

Proposal for Core Curriculum Revision
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This document assesses central issues of concern with the current USG Core Curriculum, and proposes a new evaluation process to review the Core.

Most professionals – particularly those who have long experience working within the system – find the current Core to be a useful structure with regard to breadth of instruction as well as ease of transfer for our students. However, there is clearly room for improvement with regard to transfer issues, and there are also opportunities for more rigorous assessment of student learning within the Core areas.

The Current Core Curriculum

The Core Curriculum, as constituted in BOR policy, consists of 59-61 semester hours, distributed across six areas:

Area Essential Skills	9 semester hours
A Specific courses in English composition and mathematics	
Area Institutional Options	4-5 semester hours
B Courses that address institution-wide general education outcomes of the institution's choosing	
Area Humanities/Fine Arts	6 semester hours
C Courses that address humanities/fine arts learning outcomes	
Area Science, Mathematics, and Technology	10-11 semester hours
D Courses that address learning outcomes in the sciences, mathematics, and technology	
Area Social Sciences	12 semester hours
E Courses that address learning outcomes in the social sciences	
Area Courses Related to the Program of Study	18 semester hours
F Lower division courses related to the discipline(s) of the program of study and courses that are prerequisite to major courses at higher levels.	

Institutional core curricula within the USG have, for the most part, reflected this organization.

There are a number of additional System-wide guidelines on the core curriculum that are specific to transfer matters. These may be found in the USG's policy on transfer of Core Curriculum Credit between institutions (*Academic Affairs Handbook*, 2.04.04). They include the following:

- Institutions within the USG have carefully designed their core curriculum requirements in each core area to reflect local institutional culture and to assure that students meet agreed upon general educational outcomes.

- While students are not required to complete the entire core curriculum at one institution and are able to transfer completed areas of the core, they are required to declare a "home" institution whose requirements they are expected to follow.
- Students who complete the core curriculum (Areas A-F) at a USG institution are guaranteed full credit in transfer if they do not change majors or programs of study.
- Students who complete an area of the core curriculum are guaranteed full credit for that area in transfer if they do not change intended majors or programs of study.
- Students will receive full credit for courses completed in Area A regardless of whether they complete the entire area.

Areas A-E

Though the Core Curriculum consists of a total of approximately 60 hours, its General Education components reside in the 42 hours of Areas A-E. When critics of the "Strong Foundations" initiative averred that the current Core was not "broken," they referred to transfer of credits within these areas. The policies highlighted above have ensured that students are able to receive full credit for General Education coursework when transferring between system institutions. Registrars and Chief Transfer Officers system-wide report few problems assisting students transferring credit in Areas A-E. Generally, there seems to be a perception that this structure works well for transfer and is a marked improvement over the previous system (course-by-course transfer).

Role of the Council on General Education

The specific courses contained in areas A through E of an institution's core curriculum are approved by the Council on General Education. Committee members are selected to represent each of the areas (Math and Science representatives for Area D, Humanities representative for Area C, Social Science Representative for Area E). Membership typically also includes a Learning Support representative, as well as representatives from the University of Georgia and Georgia State (most frequent transfer destination institutions within the USG). These members have traditionally been selected by the Council Chair, in consultation with System staff.

The Council maintains the integrity of the System's core, following multiple guidelines detailed in the *Academic Affairs Handbook*, section 2.04.01. (<http://www.usg.edu/academics/handbook/section2/2.04/2.04.01.phtml>)

Area F

As mentioned above, the 18 hours of Area F consist of lower division courses related to the discipline(s) of the program of study and courses that are prerequisite to major courses at higher levels. It is within this area that most transfer problems within the Core occur, although the number of problems appear to be minimal from the standpoint of chief academic officers at 2-year institutions. A group of Academic Advisory Committees is charged with reviewing the Area F requirements of each institution and monitoring their compliance with the recommendations

approved by the Council on Majors in 1997

(http://www.usg.edu/academics/programs/core_curriculum/areaf/) during the System's Quarter to Semester conversion process. In practice, however, wide disparities exist in the rigor of different Advisory Committees, and a number of majors are unrepresented (though representing every major in the system is clearly not feasible), and courses that are more interdisciplinary in nature do not have a natural venue for discussion under the current system.

Transfer problems typically occur when Area F doesn't "match" between institutions, and the receiving institution has courses required in Area F that are prerequisites for courses in the major. This is to be expected given the natural differences in institutions. Students who have completed their institution's Area F at their first institution but who do not have the transfer institution's specific prerequisite courses for the major may therefore need additional coursework before proceeding into those courses in the major.

As a result, students who have completed Area F at their initial institution and who do not switch their major when attempting transfer are often told by the receiving institution that they will only be granted admission if they agree – in advance – to take different courses for that area upon arrival. Hence the letter of the rule is followed in practice, but not in intent. To be admitted, the transfer student must agree to take additional courses in an area he/she had previously completed.

In many cases, Area F ends up being a forced "patchwork" of similar courses in order to best satisfy transfer requirements.

Chief Transfer Officers

Each institution designates a Chief Transfer Officer (formerly "Ombudsperson") to facilitate the transfer of students within the System. The CTO is the contact person for students, faculty, advisors, records and admissions personnel, and academic administrators when problems related to transfer of Core Curriculum coursework across System institutions occur. It is unclear, however, whether students at every System institution know that there is a staff person charged with this responsibility, and how to contact them when problems arise.

Other Transferability Issues

- Front line personnel at receiving institutions are sometimes poorly informed about guaranteed transfer.
- Variance in Area B requirements, which are institution-specific by definition, creates challenges.
- Receiving institutions cannot tell which courses (other than the standard courses) have been taken to satisfy Areas A thru F. System-wide adoption of the DegreeWorks program may help with this problem.
- Standards for CLEP credit scores are different at various institutions.

- When a receiving institution will not accept more than 60 hours of credits, students may lose as many as twelve credits and may have to do extra course work, in addition to losing HOPE eligibility early.

Learning, Competencies and Assessment

There is widespread agreement that "cookie cutter", high-stakes, USG-wide examinations – in each area of the Core – would be both inordinately expensive to design, academically dubious, and ultimately impossible to enforce, unless there were a large-scale expansion of the University System Academic Affairs Office. Creation of an office to develop and oversee assessment tools across the system would entail hiring multiple experienced academic administrators with particular expertise in learning assessment. At least 5-6 such individuals would need to be hired, in addition to staff support, space, and discretionary funds for travel, computing, and so forth.

Expansion of the system office in this manner is expensive, but also inappropriate, given the current expertise on our campuses and the unique nature of educational missions at our institutions.

This does not mean that individual institutions cannot be tasked with, and supported, in implementing assessment systems for their Core courses. Given the expertise within the system at present, there are a tremendous number of opportunities for sharing of best practices and intensive, sustained, faculty development. The system office can be a central resource for support of all faculty teaching in the Core, by drawing upon campus experts and organizing workshops, programs, wikis, and other tools.

Most important, perhaps, is that learning outcomes are critical to SACS accreditation. Assessment is therefore best managed at the institution level, and integrated with all other aspects of curriculum and curricular development as evaluated by SACS.

Recommendation

Based on the thoughtful discussions of the Strong Foundations Taskforce and extensive conversations with faculty, administrators, and Regents across the System, I will appoint a committee of eight individuals, to be named the USG Core Evaluation Committee.

The committee will be charged with addressing the following four issues and submit their report by **January 15th**, for evaluation by me, other appropriate Chancellor's Office leaders, and all system presidents:

1. **Learning Outcomes:** What are the System-level student learning outcomes for the Core? These outcomes will provide the framework for the Core, will drive institutional assessment of the Core, and serve to strengthen the coherence of the Core beyond a collection of courses. The committee will also be asked to address how national best practices should be employed by campuses to assure the Board of Regents that our students are, in fact, gaining competence within the areas defined by the Core.
2. **Current Core:** What are the intellectual and administrative strengths and weaknesses of the current USG Core Curriculum? A fundamental question that has been posed by many

is, “What is wrong with the current Core?” This evaluation will include a focus on aspects of the Core that are working well, not just those that are not.

3. **Size of Core:** What is the optimal size of our System-wide Core? Many administrators and faculty have expressed strong discontent with the large number of courses in the core, noting both challenges and delayed graduation, particularly for students in fields with numerous requirements. The role of Area F as part of the Core will also be evaluated.
4. **Transfer:** How might transfer opportunities be enhanced through Core revision? Analysis of existing articulation agreements and identification of potential new ones – within the USG and between USG and the Technical College System of Georgia – will be given special attention.

I will solicit nominations for service on the Committee from the university presidents. The Committee will be composed of eight representatives, including at least one faculty member and administrator from each sector. The Chair of the Committee will be a faculty member. The Committee will be supported by System staff members Robert Vaughan and Linda Noble, for a total of ten members. *The committee will use any method they like, in pursuing the answers to the above questions, but it is essential that they develop a mechanism for early faculty and administrative input from across the system.* For example, this could be pursued electronically through a blog for presentation of ideas and discussion. The committee will establish this mechanism in the form most appropriate for their purposes.

After review, critique, and revision by university presidents and the USG Council on General Education, recommendations from the USG Core Evaluation Committee will be presented to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents for evaluation, before presentation to the full Board for possible adoption.