

March 30, 2004

To: Charting the Future Design Team
From: General Education Council of the Faculty Senate
Re: Comments on March 5 CTF Draft

The General Education Council (GEC) agrees with the Design Team about the need for reform in general education. We agree that UNC students need a coherent program, and we agree with the Design Team in thinking that a smaller program, with a more limited range of course options based on the CCHE core curriculum model, can provide students a solid liberal arts foundation. We further agree that such a program must be structured so as to ensure that it has clear outcomes that can be assessed by faculty, so that the goal of ongoing improvement can be achieved.

We are eager to help move the process of reform forward. We do, however, have several serious concerns about this particular proposal, and we would like to have clarification on a number of points. Finally, we have some specific recommendations concerning the next step in this process.

CONCERNS

Our chief concern relates to the process by which this reform was proposed. We are dismayed that UNC's administration has prepared such a specific, detailed proposal for major curricular reform entirely on its own. The teaching faculty must be involved in the preparation of such proposals. According to the Board Constitution, section 1-1-304, the Board of Trustees "recognizes that curriculum design is within the purview of the faculty ... [and] authorizes a curriculum approval process in which changes to academic programs and courses are initiated by the concerned academic department or division and are reviewed from the point of view of academic desirability by faculty committees at the college and University levels." **This procedure was not followed by the Design Team.**

Under section 2-3-107(2) of the Constitution, the GEC is specifically charged with recommending modifications to the general education program. As the faculty governing body for general education, the GEC objects to any plan to implement a new curriculum structure that did not originate with the faculty.

Any proposed change in the structure of the general education program must also be approved by the faculty. Specifically, the Design Team's decision to drop the existing program's areas of Physical Activity (Category 3) and Interdisciplinary, International, and Multicultural Studies (Category 7) must be presented to a vote of the full faculty. The Sports and Exercise Science (SES) program has already addressed its concerns about the elimination of a physical activity requirement to the Design Team. There is also strong sentiment among faculty for keeping the interdisciplinary and multicultural

requirements, which have added a unique dimension to UNC's general education program.

We also believe that the content of the proposed plan has problems and will fail to meet the objective of providing students with a coherent liberal arts foundation. *First, the design as presented does not even match the credit hours specified in the CCHE model.* The GEC believes that the core curriculum specified by CCHE, consisting of 35 hours, is stronger than the 29-hour program in CTF. If UNC is to base its general education requirements on the state-mandated CCHE core, we need to follow the model more closely.

Second, we have significant concerns about the other components of the proposed "Best University Experience," as delineated in the five bulleted items below the description of the core curriculum on page 31 of Attachment B. These items ("first-year experiences," service learning, internships, connections seminars, and capstone courses) would all demand considerable planning and a significant commitment of resources. In an era of declining resources, these components need to be examined much more carefully before they are adopted. If these components were implemented too quickly, without adequate attention to how they integrate into the objectives of general education, we believe there would be numerous problems, and the new program would be likely to fail for lack of planning and support.

The GEC believes this proposed program is impractical. While each of these experiences represents, individually, a noteworthy goal, it is not readily apparent how these varied items would necessarily create a coherent university experience. We are leery of the piecemeal approach in the CTF draft. As described in Attachment B, these components would occupy up to 11 credit hours of a student's undergraduate program (although the exact number is not clear in the proposal). These 11 hours are scattered across some seven different components of 1 or 2 credit hours each. It is unclear how the faculty can deliver these special courses, in addition to the CCHE core curriculum. As described, these courses – especially service learning, internship supervision, and the individualized connections seminars – would be very labor intensive and could not be supported with the current faculty-to-student ratio.

The GEC believes strongly that more sophisticated deliberation is needed concerning the way all the pieces of general education (core curriculum and specialized experiences) can best fit into a coherent whole. In terms of content, the overarching goal of general education should be to provide students with a liberal arts foundation and a broad understanding of the world. General education should not have to be linked directly to a major; it should stand on its own as an essential component of a university education. The GEC does not believe that the model proposed in CTF will meet these objectives.

ITEMS NEEDING CLARIFICATION

Most of our confusions about the proposed program are due to the sketchiness of the descriptions of the specialized courses included in the “Best University Experience” alongside the CCHE core. Specifically, we request clarification on these nine points:

1. Are these special courses (first-year experiences, service learning and internships, connections seminars, and keystone/capstone) to be designed by each major, or will these be a campus-wide set of options administered through the general education program?

2. Is the intent of the “connections seminars” and “integrative keystone course” to provide students with an interdisciplinary liberal arts approach to understanding problems and issues? Will these courses be taught as part of the general education experience? If so, will the Life of the Mind program serve as the model? This was the intent of the capstone suggestion included in our GEC *Charting the Future* unit report in Fall 2003, but it is not clear if the Design Team agrees with our original suggestion.

3. Or are “connections seminars” and an “integrative keystone course” to be part of the credit hours included in each major’s program, and not integrated into the general education core experience? If that is the case, in what way would these courses add coherence to a student’s university program?

4. Regarding the service learning component, have other models been consulted? Would one credit hour, standing alone, be an effective way for students to reach the laudable goals of a service learning experience?

5. Shouldn’t internship experiences be tied directly to each major, rather than to general education? Otherwise, how would internships get staffed across campus? How could a campus-wide internship experience be administered and assessed?

6. How would this program affect faculty workloads? How could this array of 1 and 2 credit-hour courses, especially those that demand individualized instruction, fit into the workloads of faculty, who are already handling 21-hour loads instead of the original 18?

7. How would this mix of special courses be assessed? What objectives would be specified for each element of this experience? What models has the Design Team consulted to see how such experiences can be effectively taught and assessed?

8. At present, the GEC has an assessment program that meets NCA guidelines. If we align general education with the state core, how will this affect our existing program assessment? The GEC has been working over the last few years to develop a set of

assessable outcomes for each category. What will be gained by jettisoning that progress?

9. What exactly does the Design Team mean by “participation in a Learning Community” for all first-year students in Attachment B? Does this one credit piece refer to a course similar to the 1-unit ID 108 that some freshmen take, which introduces them to the university experience? Or does this refer to the *actual* Learning Community model as it exists at UNC, which involves a scheduled clustering of related courses?

The GEC believes that the Design Team has failed to give due consideration of how these diverse pieces would really interact. *In short, the GEC does not see how all these components, added piecemeal to the university’s curriculum, would necessarily lead to the aim of a common and coherent university experience.* We recognize that these special experiences include many valuable ideas, but we also believe that much more in-depth analysis is required to make this a practical, unified program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We have three specific recommendations, but the first one really overrides the other two.

1. Process of Curricular Reform: The GEC strongly believes that this level of significant curricular reform must be led by faculty members familiar with teaching and assessing general education programs. **We strongly urge the Design Team to designate a campus-wide, faculty-led Task Force on General Education Reform to supervise this analysis and to make well-considered recommendations for change.** Such a Task Force should include several current or past faculty representatives from the GEC, because these are the people on campus having the greatest familiarity with the problems of program design and assessment.

The GEC wishes to remind the Design Team that there are several extant models for general education reform developed by faculty on this campus. In the recent past, the faculty approved a core curriculum program with a campus-wide vote. That program, Crossroads, was cancelled by the administration while in its pilot stage. More recently, another task force on general education developed some useful ideas for reform that were not acted upon. There is considerable expertise among the members of our faculty about general education theory and practice and about designing interdisciplinary courses. We believe strongly that instead of attempting to impose a revised program from the top, the Design Team should capitalize on the existing faculty interest in general education reform.

The Design Team should respect the principle of faculty governance with respect to general education. One of the GEC’s purposes is to modify the program to meet future needs and changing circumstances. Letting it do so would maximize the chances of

creating a program in which the faculty has a stake, something unlikely to be achieved by the proposal in the CTF draft. We believe strongly that the expertise of faculty on the GEC with respect to program design and assessment should not be ignored. The GEC understands the needs of UNC students, knows the practical considerations of implementation and assessment, and can articulate the program within the demands of the state's core transfer program. *As we stated at the conclusion of our CTF unit report, the GEC is willing and able to take a leadership role in general education reform.*

2. Core Curriculum Part of Proposal: As is, the proposal does not match the CCHE statewide core curriculum model. **To reach the CCHE model of 35 hours, add one course each to the Arts and Humanities and the Social and Behavioral Sciences areas.** For the most part, the GEC believes that the CCHE model will work well. However, to implement its proper, 35-hour size, more general education course options than the 60 suggested by the Design Team need to be available for students.

Adopting the CCHE model will raise issues concerning the way UNC has traditionally defined general education. These issues need careful consideration. Within the Social and Behavioral Sciences area, the CCHE model specifies that one course must be from History, which in UNC's present general education model is part of Arts and Letters. Also, the GEC believes there are creative ways that could be employed to incorporate some of our existing interdisciplinary and multicultural courses (Category 7) into the CCHE model. In addition, we need to align competencies associated with each area to our approved assessment model. **These details should be assigned to the Task Force on General Education Reform, as part of its charge to undertake a comprehensive and deliberative review of general education.**

3. Other Proposed Components for a Best University Experience. These ideas individually are good, and the GEC supports a "Best University Experience" concept that incorporates some or all of these components. But we believe that each component needs to be investigated closely in terms of how it would fit into our curriculum, how it would affect workloads, and how it would be administered and assessed. We do not think that 11 credit hours of campus-wide, individualized instruction is a practical option. By adopting the 35-hour state core as the nucleus of general education, that leaves at most *five* hours to encompass the array of experiences suggested in the March 5 draft. Even then, that would create an overall general education program of 40 hours, as it is now.

Greater analysis of the relative costs and benefits of each component is clearly required, given that *Charting the Future* is purportedly intended to cope with declining resources. It would be beneficial to contact other schools that have implemented similar programs to discover the benefits, the costs, and the shortcomings of such programs, and to find out how students have reacted to such requirements. **Such analysis could be charged to the recommended faculty-led Task Force on**

General Education Reform. It will also be crucial to have the UNC faculty be in support of these additions.

In closing, the GEC believes that there are many good ideas contained in the CTF proposal, but that many questions need closer scrutiny. *But most importantly, we oppose the administration's effort to impose this level of change without having consulted with the teaching faculty.*

Thank you for your time and for your ideas. These have spurred needed discussion on campus about general education. We apologize for the length of this response. But we believe your attention to this is warranted, given the centrality to the university's mission of providing students with a general education program that ensures they have a solid grounding in the liberal arts. We look forward to the Design Team's response to our concerns, questions, and recommendations.