

**AAC&U Institute on General Education**  
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**Lessons for Fayetteville State University**  
**Executive Summary and Recommendations**

by  
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In February 2005, the Core Review Committee appointed by the University College Advisory Board applied to attend the AAC&U Institute on General Education. Our proposal was accepted, and the Chancellor and Provost provided funds to send a team. The team included one member from each college or school and one administrator. Based on the best practices in general education presented at the Institute, the Core Review Team recommends

- That the Core Review Committee initiate a process to clarify and define the goals of the current Core Curriculum (best practice is intentional—curriculum must be related to explicit goals);
- That these goals be stated in terms of student learning outcomes (best practice is learning-centered);
- That these definitions include beginning, milestone, and culminating expectations (best practice recognizes that general education continues throughout the student's undergraduate education);
- That the process include forums and other mechanisms to get the input of faculty, students, and other members of the university community (best practice is inclusive);
- That the definition of goals and objectives be followed by an assessment of student work (best practice incorporates systematic assessment);
- That the process of definition be given at least one year and possibly more (best practice recognizes that curricular review takes time);
- That the project be made a priority of the university and be given the support of the administration (best practice recognizes that curricular review requires institutional support).

Fayetteville State University should begin a review of the University College Core Curriculum by assessing the effectiveness of the current core. Only then should the university attempt a revision. Unless we know what we need to improve or change, we cannot be assured that any changes will be for the better. Assessing the current core is the best way to build a consensus about what it should be.

A review of the current core curriculum should in turn begin by clarifying its goals and objectives in terms of student learning outcomes. The goals listed in the catalog are a good start, but they need to be made more specific and measurable. We must specify what we expect students to know and do at the beginning, middle, and end of their undergraduate careers. These expectations should be formulated as rubrics that could be used to assess products of learning.

We must specify outcomes at the beginning, middle, and end because general education is a process that continues throughout the student's undergraduate career. Students will come to the university with a variety of levels of preparation. Some students will need assistance getting to the minimal level needed for college work. The first-year courses will build on student skills and knowledge, but a single course or year of courses can only do so much. We must build definite yet reasonable expectations for the general education courses. The first-year courses must prepare students to succeed in their majors. However, students continue to develop their general education skills--research, critical thinking, and communication—in their major courses. We need to make this fact explicit in our courses and in our conception of general education.

The process of defining learning outcomes should be as inclusive as possible. The core review team or even the Core Review Committee should not attempt to define these outcomes in isolation. The university community should be invited to participate. The departments and faculty teaching core courses should have a say. The schools and colleges that receive the students from the general education program should also be consulted, as should the students themselves. The core review team recommends that a series of forums be held on the different core skills and knowledge areas. The Core Review Committee can organize, guide, and summarize the hearings.

Once expectations for student learning outcomes are defined, student products of learning should be assessed to determine how the university is performing in these areas. It is crucial that we move beyond statements of expectation to actual assessment of student work. This assessment should include random selections of student work, which would be compared with rubrics describing different levels of competency in the selected goal. Student work could be collected through student portfolios, or instructors could keep and submit copies of student work. The assessments would be made by committees of faculty, who would review the samples. This structure of assessment committees could become the basis of a permanent assessment process.

The proposed review and assessment will complement efforts already underway. Data from the CBASE (rising junior examination) should be reviewed to see how the university compares with other institutions. The Collegiate Learning Assessment project will provide excellent data on whether student learning increases over the course of their undergraduate careers. These instruments can also be examined to assist the process of defining general education goals and outcomes. However, they must be complemented by a concerted effort to make our goals explicit and to ensure that the curriculum does in fact enable students to reach these goals.

The process of defining goals and assessing student work will take time. The Core Review Team recommends that the Committee commit one year to the process of defining goals and outcomes and another year to the assessment of student work. Unless sufficient time is allotted, the Committee will be tempted to rush the process and curtail discussion. This is a recipe for failure.

The recommended process will succeed only if the university community endorses it and if the administration supports it. The Core Review Team recommends that the project be reported to the Faculty Senate, with opportunities for the Senate to make recommendations on the process. The Core Review Team recommends that the Chancellor and Provost support the process by making it a priority of the university and by providing funds for faculty development.