

Baccalaureate Core Review Committee - Phase I Summary Report

The Beginning:

Oregon State University's Baccalaureate Core curriculum was developed and implemented with much of its current structure in 1988, with the later addition of Writing Intensive Curriculum (WIC) and Difference, Power and Discrimination (DPD). That current structure (Skills, Perspectives and Synthesis) and stated goals of the curriculum were visionary at the time, and our community still considers them appropriate for general education. Perhaps the largest two changes over the decades have been: 1) a substantial proliferation of classes offered in several Perspective categories due to planned changes in the university's funding model, and 2) a general drift away from the original intent and plans (and the people involved in that). By and large, though, our Baccalaureate Core was well designed in 1988, has had meaningful additions over time, and remains a reasonable model for general education.

Current stated mission:

"The Baccalaureate Core (Bacc Core) Curriculum represents what the OSU faculty believes is the foundation for students' further understanding of the modern world. Informed by natural and social sciences, arts, and humanities, the Bacc Core requires student to think critically and creatively, and to synthesize ideas and information when evaluating major societal issues. Importantly, the Bacc Core promotes understanding of interrelationships among disciplines in order to increase students' capacities as ethical citizens of an ever-changing world."

More detailed insight is available from the composite learning outcomes of our current Baccalaureate Core curriculum. These are distilled from the outcomes associated with and required in each category:

"Demonstrate, by successful completion of approved Baccalaureate Core courses or relevant alternative activities, the ability to create or perform at the university-level in the following areas:

- 1. Critical thinking skills;*
- 2. Oral and written communication across disciplines and within the discipline of the major;*
- 3. Mathematical analyses and interpretation;*
- 4. Personal programs for a physically active and healthy lifestyle;*
- 5. Analyses and appraisals of significant creative and scientific scholarship, including:
evaluations of variability and bias in a set of data and ideas; and
strategies to solve significant global problems using a multidisciplinary approach;*
- 6. Analyses and appraisals of significant works of literature and art addressing:
the origins and operations of social discrimination;
the nature, value, and limitations of scientific methods;
societal dimensions of science and technology, and their evolving relationship to
attend to shared problems; and
evolving roles and achievements of civilizations and cultures."*

These distilled outcomes are absolutely consistent with OSU's "Learning Goals for Graduates", developed originally within the OSU 2007 process (2002-2007) and revisited in 2006 by the University Assessment Council (Appendix 1). We want to emphasize that these learning goals encompass the entire university experience, of which the Baccalaureate Core is only a part. The Core and the majors/minors fit together to produce a complete education.

Review Process:

Our committee was charged by the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate to "*improve the educational attainment and retention of undergraduate students at Oregon State University*" specifically by reviewing and recommending potential revisions to the Core. We first needed to establish the appropriateness of our current learning outcomes, relate them to research and examples from across the continent, and assess OSU's knowledge and appreciation for the Core. Now that this Phase I report is complete, we will be working with colleges and departments to establish options by which students can accomplish the Core outcomes, including but not limited to coursework (Phase II). Phase III will be the implementation, over several years, of any adopted changes to the Core.

Committee members included: co-chairs **John Bailey** from Forestry and **Bill Bogley** from Mathematics and Honors; **Susie Brubaker-Cole** from Academic Success and Engagement; **Brad Cardinal** from Nutrition and Exercise Sciences; **Jim Coakley** from College of Business; **Milo Koretsky** from Chemical, Biological, and Environmental Engineering; **Corinne Manogue** from Physics; **Pat Muir** from Botany & Plant Pathology; **Indira Rajagopal** from Biology; **Lisa Sarasohn** from History; **Tom Savage** from Animal Sciences; **Celeste Walls** from Speech Communication; **Chris Ward** from Teacher and Counselor Education; and **Shayna Rogers** and **John-Albert (Jac) Conlu** from ASOSU. We received valuable help from **Larry Roper**, from Student Affairs, as a facilitator and non-voting member, and from **Vickie Nunnemaker** in the Faculty Senate Office. Most of the committee will continue to work into Phase II.

This committee began meeting and organizing in December 2008, and met most weeks of both Winter and Spring terms with hundreds of hours of work between meetings:

2009 Time Line for Phase I and this summary report, with some reflection of intent of the various outreach, research and reporting tasks:

January - information gathering on OSU Baccalaureate Core curriculum and national general education efforts

February - planning for input from Colleges and initial Focus Group meetings; begin developing student survey

March - complete Focus Groups and schedule Open Forums with the campus; complete student survey design and submit

April - Open Forums, survey approval, and other information gathering to round out committee impressions; regular postings to Faculty Senate website

May - student survey launched, Focus Group and Open Forums summarized, interviews with other institutions, and overall synthesis activities

June - presentation of report to Executive Committee and Faculty Senate

LEAP and General Education Philosophy

One extremely valuable source of information about current trends in general education outcomes is AAC&U's Liberal Education for America's Promise (LEAP) project, which contains a distilled list of *Essential Learning Outcomes* associated with a standard four-year university education, but with distinct implications for any Baccalaureate Core curriculum. Those authors present four basic areas in which students must gain meaningful experience:

Knowledge of human cultures and the natural world through study of enduring and contemporary questions about science and the arts;

Intellectual and practical life skills, including: inquiry, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative and information literacy, problem solving, and teamwork;

Perspectives on real-world personal and social responsibility, including knowledge, competence and engagement in local-to-global civics, cultural diversity, and social and environmental ethics; and

Progressive and integrative learning across years and disciplines, general to specialized studies, through application of knowledge, skills and responsibilities.

We found that these four areas, developed over many years and with participation from hundreds of colleges and universities, were enthusiastically embraced by the various Focus Groups and Open Forums at OSU. There is considerable latitude for interpreting these goals within the context of OSU as a land grant institution, with its current identity and strategic plan for the future. Some details of that vision emerged from our information-gathering with various campus groups to date.

Focus Groups, Open Forums and Student Survey Data

Faculty members across the colleges at OSU were remarkably consistent in their views about the role of general education at this and any institution, and modestly consistent about what is working/not working specifically here and at this time (Table 1). This feedback was open and unguided, and the committee is confident that the vast majority of units on this campus would agree with these summary statements even though their session may not have considered them all.

Most students also support the goals and ideals of our Baccalaureate Core and general education (74% agree, with 24% strongly agree), and they acknowledge that it contributes to their personal growth (59% agree, with 16% strongly agree). However, students are consistently more excited about and agreeable to courses within their majors than to those in the Baccalaureate Core curriculum, even in topic areas that we all identify as specific to the goals of the Core (Figure 1).

Across our existing categories, student survey data confirm qualitative feedback that English and Math skills courses are perceived as meaningful, but that only some synthesis and perspectives categories are effective (Figure 2). These data echo repeated spoken and written concerns about the HHS 231 courses, some perspectives categories and DPD, cookbook laboratories, and general lack of rigor and purpose.

Finally, students do not think they are receiving good advising about the Baccalaureate Core, with half disagreeing (18% strongly disagreeing) that academic advisors have presented the Core as an important part of their studies. Even more alarming is the fact that Bacc Core instructors themselves often (50%) don't present the Core as important, and only 34% of students state that their major professors and instructors present the Core as important.

Table 1. Focus Group and Open Forum results on overall perceptions of the role of any general education requirement, and structural ("STR") and implementation ("Imp") issues with the current OSU Baccalaureate Core curriculum.

Type*	Common Themes	College Focus Groups										Open Forums	
		Count	COS	CoF	CAS	CLA**	COE	COEd	HHS	Pharm	UHC	Advisors	Faculty
Role	Skills (e.g., writing ¹ , math, science and information literacy, scientific method)	11	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Role	Critical and creative thinking; problem solving skills	11	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Role	Tools for local to global citizenship; cultural appreciation	10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Imp	Change students (and faculty) attitude about the Bacc Core	10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Role	Breadth, appreciation of arts, philosophy ..., perspective (out of their comfort zone)	10	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Role	Personal growth and engagement in life-long learning	8	x	x	x		x	x	x			x	x
Imp	Ensure access to classes when needed, across years	8	x	x	x	x		x	x			x	x
Imp	Address concerns over easy A's and SCHs; rigor and meaning of courses	7	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	
Role	Teamwork and collaboration, consensus building	7	x	x	x				x	x		x	x
Imp	Consider the role of increased class size and eCampus	6		x		x		x	x	x			x
Imp	Provide meaningful explanation of flow/design; tie to advising	6		x		x	x	x				x	x
STR	Add service learning and/or broader experiential learning opportunities	6		x			x	x	x			x	x
STR	Integrate the Bacc Core with majors to be simple and complementary	5	x	x	x		x						x
STR	Integrate within upper-division Bacc Core classes (team teaching, multidisciplinary)	5	x			x	x	x					x
Role	Interrelationships among disciplines	5	x				x		x			x	x
Imp	Ensure quality of instruction (particularly in preparing GTAs and Instructors)	4	x	x		x		x					
STR	Clean up specific problem areas (e.g., COM, WR, HHS and lack of choice)?	4	x	x	x					x			
STR	Add sustainability as a more discrete and noticeable component	4	x	x	x							x	
Imp	Perception of bias/instruction in classes	3		x	x	x							

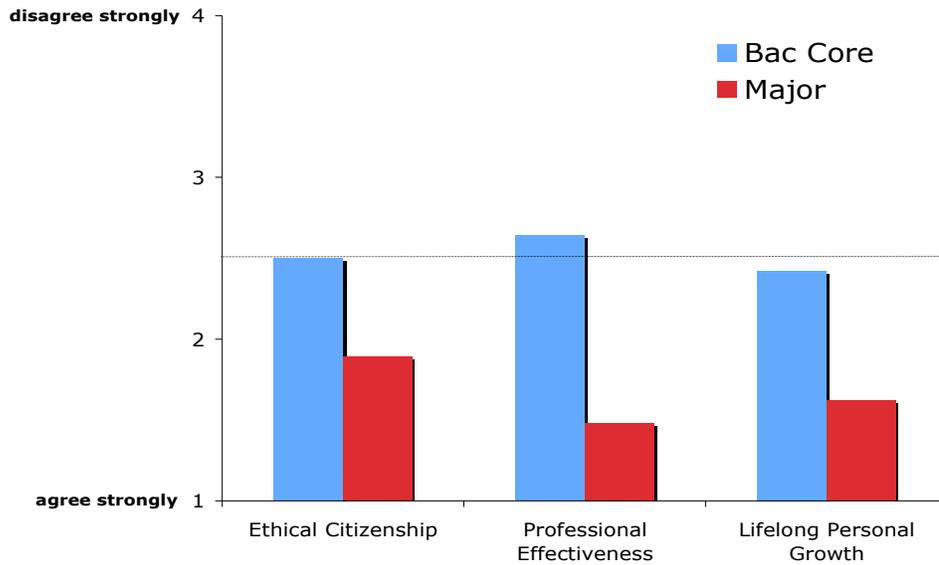


Figure 1. Student survey results ($n > 2330$; standard deviations average < 0.02) on overall perceptions about the Core and their majors. "1" is agree strongly, for example with the statement "The current Bacc Core contributes to my development of ethical citizenship"

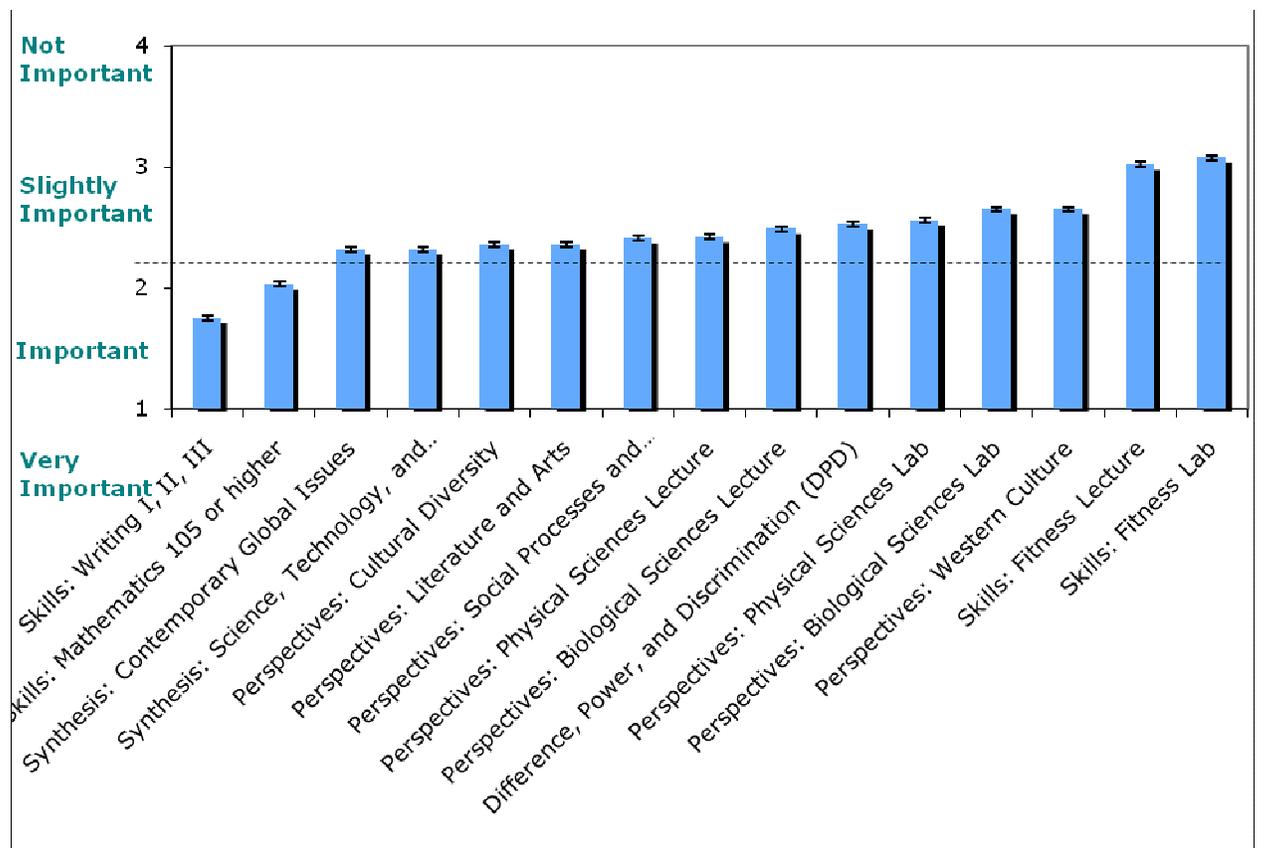


Figure 2. Student survey results ($n > 2330$; standard deviations average < 0.02) on categories. "1" is "very important" in response to the question: "Rate the importance of each category in terms of your individual educational goals." The rating 1.7 for Skills: Writing corresponds to 35% important and 45% very important.

Major Findings and Recommendations:

General consensus amongst the Focus Groups, Open Forums and Student Survey is that the philosophy and goals of the Baccalaureate Core are sound and consistent with the AAC&U LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes although a few critical components were identified as missing. We should consider placing increased emphasis on local-to-global citizenship, civic engagement, sustainability, conflict resolution, and active learning.

The curriculum structure has become unwieldy in size and complexity, leading to problems in discerning its focus and achieving the learning outcomes. It is and will remain a challenge to implement a clear structure in terms of class access, course rigor/quality, flow within the overall structure, and cohesion of the system in its current form.

There are serious problems with the implementation of the Baccalaureate Core curriculum:

1. It has become overly mechanical for our advisors and students (the "checkbox effect"). There should be flow and coherence for individual students across their academic careers; a renewed commitment to advising will be crucial in this process.
2. The goals and philosophy of general education are seldom discussed in our community, at levels ranging from students to advisors to faculty to administrators. As a result, the curriculum has lost much of its meaning for many students and faculty, particularly those focused on their majors and future employment.
3. Students and faculty both emphasize the importance of basic skills (written and oral communications, mathematics literacy), but faculty feel that many graduates lack even fundamental competency in these skills.

This is an excellent time to consider changes in both structure and implementation. As part of any proposed adjustments to the Baccalaureate Core, we need to renew our commitment broadly as a university community to the basic (and sound) philosophy toward general education at OSU. We need to produce graduates that can write well, communicate with multiple audiences, synthesize divergent historic and contemporary information, solve complex problems and think deeply and outside of their usual comfort zones. We should create a community of learning in which we all become more informed and mindful of our global citizenship, our environmental stewardship responsibilities, and the ethical challenges associated with human-human, human-environment, and human-technology interactions.

Design Strategy Questions - the next steps:

How can we best energize a 'community of learning' that values general education?

How can we more effectively develop and maintain a progression into and through the Baccalaureate Core? What is the role of the first-year experience in this process?

How can we establish more meaningful connections and balance between the Baccalaureate Core and majors?

How can we foster connections among diverse fields of thought in order to make the Baccalaureate Core rich and meaningful, more welcome among students, and easy for faculty and advisors to convey and implement?

How can we create opportunities for integrative learning within classes (e.g., *via* team teaching and/or multi-disciplinary instruction)? Faculty members do their best thinking and best teaching while in meaningful relationship with students and colleagues.

Who will do the teaching and how will those teachers be prepared and supported for the Baccalaureate Core? How will that vary between lower- and upper-division requirements? How will faculty be rewarded for such teaching? What will be the role of eCampus?

What are the logistics for implementing and monitoring active learning (e.g., service learning, undergraduate research and study abroad)?

Significant changes to the structure and implementation of the Baccalaureate Core will not be easy due to institutional and budgetary constraints, as well as the number of programs and students involved. However, such times of disturbance create opportunities for systems to reorganize and flourish. Reinvigorating the Baccalaureate Core now is critical for preparing OSU students to meet the challenges and opportunities they will encounter as citizens and professionals.

Appendix 1. OSU's "Learning Goals for Graduates", developed originally within the OSU2007 strategic planning process (2002-2007) and revisited in 2006 by the University Assessment Council.

Competency in One or More Fields

As an OSU graduate you will show a depth of knowledge within chosen field(s) based on integration of its history, core methods and ways of knowing, techniques, vocabulary, and unsolved problems.

Critical Thinking

As an OSU graduate you will evaluate and synthesize information from multiple sources and perspectives to make informed decisions and solve problems; you will exhibit unrestrained intellectual exploration.

Pluralism and Cultural Legacies

As an OSU graduate you will acquire knowledge and appreciation of human conditions and achievement, as well as the social world, to recognize oneself in the diversity of human experiences and cultures both regionally and globally.

Collaboration

As an OSU graduate you will develop the ability to be a positive contributor to situations requiring shared responsibility toward achieving a common goal.

Social Responsibility

As an OSU graduate you will develop the capacity to construct an engaged, contributing life which reflects an understanding of the value of service, citizenship, and the interdependent nature of local and global communities.

Communications

As an OSU graduate you will be able to present and evaluate information, as well as exchange ideas to clearly and effectively communicate with diverse audiences in a variety of situations.

Self-Awareness and Life-Long Learning

As an OSU graduate you will develop awareness of and appreciation for your personal strengths, values, and challenges, and you will cultivate the ability to use that knowledge to guide your future learning and development.