

To: Dr. Clayton Baum, Chair, Curriculum Committee
From: Dr. Richard Turner, Chair, Institutional Core Curriculum Subcommittee
Subject: Recommended changes to the institutional core curriculum
Date: 25 February 2005

HISTORY

Review of the institutional core curriculum began at the 3 October 2003 meeting of the Curriculum Committee in response to a memo to Dr. Clayton Baum from Registrar Cookie Young. Discussion focused on the requirement of COM-1102 as a prerequisite for the civilization sequence [prerequisite affirmed by the committee at 29 October 2003 meeting], on the two civilization courses as prerequisites for upper-division humanities courses [issue unresolved at 29 October 2003 meeting], and on transfer students entering with many credits for humanities electives. The concern of Provost Dwayne McCay and two departments was that the prerequisites slowed down student progress, particularly in cases of some transfer students. It was pointed out in committee discussion that departments have sovereign rights over setting prerequisites for their courses and that the Curriculum Committee had addressed in 1998 the procedure for assignment of humanities transfer credits in Florida Tech curricula [reaffirmation of the 1998 procedure rejected at 29 October 2003 meeting].

The Institutional Core Curriculum Subcommittee was established by action of the Curriculum Committee at its meeting of 29 October 2003 “to reexamine the core requirements for all students at Florida Tech” [from Baum’s minutes]. The first meeting of the subcommittee was convened on 21 November 2003 by Dr. Baum. Dr. Richard Turner was elected chair. In addition to guests and proxies, the subcommittee members have included Drs. Baum (ex officio), John Cain (Aeronautics), Robert Fronk (Vice Provost for Academic Affairs), Bill Gabrenya (Psychology and Liberal Arts), Paul Jennings (Engineering), Nabil Matar (Psychology and Liberal Arts), Barbara Pierce (Business), and Turner (Science). The subcommittee subsequently met on 19 January, 18 February, 22 and 31 March, 12 and 21 April, and 14 May 2004 and on 11 and 18 February 2005.

ISSUES

The subcommittee addressed first whether or not the present core curriculum satisfies the standards set by SACS. We asked Bob Fronk to inquire of SACS about the use of communications and language courses as humanities and the need for the core to reflect the mission of the university. The issue that consumed most of our discussion was the Provost’s concern and that of two departments about long inflexible sequences of courses that impeded the progress of students who were out of phase in their curricula due to the students’ transfer from other institutions or to the addition of remedial coursework to their programs on the basis of diagnostic exams given upon entrance to the university. Discussion of this issue involved considerable input from the faculty of the Department of Communication and Humanities. Several other issues arose at meetings of the subcommittee, but they were dismissed upon discussion.

UNDERGRADUATE CORE REQUIREMENTS (2004–2005 University Catalog, p. 23)

Curricula for bachelor's degrees

Communications	9 cr, including COM 1101, COM 1102
Humanities	9 cr, including HUM 2051, HUM 2052
Note: Science education majors substitute HUM 3332 for HUM 2052.	
Mathematics	6 cr
Physical and/or life sciences	6 cr
Social sciences	3 cr
Computer literacy	any course designated "CL"
Total credits	33

Curricula for associate's degree, College of Aeronautics

Communications	6 cr: COM 1101, COM 1102
Humanities	6 cr: HUM 2051, HUM 2052
Mathematics	6 cr
Physical and/or life sciences	6 cr
Social sciences	3 cr
Computer literacy	any course designated "CL"
Total credits	27

SACS GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

The following items are taken from SACS documents [underscores added]:

7. The institution:
 - c. offers a general education program at the collegiate level that is (1) a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. These credit hours are to be drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural sciences/mathematics. The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. The institution provides a written justification and rationale for course equivalency.
15. The institution identifies competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those college-level competencies.

The SACS requirement that the institution ensure training in the use of technology for student learning is not part of the general education program, but the inclusion of CL courses in our core curriculum is intended to satisfy this requirement.

SATISFACTION OF SACS GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Use of Communications and Language Courses as Humanities Courses

Dr. Fronk's contact at SACS stated that "it was never the intention of SACS to disallow writing courses such as our COM courses in the core requirements. The only stipulation is that they cannot represent the *only* humanities courses in our core" (Fronk email, 27 January 2004). Dr. Fronk (23 March 2004) reported also that SACS neither has guidelines regarding the use of language courses as humanities nor defines the term "humanities elective."

The Core Curriculum and the University Mission Statement

Dr. Fronk [9 February 2004] pointed out that SACS has a strong emphasis on the institution's mission. He commented that our present core curriculum is well aligned with the mission with regard to having "an organizational culture that values and encourages intellectual curiosity" and to "providing personal and career growth opportunities" for students.

Comparison of Present Core Curriculum and SACS Requirements: Baccalaureate

SACS category	SACS requirement	Florida Tech core curriculum
Substantial component	30 credit hours	33 credit hours
Humanities/fine arts	one course	18 credit hours
Social/behavioral sciences	one course	3 credit hours
Natural sciences/mathematics	one course	12 credit hours
Breadth	no occupational focus	no "writing for marine biologists" in core
Course equivalency	written justification and rationale	transfer courses evaluated by respective departments;
[Use of technology]	[inclusion]	[CL course]
College-level competencies	identify and document	Accomplished by Dr. Fronk's office

Comparison of Present Core Curriculum and SACS Requirements: Associate

SACS category	SACS requirement	Florida Tech core curriculum
Substantial component	15 credit hours	27 credit hours
Humanities/fine arts	one course	12 credit hours
Social/behavioral sciences	one course	3 credit hours
Natural sciences/mathematics	one course	12 credit hours
Breadth	no occupational focus	no "writing for aviators" in core
Course equivalency	written justification and rationale	transfer courses evaluated by respective departments;
[Use of technology]	[inclusion]	[CL course]
College-level competencies	identify and document	Accomplished by Dr. Fronk's office

Conclusion

The present core curriculum of the university meets the qualitative standards of the current SACS requirements for baccalaureate programs and exceeds the 30-credit-hour standard by 3 credit hours. Requirements for the associate's degree in the College of Aeronautics exceed the 15-credit-hour SACS standard by 12 credit hours. Our inclusion of a course in computer literacy satisfies a part of the SACS requirements other than the core. The university's policy on transfer credit meets the SACS stipulation of having a rationale for course equivalency. A policy exists that "identifies competencies within the general education core" and provides a mechanism to gather "evidence that graduates have attained those college-level competencies."

CONSENSUS REGARDING OTHER ISSUES ABOUT THE CORE CURRICULUM

During its deliberations, the subcommittee discussed many issues related to the core curriculum. Most issues dealt with the Provost's concern about flexibility in programs, and a few additional matters arose that the subcommittee agreed should be put before the Curriculum Committee.

Distribution of Credits among SACS Categories

The subcommittee agrees that there should be no change in the part of the core dealing with mathematics (6 credit hours) and science courses (6 credit hours).

Writing Courses in the Core Curriculum

A full year of writing, as presently represented by COM 1101 and COM 1102, should remain part of the core curriculum. The primary goal in these courses needs to be the development of writing skills. The core should continue to require a third course in communication (COM)—one that is specified by each academic unit for its curricula or one that the unit leaves open for the student to elect.

Remediation in Writing Skills

The subcommittee requested that the faculty of the Department of Humanities and Communication revise the mechanism for remediation of students with poor writing skills to reduce the number of students who become out of phase in their writing courses. The department's faculty are, however, not convinced that students can be remediated by means other than enrollment in COM 0110 Basic Writing Skills. In view of this, the subcommittee supports the continued use of COM 0110 to remediate students with poor writing skills and believes that advisees should be encouraged by their faculty advisors to complete their COM 1101/1102 sequence during the summer following their first academic year at Florida Tech. If upon admission a student is identified early enough as one who needs remediation, the student should be encouraged to take COM 0110 in the summer preceding the semester of anticipated entry.

Foreign Languages as Humanities and Social Science Electives

The definitions for humanities (HU) and social science (SS) electives as found in the 2004–2005 university catalog should be revised to eliminate first-year foreign languages (LNG 1XXX). These courses would remain as liberal arts (LA) electives, and curricula may be revised to accommodate the desire of faculty of academic units to include the election of first-year foreign languages by their majors for graduation credit.

Civilization Courses as Prerequisites for Upper-division Humanities Courses

The subcommittee requested that the faculty of the Department of Humanities and Communication eliminate the general prerequisite of HUM 2051 and HUM 2052 for its upper-division courses. Upper-division courses should be reviewed for appropriate renumbering and for the designation of prerequisite courses based on desired knowledge and skills. The purpose of this request was to increase the flexibility of curricula and to reduce long sequences of prerequisite courses. In addition, any revision to this part of the core curriculum must accommodate the need for inclusion of HUM 3332 (American History: Reconstruction to the Present) in place of HUM-2052. The response of the department was that the prerequisite of the civilization courses is largely for the writing skills developed in those courses rather than for their historical content. Flexibility of curricula and avoidance of long sequences of prerequisite courses will be accomplished by the addition of courses mentioned in the next two paragraphs.

Inclusion of Eastern Civilizations in Humanities Courses

The subcommittee requested that the faculty of the Department of Humanities and Communication revise the civilization courses to allow for greater inclusion of Eastern civilizations. There was a strong desire among members of the subcommittee to increase the offering of courses on Eastern civilization; but the ability of the department to offer courses in this area was uncertain because of the current demands on and scholarly focus of existing faculty. The department's faculty believe that the modification of the civilization courses to include world civilization would greatly diminish the depth of coverage. [One member of the subcommittee recommended a change of the titles of HUM 2051/2052 to "Western Civilization 1/2".] They are proposing instead to offer new courses (HUM 2XXX; prerequisite of COM 1102) and to modify a few existing courses to include Eastern civilizations. Some of the courses would not require the civilization sequence and, therefore, would allow greater flexibility in scheduling electives (HU and/or SS) by students who are out of phase in their curricula. The subcommittee encourages the addition to the department's faculty of new hires with expertise in Asian cultures.

Diversity of Lower-division Humanities Courses

The subcommittee encouraged the faculty of the Department of Humanities and Communication to increase its offering of lower-division and upper-division courses; but it recognizes that the department is limited by budgetary restrictions, demands on faculty time, and the desire of faculty to offer courses within their areas of specialty to their own majors. The department reported its plan to offer three new 1000-level courses with no prerequisites: logic, mythology, pop culture. [Note also the addition of new 2000-level courses mentioned in item above.] The subcommittee is concerned about the use of 1000-level HUM courses in curricula with few HU electives, and it would encourage the restriction of at least 3 credits of HU elective in the core curriculum to 2XXX–4XXX courses. [Note that many courses with prefixes other than HUM are designated HU electives in the university catalog.] In view of the willingness of humanities faculty to add lower-division courses, the subcommittee again encourages the addition of new faculty to the department.

Military Science 4 as Humanities or Social Science Elective

The subcommittee has not evaluated the use of MSC 4002 Military Science 4 as a HU or SS elective. Current acceptance of this course for such electives is not in question.

