

College of Fine Arts
Faculty Forum on Task Force for Curriculum Reform Report
March 1, 2006

College of Fine Arts Faculty in attendance:

Art and Art History:

Linda Henderson, Nassos Papalexandrou, Jeff Smith, Michael Charlesworth, Glenn Peers, Gloria Lee, Chris Taylor, Lawrence McFarland, Janice Leoshko, Bogdan Perzynski, Janet Kastner, Michael Smith, Lee Chesney – a member of the College Committee on Undergraduate Policy and Curriculum.

School of Music:

Glenn Chandler, Martha Hilley, Kristin Jensen, Denise Martel, Robin Moore, Scott Hanna, Judith Jellison, David Neubert, Jacqui Henninger, Hunter March – a member of the College Committee on Undergraduate Policy and Curriculum.

Theatre and Dance:

Doug Dempster, Drew Campbell, Charlotte Canning, David Justin, Ken DeSpain

Task Force Committee Guests:

Larry Abraham (Education), Evan Carton (Liberal Arts), Brent Iverson (Natural Science), Geoffrey Leavenworth (Special Assistant to the President), C. Cale McDowell (Graduate Student School of Business)

Martha Hilley convened the faculty forum and introduced Linda Henderson, who introduced special guests from the Task Force.

Linda Henderson made a brief Powerpoint presentation on the history of the committee in response to Commission 125 and the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University. Her overview defined the structure and tasking of the committee and concluded with an overview of the report's findings: writing flags, culture flags, signature courses, University College (purpose, structure, admission, etc).

Martha Hilley then opened the floor to questions and comments.

Faculty Member: Asked for clarification of the 36-42 hours the proposal calls "core courses" in connection to the addition of the signature courses.

Task Force Member: 36 hours are proscribed by Coordinating Board and are inflexible; 6 hours are "institutionally designated," are flexible and may come from a variety of areas. Currently 6 hours at UT are used for a substantial writing component requirement and an additional natural science course.

Faculty Member: The distinction between 36 to 42 hours across CoFA academic units' degree plans affects how signature courses would be put into play; that is, each CoFA

degree plan would have to be looked at separately because each degree plan utilizes the extra 6 hours of institution-driven core curriculum requirement differently.

Faculty Member: Only one of the two proposed signature courses would add three hours to degree requirements.

Task Force Member: “Double-dipping,” so that signature course would simultaneously satisfy a degree requirement, is likely.

FM: What exactly is this “common educational experience” the report says we should be seeking?

TFM: Football games are a type of common experience for students, but this does not address academic or philosophical issues. Students from diverse backgrounds and academic interests should be able to share and discuss academic issues and methods of inquiry across disciplines and this is a goal of signature courses taught by senior faculty

TFM: Some other colleges do not put distinguished, inspirational tenure-track faculty in front of freshmen. Indeed, they only teach upper-division majors.

FM: Where is the data that 60% of UT students change major coming from? Is this figure true for all universities everywhere, or just at UT?

TFM: Brent and Evan collected the data. The committee also observed that few students actually take the core curriculum at UT because they earn credit by examination, have A/P credit, or enroll at community colleges. She cited Boyer report’s recommendations for interdisciplinary teaching and reforms at Harvard, Yale and Williams.

FM: Related an anecdote about the power of parents’ influence on student’s choice of major at Camp Texas. Reported Columbia students do not declare a major until the junior year.

TFM: Data gathered by the Reform committee also included flow, graduation rates. The committee felt the report should acknowledge that changing major is common at UT.

FM: Has any provision been made for transfer students?

TFM: Accommodation must be made, but the details have not been determined.

FM: The proposal is based on the assumption that students enter equally well-prepared, and that assumption is untrue. The proposal has not addressed differing levels of development and preparedness. How can we be sure school districts are raising preparation to meet UT’s standards?

TFM: Freshman “care” is needed at UT. Students need tutoring, socialization, acculturation to the university. Faculty and TA’s are currently called upon to assist students in navigating. An Undergraduate College would help with intellectual development and socialization and cites resources already available at through Career Exploration Center, an Undergraduate Advising Center and Connexus.

FM: The University doesn’t currently attempt to make up for individual inequalities among students.

TFM: An Undergraduate College’s ability to facilitate inquiry across disciplines would make explicit the differences between high school and college.

FM: When I was an undergraduate, I changed major myself before arriving at dance. It wasn’t traumatic at all. I discovered a new area of interest and pursued it. I don’t perceive students’ tendency to change major as being a problem. It’s a natural part of college life.

TFM: The task force sees increasing specialization at UT as having cut out opportunities for students to change major. At the time they declare a major, they’re not sufficiently exposed to other options.

TFM: Colleges and departments would be invited to make presentations to the UC about their disciplines and degree programs. The sciences are particularly deadly – Natural Science majors often falsely believe they must get a science degree if they are to go to med school.

FM: Team-teaching across disciplines is important if students are to get exposure to other areas.

TFM: Team teaching, that is, pairing faculty from seemingly disparate disciplines teaching together to expose students to different methods of inquiry and different points of view, e.g., an Art Historian and an Astronomer paired together teaching on some core issue, could be a feature of signature courses.

TFM: Faculty, if you object to language in the proposal or find it ambiguous, or if there are issues of great importance to you, personally, your input should be forwarded.

FM: How would signature courses work for performative practices? Don’t kid yourselves: a traditional lecture format Signature course is unlikely to be the key to revolutionizing undergraduate education.

TFM: The discussion sections might be the place to expose students to practice, although I admit that may be impractical.

TFM: I don’t see FIG courses as being the vehicle for providing students with the kind of exposure they need to decide to change major.

FM: The large class size and lecture format proposed for signature courses won't allow students to engage in creative endeavors. Might flags be the place to insert "creative activity and inquiry"?

TFM: Other suggestions not incorporated into the current reform proposal are the study of foreign language and service learning. Perhaps a creative activity and inquiry flag could be added or rolled into the one on individual inquiry?

(Ticket to the Arts and PAC, senior exhibitions and recitals discussed.)

FM: Considering synergies between nature and culture benefit both students and teachers. I'm okay with the signature course idea as long as the faculty chosen to teach the courses are truly excellent. The challenge will be to find appropriate faculty to both lecture and facilitate stimulating discussion – the classic European model with which I'm familiar. Art and Art History's existing foundation program is doing a good job with our current freshmen.

TFM: The task force recognizes extensive resources will be necessary for the UC to succeed. UC would need to acquire and dedicate lines allocated to departments. It's unlikely outside lecturers would be hired to teach signature courses.

FM: Perhaps limited resources are better used by allowing colleges to improve the quality of undergraduate education in their own departments rather than by creating a new University College.

TFM: There is no expectation implicit in the proposal that colleges would be expected to start offering a greater number of non-major courses.

FM: How can the UT experience be made more personal, and not just through a "common experience"? Signature courses are central to the task force's proposal, but 240-seat courses may defeat the plan. Has consideration been given to using existing FIG and other program courses to accomplish the goal? Funds could be used to hire more faculty mentors. Students get the most out of any class in which they are actively involved.

In a department with funding challenges for shows and scholarships, I am not in favor of a fundraising effort that detracts from current and on-going efforts. Pell grants are dropping away. Could funding efforts in support of curriculum reform also support subsidizing costs of student education? Don't create a new structure needing new funding when so much other support is still needed for existing programs.

TFM: Admittedly, signature courses will require resources. It may be impossible to lower the signature class size because of resource issues. Existing community-building efforts like FIGs were not emphasized in the task force's report as a way to use existing resources.

FM: The real learning at a university takes place in small groups.

FM: While I'm excited by the signature course concept, I suggest expanding the FIG program to include the first signature course. I understand that donors are attracted by plans for new programs because they're "sexier." Original signature course model may need modification.

TFM: The problem with present FIGs is that they aren't cross-disciplinary and are organized within specific majors and colleges.

TFM: The signature courses aren't meant to be a means for way-finding. Strands are for that. Signature courses are meant to announce that interdisciplinary inquiry separates college from high school, are meant to be a "common experience" in that they may not be taken elsewhere or tested out of, and expose students to outstanding faculty in fields other than their major. Currently, undergraduates have little access to the most outstanding faculty until upper-division work in their majors. No one is currently "owning" the undergraduate curriculum, so a University College is necessary.

FM: Everything in the task force's report is set up to benefit "wafflers." Why change the whole system to cater to them? Admit undecided students to University College and get them the advising and support they need, but don't impose the UC model on the whole university. All the needed energy in the task force's proposal must come from FACULTY. Students don't learn that way.

It's hypocritical to say on one hand that high school A/P courses provide the university with better-prepared students, yet later express a desire to severely limit acceptance of A/P credit.

TFM: Other U.S. universities and the 125 Report also cite concerns about the amount of A/P credit students are earning.

TFM: Inquiry-based learning: the Blanton Museum could be used as a lab, similarly to the way biology classes use science labs. Part of the fundraising efforts will have to include building in capable TAs.

Martha Hilley: Faculty are encouraged to voice their specific concerns via the link, which will be sent out again to all in attendance.

FM: Why an Undergraduate College? We used to have a centralized undergraduate advising center and still have other centralized resources. Why add another administrative unit? Why must it be a new college, as opposed to a center, academy or institute?

TFM: Stature, providing at the level of a college with a dean, reporting to the provost, independent, powerful, on equal footing with donors to attract resources, provides a

system of checks and balances, provides UC dean with opportunity to deal with allocation of resources without having to share with other competitors.

TFM: What's the problem? It's just a name. Regardless of arguments about the merits of specialized education versus general education, no one is currently taking responsibility for undergraduate education. The basic education core is presently "lowest on the totem pole" of all classes at UT. Neither the faculty nor the departments are interested in core courses and there are disincentives to teaching them.

FM: This proposal seeks to solve certain problems in other colleges. But can't the problem be solved by providing support for teachers that works from the bottom up? How we teach ARH 301 is an example. Learning based on writing papers and testing via essays is a method that currently works.

FM: I'm curious about using flags as a way to satisfy the legislated government and history course component of basic education core, courses students frequently cite as being among their least favorite. I thought the University College was an effort to find a faculty who cared about undergraduate education. If all faculty are automatically members, how does that insure they care? The current core curriculum was probably once thought of as an idealistic plan – but did it live up to its original vision?

Administrator: We aren't Columbia! UT is an aggregate of diverse units. One size does not fit all. I'm fine with the truly undecided freshmen being admitted into a University College, but I am not in favor of forcing those students who are already committed to seeking a specialized education into UC and delaying their acceptance to a department. The university needs to provide greater resources to departments to support general education. Although Music offers many courses to non-majors, I doubt many of them use MUS 302L as their entry portal to a major in School of Music. They're more likely to enter via ensembles, which brings us back to the point about the superiority of practice-based teaching.

TFM: University College would involve both students and faculty. Under a dean, with the support of administrative staff, the UC would bear the responsibility for pulling in faculty.

TFM: It may be helpful to view the proposed Undergraduate College as somewhat analogous to the Grad School, which doesn't have its own faculty.

TFM: FIGs and Connexus currently compete with each other for resources. Bringing them together to strengthen undergraduate education is a good idea. Remove the stigma of being undeclared and view it as a positive thing. Students could participate in UC to the extent they wanted. Some would be immediate "dual citizens" preadmitted into a major, taking advantage of all their department and UC had to offer them. Students would have more options, not fewer.

Music?: If student doesn't decide on a major, or if they're not coded as a major, how do they get departmental scholarships? (This question raised issues about holding a declared major and documented progress toward a degree being necessary for students using veterans' benefits, for those in ROTC and for those athletes whose NCAA eligibility must be certified.)

TFM: Dispensations to holding a major in Undergraduate College would have to be made for scholarships. UC shouldn't impose any negative effects on current recruiting efforts.

FM: Language and terminology are very important, and the proposal is sometimes vague. The impact of UC on scholarships and recruiting must be clarified.

MH thanked the college for providing lunch and the faculty and task force guests for their participation and invited the faculty again to submit their comments and concerns to Faculty Council via the downloadable form. The meeting adjourned.

Notes taken by Lydia Guenther, Shane Sullivan and Rachel Martin, compiled by Rachel Martin.