

School of Social Work

Friday, February 24, 1:30pm, SW 2.116

Summary of key points from the School of Social Work faculty to the Task Force Report on Curricular Reform.

1. The major con identified by our faculty was that the signature courses might be taught by TA's who are not adequately prepared/experienced. The size of these courses was also a concern, but we also recognize the issues associated with resources.
2. A pro of the signature courses was that UT students would actually take these classes at UT rather than having them "farmed out" to the community colleges.
3. A pro associated with University College is that it would help students avoid a silo effect of going into a school or college as a freshman. It does make sense to our faculty that a "guardian of the core" is needed for this effort to be sustainable.

The recommendation below is from Laura Lein and Diana DiNitto:

Given the current structure of the signature courses, it is important to consider using a professional teaching staff to meet with the smaller writing and discussion sections of the course:

In these sections, students will be discussing complicated, interdisciplinary ideas. They will be completing both writing and speaking assignments.

They will be engaging with teaching faculty and other students. The ability to work with students on so many levels requires professional skill and focus on teaching. If these courses will have 200+ students, the multiple sections will benefit from leaders who can devote full time to this work.

Furthermore, the courses will improve considerably as the section leaders and the lecturing faculty become a team that can work closely together. Section discussions and assignments can be more closely integrated with lecture material, and the lecturing faculty can depend on real coordination between the lecture content and the content of discussion groups, as well as professional expertise in developing writing and speaking skills among students.

Furthermore, the development of such a staff should be no more expensive than the support of graduate TAs for the system, since a full-time professional can take on a more extensive section load than two or three half-time graduate assistants. Given that at least some liberal arts graduate programs are considering a reduction in the numbers enrolled in their graduate programs and are in a position to first select which students will TA for departmental courses, it is unclear whether the size and experience of the available graduate teaching cohort will be suitable on a regular basis for the signature courses.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this option.

Diana DiNitto and Laura Lein

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