FAU
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Florida Atlantic University

Item: V. AS: A-2

Wednesday, June 25, 2008

SUBJECT: PROPOSED REVISION OF FAU CORE CURRICULUM

PROPOSED BOARD ACTION

Approval of a new general education curriculum to replace the current core curriculum

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Every university goes through a periodic assessment of its undergraduate requirements to ensure that it is offering its students the best possible educational experience, one that prepares them to meet the challenges of the modern workplace and equips them with the skills and knowledge expected of an informed citizenry. FAU has been engaged in this assessment for several years. Although excellent courses constitute the current core, the curriculum focuses heavily on subject fields rather than skills or knowledge areas; also, the curriculum lacks intentionality. There is no clear sense of why students must take courses in the required core areas, or why faculty are teaching the courses that they teach. The revised core curriculum – renamed the General Education Curriculum, to reflect the purposefulness of the changes – seeks to remedy these deficiencies.

The revised curriculum is consistent with best practices in higher education, including those recommended by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). The courses that comprise the FAU general education curriculum combine to develop not only knowledge in several different disciplines but also the ability to think critically; the ability to communicate effectively; an appreciation for how knowledge is discovered, challenged, and transformed as it advances; and an understanding of ethics and ethical behavior.

The new curriculum is also consistent with guidelines mandated by the State of Florida. Core or general education curricula at every four-year state institution require thirty-six credit hours in the areas of communication, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The new FAU curriculum contains the following components:

1. Foundations of Written Communication
2. Foundations of Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning
3. Foundations of Science and the Natural World
4. Foundations of Society and Human Behavior
5. Foundations in Global Citizenship
6. Foundations of Creative Expression

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN/DATE

The new curriculum will be implemented in fall 2009; the certification process for courses to be included in the new curriculum will take place in 2008-2009

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

No additional state funding will be required for the implementation of the new curriculum.

Supporting Documentation: See Attached

Presented by: Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Ed Pratt Phone: 561.297-2126

Intellectual Foundations Program:
FAU's General Education Curriculum

FAU believes that higher education should go well beyond the preparation of individuals for demanding careers in their chosen fields. It should also provide broad intellectual enrichment through systematic exposure to a diversity of academic experiences. The purpose of the general education curriculum in this endeavor is to develop the intellectual skills, habits of thought, ethical values, and love of learning that transcend the choice of major. These are the hallmarks of educated men and women capable of meeting effectively the social, political, and economic challenges of contemporary life. Perhaps at no other time in history has a well-rounded, inquiring intellect been more important and useful than in the world of rapid technological change and ever increasing globalization in which we now live. Thus, the mission of a comprehensive university education is to produce graduates who can intelligently analyze information, appreciate diverse peoples and ideas, and adapt to change through the self-motivated acquisition of new knowledge.

Consequently, the FAU general education curriculum is a carefully devised program that draws on many subject areas to provide and reinforce essential skills and values from different points of view. It equips students with the academic tools they will need to succeed, not only as undergraduates in their degree programs but also as responsible citizens in a complex world. The courses that comprise the FAU general education curriculum combine to develop:

1. Knowledge in several different disciplines;
2. The ability to think critically;
3. The ability to communicate effectively;
4. An appreciation for how knowledge is discovered, challenged, and transformed as it advances; and
5. An understanding of ethics and ethical behavior.

Students are invited to select from a number of courses, all at the lower-division level, in completing their general education requirements. All of the courses contribute to meeting the overall goals of the general education curriculum, thereby allowing flexibility in making individual choices. Students must complete a minimum of thirty-six credit hours of general education coursework, distributed as indicated in the six categories below.

Students who enter FAU as freshmen or as transfer students with fewer than 30 credits must fulfill the University's general education curriculum requirements as described below. A course may be used to simultaneously satisfy a general education curriculum requirement and a requirement of the student's major program. All course selections should be made in consultation with an advisor.

I. Foundations of Written Communication (6 credit hours)

Learning to communicate effectively is much more than the putting of thoughts and ideas into words. Writing, in particular, allows us to develop and organize our thoughts and ideas in intelligible and meaningful ways. Effective communication involves the examination of evidence, the development of ideas, and the clear expression of those ideas. Communication also involves the application of ethical standards when using words or ideas that are not one's own. Courses that fulfill this requirement are designed not only to develop students' writing skills but their ability to think critically -- to question habitual ways of thinking, to move beyond obvious responses, and to develop new ways to see themselves and the world around them.

Students who complete the Written Communication requirement will be able to:

1. Produce clear writing that performs specific rhetorical tasks;
2. Respond critically to a variety of written materials in order to position their own ideas and arguments relative to the arguments and strategies of others;
3. Use writing not only to communicate but also to think critically -- examining assumptions that underlie the readings and their own writing;
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical standards that apply to the use of external sources in one's writing.

II. Foundations of Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning (6 credit hours)

Mathematics is a peculiarly human endeavor that attempts to organize our experience in a quantitative fashion. It aids and supplements our intuitions about the physical universe and about human behavior.

The Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning requirement is intended to give students an appreciation of mathematics and to prepare them to think precisely and critically about quantitative problems.

Students who satisfy the Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning requirement will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of mathematical theories and their applications;
2. Be able to identify and apply mathematical concepts most appropriate to solving quantitative problems.

III. Foundations of Science and the Natural World (6 credit hours; two courses, one with a lab, from two different departments)

Scientific principles are behind what we find in nature and in natural occurrences. Scientific issues, such as those dealing with stem-cell research, cloning, and global warming, are hotly debated by policy makers.

Courses that meet this requirement share the goal of seeking to understand patterns and principles behind phenomena and occurrences, both in the inorganic world and in the living world. They typically fall within either the physical sciences (Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, and the Earth Sciences) or the Biological sciences.

Students who satisfy the Science and the Natural World requirement will demonstrate:

1. An understanding of the nature of science, including important principles and paradigms;
2. An understanding of the limits of scientific knowledge and of how scientific knowledge changes;
3. An understanding of the nature of scientific inquiry and its ethical standards, in particular how to pose questions and how to develop possible explanations;
4. An ability to discern claims based on rigorous scientific methods from those based on illogical or incomplete scientific methods.

After completion of the associated lab, the student will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of how experiments are conducted;
2. Be able to analyze resulting data; and
3. Be able to draw appropriate conclusions from such data.

IV. Foundations of Society and Human Behavior (6 credit hours; two courses from two different departments)

The social sciences examine the forms of social activity. They study the social behavior of individuals and organizations, the structure of organizations and institutions, and the organization of society. Social science deals with such things as the formation of attitudes; how institutions develop, function, and change; how technology transforms society and social institutions; how societies change the environment and respond to environmental change; the relationships between individuals and society; and matters of race, gender, and class.

Courses that meet this requirement teach students to understand the complexities of human and societal behavior, to predict future behavior, and to understand the consequences of behavior.

Students who satisfy the Society and Human Behavior requirement will:

1. Be able to identify patterns of human behavior;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of how political, social, cultural, or economic institutions influence human behavior;
3. Understand key social science methods and the theoretical foundations behind these methods;
4. Be able to apply social science methods to the analysis of social, cultural, psychological, ethical, political, technological, or economic issues or problems.

V. Foundations in Global Citizenship (6 credit hours; two courses from two different departments)

FAU students live in an increasingly diverse region. They also live in a world in which individuals, societies, and governments are becoming more and more interconnected. To succeed in this interconnected world, students must have an understanding of diverse cultures and inherited traditions; they must be able to communicate across these diverse cultures; they must understand why societies make the choices that they make; and they must have an awareness of how their actions affect others.

Courses that meet this requirement examine aspects of the diverse human experience (inclusive of issues of race, ethnicity, and gender), leading to a better understanding of ourselves and of people from other cultural traditions. Students will select courses from the following areas, one of which must be from the global perspectives category:

1. Western identities
2. Global perspectives

Students completing the Global Citizenship requirement will demonstrate an understanding of:

1. Different individual, cultural, and national identities;
2. The economic, political, environmental, and/or social processes that influence human action/interaction.

VI. Foundations of Creative Expression (6 credit hours; two courses from two different departments)

Creative expression is a uniquely human attribute. Through literature, the creative and performing arts, and architecture, individuals and cultures express their values and ideals, as well as explore human potential, the human condition, and the imagination.

Students fulfilling the Creative Expression requirement will demonstrate an understanding of:

1. One or more forms/genres of creative expression;
2. The theory or methods behind the creative expression;
3. The social, cultural, or historical context of the creative expression(s).

Proposed Revision of FAU Core Curriculum

Presentation to the FAU BOT Committee on Academic and Student Affairs – June 11, 2008

Current Curriculum

Current curriculum simply follows state-mandated criteria for general education curricula:

- 36 hours of coursework in
  - Communications
  - Mathematics
  - Natural Sciences
  - Social Sciences
  - Humanities
  - Curriculum lacks guiding principles, learning expectations in each of the five core areas.

Current Curriculum

- Unclear to students why they are taking courses in the core and the value of a liberal arts education.
- Unclear to faculty why the courses they are teaching are part of the core.
- Unclear to potential employers how an FAU undergraduate education is preparing future members of the workforce.
- Times have changed.

What Should FAU Students Get from their Undergraduate Education?

Recommendations of American Association of Colleges and Universities:

1) **Knowledge of Human Culture and the Natural World:**

- Science
- Social sciences
- Mathematics
- Humanities
- Arts

What Should FAU Students Get from their Undergraduate Education? (con't)

Recommendations of American Association of Colleges and Universities:

2) Intellectual and Practical S-kills:

- **Written and oral communication**
- **Inquiry, critical and creative thinking**
- **Quantitative literacy**
- **Information literacy**
- **Teamwork**
- **Integration of learning**

What Should FAU Students Get from their Undergraduate Education? (con't)

Recommendations of American Association of Colleges and Universities:

3) Individual and Social Responsibility:

- Civic responsibility and engagement
- Ethical reasoning
- Intercultural knowledge and actions
- Propensity for lifelong learning

The general education should not be expected to incorporate every element. On the other hand, it should not be viewed simply as an "add-on." General education coursework should be viewed as an equal partner to courses in the major.

FAU's Proposed General Education Curriculum

Goals

The courses that comprise the FAU general education curriculum combine to develop:

- **Knowledge in several different disciplines;**
- **The ability to think critically;**
- **The ability to communicate effectively;**
- **An appreciation for how knowledge is discovered, challenged, and transformed as it advances; and**
- **An understanding of ethics and ethical behavior.**

FAU's Proposed General Education Curriculum

Categories

1. Foundations of Written Communication
2. Foundations of Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning
3. Foundations of Science and the Natural World
4. Foundations of Society and Human Behavior
5. Foundations in Global Citizenship
6. Foundations of Creative Expression

FAU's Proposed General Education Curriculum

Learning Expectations Associated with each Category

For example, the following learning expectations are associated with Category 3: Foundations of Science and the Natural World

Students who satisfy the Science and the Natural World requirement will demonstrate:

1. **An understanding of the nature of science, including important principles and paradigms;**
2. **An understanding of the limits of scientific knowledge and of how scientific knowledge changes;**
3. **An understanding of the nature of scientific inquiry and its ethical standards, in particular how to pose questions and how to develop possible explanations;**
4. **An ability to discern claims based on rigorous scientific methods from those based on illogical or incomplete scientific methods.**

FAU's Proposed General Education Curriculum

After completion of the associated lab, the student will:

1. **Demonstrate an understanding of how experiments are conducted;**
2. **Be able to analyze resulting data; and**
3. **Be able to draw appropriate conclusions from such data.**

Things Seen and Unseen

For general education curriculum to be effective – to do the things it is intended to do – there must be processes in place to assess its effectiveness.

- Stage 1, Certification Process: Faculty submit course syllabus and assignments; answer questions about how their course is meeting the overall goals of the general education curriculum and the learning expectations of the category their course will fall under.

- Stage 2, Assessment: Queries of students and faculty, to determine the extent to which goals and learning expectations are being met; evaluation of syllabi, assignments, exams.

Implementation Process

- 2008-2009, certification of courses to be included in curriculum
- Fall 2009, implementation of new curriculum
- Fall 2009 and spring 2010, pilot assessment of curriculum