

History of the Core Curriculum at The University of Alabama

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The first core curriculum was recommended by the Core Curriculum Implementation Committee on March 18, 1981; the final recommendation was the product of numerous University committees including students, faculty, and administration. Its report was published in the April 2, 1982 issue of *Dialog*, and the core curriculum, including the creation of the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee (CCOC), was implemented in 1982.

By the 1990s, the number of courses had grown rapidly, resulting in some faculty and administrators feeling that the core lacked a guiding statement of its philosophy, rationale, or goals. Consequently, in 1991, Provost Taaffe formed a Task Force on the Goals of the Core Curriculum. The task force operated through the Spring semester 1995. The task force collected core curricula from a number of universities and colleges and scholarly publications on core curricula. The work of the task force produced a set of goals for the core curriculum that were revised numerous times after consultation with the Office of Academic Affairs and the Faculty Senate, but no formal proposal was presented. Provost Taaffe then tasked the CCOC with reviewing the core and its underlying rationale in addition to its normal duties. The CCOC worked on this charge in the 1995-1996 academic year and proposed a prologue and goals for the core curriculum to Provost Taaffe. The CCOC's efforts continued under Provost Barrett in the 1996-1997 academic year, and on 9 May 1997 the CCOC proposed a revised core curriculum that included a philosophical rationale and a list of goals for the core curriculum. In response, in the 1998-1999 academic year, Provost Barrett created a new task force to look at reforming the core. This task force only got as far as preliminary discussions on how to proceed and simply stopped meeting after about a year.

The core curriculum's first and only significant modification since its conception was the result of the action of the Alabama State Legislature through ACT 94-202 that created the Alabama Articulation and General Studies Committee (AGSC). Implementation of the provisions of ACT 94-202 started Fall 1998. In anticipation of this, the faculty voted on changes to the UA core curriculum in October 1997. The faculty adopted the state core with the addition of the 6-hour foreign language/computer science (FL/CS) requirement and the 6-hour writing (W) requirement. At the same time the faculty voted down (136 to 184) increasing the 3-hour mathematics (MA) requirement of the State core back to 6-hour requirement of the original core.

Given that the role of the CCOC had effectively been reduced to reviewing W and C courses as the rest of the core courses were expected to go through the discipline specific committees under the AGSC and as part of Provost Barrett's efforts to reduce the number of University standing committees, the CCOC was disbanded and its functions were transferred to the Core Curriculum Subcommittee of the Undergraduate Programs and Services Committee. Subsequently, during the period of transition with the changes in the president and provost, these functions ended up not being the responsibility of any committee. The Faculty Senate about Fall 2006 discovered that core course proposals were not being

reviewed by a University committee, i.e., not by any body of faculty, but only by an associate provost. The senate immediately requested that this be addressed. Consequently, the CCOC was revived, and the new CCOC reviewed the guidelines of the committee and developed an electronic system for handling course proposals.

The timeline for the reestablishment of the CCOC is as follows. The CCOC starting meeting again in Fall 2007 with a goal to update policies and procedures since the creation of the AGSC. In Spring 2007, Keith Sessions, Executive Director of ASGC, and Dendy Mosely, Program Coordinator of the Statewide Transfer Articulation Reporting System (STARS), came to campus; the result of this meeting indicated that UA was freer to determine its core curriculum in areas covered by the AGSC than previously believed. The CCOC guidelines were revised and adopted by the committee on December 11, 2008. No dated revisions to the guidelines have since occurred. The CCOC set up a 5-year review schedule for core courses. In 2009-2010, templates for reviewing each category of core course were adopted by the CCOC.

In fall 2009, the Academic Affairs committee of the senate met with Associate Provost Mark Nelson and the chair of the CCOC to discuss concerns with the process for approval of temporary core status to courses submitted out of cycle by the associate provost as it did not require obtaining any input from the CCOC or the appropriate CCOC subcommittee. The Academic Affairs committee was informed by the associate provost that a change in the CCOC guidelines would be made so that the associate provost would have to consult the appropriate CCOC subcommittee before granting a course temporary core status. (The committee was subsequently informed that the change had been approved by the CCOC and incorporated into the guidelines; however, this item about approval of out-of-cycle courses could not be found in either the Dec 2008 or "current" guidelines). At this same meeting the Academic Affairs committee gave its opinion that a change in the MA requirement to include courses other than MATH courses should require a vote of the faculty as the basic understanding of the designation would be changed.

In fall 2010, the faculty senate passed a Philosophy for the Baccalaureate Degree of a UA Graduate (<http://provost.ua.edu/philosophy-for-the-baccalaureate-degree.html>). This philosophy was designed to effectively serve as a prologue and goals to underpin the core curriculum; the administration prevented adding a prologue and goals to the core curriculum. Provost Bonner promised the philosophy statement would become part of the undergraduate catalogue, although through a continuing series of oversight the statement has yet to appear in the catalog.

The Academic Affairs committee of the Faculty senate met in October of 2014 with new Associate Provost Kevin Whitaker. Prof. Whitaker was frank and open with the committee. In searching records in the Office of Academic Affairs, his office had found at least six different versions of the core curriculum guidelines, and he indicated he was unable at that time to determine which version was the proper and/or current version. He asked the committee's assistance in trying to find documentation to work out this issue. (The committee has since been able to find the results of the 1997 faculty vote on changing the core curriculum and to find an unadulterated copy of the Oct 2008 CCOC guidelines. Provost Whitaker's office has also been able to find additional documents and shared them with the

committee.) Provost Whitaker also felt similar to the committee in that the time had come for a thorough examination of the core to see if it met the needs of The University of Alabama in 2014. Provost Benson in a meeting with the senate's steering committee in October 2014 also expressed the need for such an examination of the core curriculum.

The Academic Affairs Committee has the following concerns:

- 1) The CCOC guidelines starting in 2008 have allowed for changes to the core as approved by the faculty vote of October 1997, as courses without ASGC approval (other than C or W courses) are now included. Neither the Office of Academic Affairs nor the Academic Affairs committee can find any evidence that the faculty has ever voted to approve any change to the core since October 1997 or the president or provost has ever formally announced an official change to the core curriculum since October 1997. Thus, technically (unless other documentation can be found) these changes by the CCOC have no official standing. As of the Dec 1998 and 2008 CCOC guidelines, the CCOC has the ability to make "operational changes" but not "structural changes" to the CCOC guidelines. Structural changes are defined as adding or deleting a category or changing the number of hours required in a category; operational changes are non-structural changes.
- 2) The lack of dating of changes to the Dec 2008 CCOC guidelines and the multiple versions of the guidelines post Dec 2008 leaves doubt as to which, if any, of these post-Dec 2008 guidelines are currently valid. Most notably as an example of the problem, the UA registrars' page on the core curriculum (accessed 2 Sep 2014) indicates MA designation courses must be "*satisfied with MA 110 or higher*", which is in conflict with CCOC guidelines currently on-line.
- 3) The Mathematics (MA) requirement since fall 1998 has been 3 hours of MATH 110 or higher. Sometime after October 2009, the CCOC guidelines were changed (without the addition of a date indicating the change) to accept as a MA requirement "an equivalent to MA 110 or higher". In contrast, the undergraduate catalog continues to indicate MA 110 or higher, not an "equivalent". A review of undergraduate catalogues from the present to 1998 all require MA courses be "*satisfied with MA 110 or higher*"; thus, the registrar's office apparently was never informed of an official change to the MA policy.
- 4) The Academic Affairs committee of the Faculty Senate is not being consulted about CCOC membership as required in the 2008 CCOC guidelines.

This review included (but was not limited to) the following documents:

- 1) UA undergraduate catalogs 1992-2014
- 2) Dec 2008 Core Curriculum guidelines (includes core as published in Dialog 2 April 1982)
- 3) "Current" Core Curriculum guidelines (accessed online 5 Sep 2014)
- 4) Faculty senate minutes 9 Dec 1997
- 5) Annual report of core curriculum committee 5 Jun 1997 (including The New Core Curriculum: A Proposal 9 May 1997, memo from CCOC to Provost Barrett)

- 6) Memorandum 1 Dec 1997 from Provost Barrett to faculty: Results of Ballot on Core Curriculum and the State Articulation Agreement
- 7) Outline of the efforts of the core curriculum task force 1990-1996 (and attachments including faculty surveys, the task forces proposals for prologue and goals for core curriculum, and the 13 Jan 1993 report of the task force)
- 8) Annual report of core curriculum committee 20 May 1996
- 9) "CCOC Timeline" prepared by Assoc. Prof. Nelson for meeting Oct 2009 meeting with Academic Affairs committee
- 10) Act. No. 94-202
- 11) Core Curriculum Requirements – After 1998
- 12) Office of the Register, "Core Curriculum Requirements – After 1998", <http://registrar.ua.edu/acefemics/core-curriculum/core-post-1998/> (accessed 2 Sep 2014)
- 13) "Philosophy for the Baccalaureate Degree", <http://provost.ua.edu/philosophy-for-the-baccalaureate-degree.html> (accessed 20 Oct 2014)
- 14) List of UA AGSC-approved courses, http://stars.troy.edu/approved_courses/ua_alpha.html (accessed 20 Oct 2014)
- 15) AGSC core requirements, http://stars.troy.edu/areas_I-V.html (accessed 20 Oct 2014)
- 16) Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs and services Committee, Core Curriculum Subcommittee Dec 1998.
- 17) Memorandum 8 Oct 1997 from Provost Barrett to faculty: The Articulation Agreement: Background and Current Choices (contains preliminary ballot for October 2007 vote of core curriculum)