

TO: Don Coers
FROM: Grady Price Blount
DATE: December 2, 2007

re: A Proposal for Minimizing the Fiscal Impact of 120 Hour Degree Plans

In this document I will review (1) my understanding of how the transition to 120 hour degrees will affect ASU fiscally, (2) some cautions we should adopt the approaching this issue and (3) some recommendations for minimizing the impact of this transition. This proposal is necessarily *back of the envelope*, so please treat it as such.

Fiscal Impact:

All ASU academic programs have been directed to prepare 120 hour undergraduate degree plans. The majority of existing ASU degree plans are currently 130 hours. We are thus facing a loss of 10 semester credit hours per undergraduate student. With undergraduate formula funding multipliers currently ranging from 1.00 to 3.24 and a base funding figure of \$59.02 per weighted semester credit hour, the mandated decrease amounts to an institutional loss of at least \$4.2M* (not counting hour-based local tuition and fees) for 5,500 students. * Derived as $\$59.02/\text{weighted sch} \times 10 \text{ sch/student} \times 5500 \text{ students} \times \text{weight/sch}$. To the best of my knowledge, these losses will be real.

Losses can be minimized in two ways: 1) Increase the minimum number of upper division hours beyond the current 39 hours, and, 2) Issue an across-the-board directive that deleted hours occur at the lower division level whenever possible. Using a conservative average formula weight of 1.3 for lower division and 2.0 for upper division hours, an increase in the minimum number of upper division hours from 39 to 45 would generate an offsetting income of \$1.5M. Restricting deleted hours to the lower division (wherever possible) adds another \$2.3M. The result, \$3.8M almost offsets the initial loss caused by the transition to 120 hour degrees. The net loss would be \$400K instead of \$4.2M. For reference, raising the upper division minimum to 46 hours would break even.

Cautions:

Before proceeding further in this discussion, I will inject my bias that we should approach these decisions with caution. This bias is based on two SACS criteria:

*3.4.12 The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty.
(Responsibility for curriculum)*

4.2 *The institution's curriculum is directly related and appropriate to the purpose and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates or degrees awarded. (Program curriculum)*

- SACS Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, December 2006

In the first case, we are discussing a change to the content of the only unified curriculum ASU offers. In the second case, we are discussing a change which should be related to our institutional goals, which are currently undergoing revision.

Many extant degree plans can reach the 120 hour mandate, without affecting their core disciplinary courses by deleting 10 hours of electives (e.g. Accounting, Ecology, Art, etc.). For others, those without “extra” elective hours, reaching to 120 hour goal means cutting into disciplinary (usually upper division) requirements. Some programs are thus faced with a double whammy of losing some of the total number of sch they generate AND cutting into their disciplinary core hours.

On the basis of these arguments, it has been suggested that we cut 3 lower division hours from the *optional* portion of our University Core Curriculum. The state requires 6 hours of optional coursework; we currently have 9 distributed as:

Public Speaking	3
Computer Literacy	3
Lab Science	2
Physical Education	1

Although our current core is oversubscribed on the optional portion of Chart II, cutting individual courses will not reach the desired goal of minimizing formula funding losses. For example, all science majors and many education and business majors will still have to take a Computer Literacy course or Lab Science courses as part of their disciplinary core. In other cases the optional courses are viewed as extraneous. For example, the THECB-mandated *speaking* goal is routinely met in discipline courses requiring in-class *PowerPoint* presentations, *Term Project* presentations or other research reports. Indeed, the *Assumptions and Defining Characteristics* of the THECB core state “A core curriculum should be described and assessed by faculty and institutions in terms of basic intellectual competencies and perspectives, and of specified student outcomes, rather than simply in terms of specific courses”. A *one-size-fits-all* solution is neither expected nor prescribed.

As an aside, I cannot find evidence that we could withstand a THECB audit of our existing core. As part of this exercise I sought out a central repository of class syllabi in which the *Basic Intellectual Competencies* and the *Exemplary Educational Objectives* of the THECB-mandated core were listed as student learning outcomes. I could not find it. I searched some web-published syllabi and in many cases I was unable to find any references to student learning outcomes at all. Such data may exist, but they do not seem to be readily available. Even more alarming, it appears we have faculty teaching core courses while unaware of their own critical role in meeting the THECB's expectations.

Recommendations:

Given that we are operating under a deadline and that we can make the case for any proposed changes to the faculty representatives of the University Curriculum Committee, I recommend that we remove 3 undesignated optional hours from the core and allow each individual program to select 6 hours from the current list of 9 optional hours to fulfill core requirements. These hours are currently coded into Banner as *component areas* 011 (Communications), 031 (Natural Sciences) and 090 (Computer Literacy and Kinesiology). I further recommend that we increase the minimum number of upper division hours required for graduation to 45. I also recommend that we reconstitute a standing Faculty Core Curriculum Committee (FC³) to document and champion our exemplary education objectives.

Implementation of these recommendations will not negate our basic responsibilities to the THECB. Computer Literacy and Public Speaking are two specific objectives of the state-mandated core. Programs that opt out of specific coursework in these areas will still have to demonstrate that their students are meeting these goals. But then, this is true for all of the basic intellectual competencies in the core whether one has taken a course or not.

We may wish to consider address the 080 competence, currently filled by sophomore literature, to a 4000-level team taught capstone course in which all ASU students would demonstrate their *signature experience* by reading, writing, speaking, listening, critically thinking and applying their computer literacy skills.

This process will not be simple. In some programs it will require substantial curricular revisions. But we can minimize the fiscal impact of the 120 hour degrees and come out with stronger programs in the end.

References:

ASU Evaluation of the Core Curriculum, October 2004:

http://www.angelo.edu/publications/institutional_effectiveness/documents/Core_Curriculum_Report_2004.doc

SACS Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, December 2006

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2007%20Interim%20Principles%20complete.pdf>

THECB Core Curriculum: Assumptions and Defining Characteristics

http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/AAR/UndergraduateEd/fos_assumpdef.cfm

THECB Core Tables

http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/Rules/tac3.cfm?Chapter_ID=4&Subchapter=B