, etc.?

• Should we consider curricular partnerships with WF Professional Schools? What if anything would our students and curriculum gain?

• Should there be a bigger role for undergraduate research broadly construed in any curriculum development?

• How would advising change to meet the needs of a revised curriculum?
Conclusions of the Task Force

• Our current divisionals/general ed structure deserves re-examination
• An ad hoc committee should be created to lead a curriculum review
• An ad hoc committee would use the research and recommendations of the Task Force as a starting point from which to lead a curriculum review
• An ad hoc committee would make recommendations to the Committee on Academic Planning
What are the faculty and student issues that an ad hoc committee charged with a curriculum review will need to consider?

Please discuss this question with your table. A task force member will help moderate and take notes. Be prepared to report out to the whole group.