

Minority Report Submitted in Connection with Task Force on Core Curriculum

For the reasons stated below, I cannot endorse the curriculum proposal advanced by Task Force II (UCC 21).

For the past three years, Task Forces I and II have struggled to update the core curriculum of the university to accommodate changes in the world inhabited by today's students and transformations becoming evident in the way students learn. Discussions have been wide ranging, informative, and sometimes contentious. Participants are to be congratulated for their commitment to the enterprise, for the high standards they set, and for their devotion to the task as demonstrated by the countless hours they devoted to the process. The fact that I cannot support the results of the effort, then, is no reflection on the sincerity or hard work of the members of both task forces on which I served.

I cannot support UCC21 for six reasons:

- 1) UCC21 lacks the empirical support necessary for widespread faculty support and success. Task Force I utilized, as the basis of its work, the *Greater Expectations* Report issued by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The report focuses on learner expectations but offers no detailed account of how students learn. Task Forces I and II utilized the *Expectations* Report in postulating learning as a four step process: from **Experience** into **information** (isolate discrete, recognizable and usable facts); from **Information** into **knowledge** (the ability to analyze facts, discover meaning in experience); from **Knowledge** into **judgment** (the ability to inquire into or reflect on knowledge gained to direct what we think, say and do); and from **Judgment** into **action**. While this process makes sense intuitively, neither Task Force provided the kind of empirical support or documentation one would expect when an academic institution embarks on a significant change in the direction of its core mission. The lack of evidentiary material will make it very difficult to sell this product to faculty and to enable them to embrace its meaning. This is not to say that empirical support for this model is entirely lacking. The AAC&U report offers some support. However, the reports of Task Forces I and II provide none of the documentation necessary for faculty to evaluate the soundness of the pedagogical principles articulated. To my mind, it is a mistake to proceed without providing substantial evidence for faculty review and debate.
- 2) The particular arrangement of UCC21 courses in a tiered system will complicate transferability. Since courses in each tier must demonstrate achievement of particular pedagogical objectives—not simply content—that proceed from the model of learning, liberal arts or core courses that traditionally transfer into and out of Ball State may no longer qualify as meeting core goals. This is especially problematic in light of the projected increase in transfer students from IVY Tech and elsewhere and in light of the statewide Transfer and Articulation system that *requires* core courses to transfer across institutions.
- 3) Neither Task Force undertook a systematic review of the literature regarding successful models employed at similar universities. The charge to produce a “national model” drove both Task Forces to eschew any lessons about what works and what doesn't that might have been learned elsewhere.
- 4) There has been insufficient attention given to technological and diversity needs within the curriculum. These elements, identified in part by the WISER requirements, were discussed briefly by subgroups over the summer but insufficiently vetted by the entire Task Force. The desire to proceed with haste has impaired the ability of the Task Force carefully to examine objectives associated with these goals in detail.

- 5) Neither Task Force has embedded assessment in the manner envisioned when the process began. Two sources of constant faculty irritation under the previous core were the lack of clarity that characterized the process by which courses were assessed and the failure to assess at the programmatic level. As a result, Task Force I made clear that it wanted assessment built into the core from the start. We have not accomplished that task. This is a substantial problem since we still have no operational definitions for many programmatic goals. What does it mean to be an “intentional learner” or a “responsible learner”? How does one assess success? What standards and tools does one use? What counts as success?
- 6) Finally, and this may be idiosyncratic, I find UCC21’s emphasis on process bypasses precisely what is most important in a liberal education, a content rich in ideas that represent the best of our own heritage and the heritage of other cultures around the world. Liberal education demands recognition that some ideas have been more important than others and deserve continued transmission through the ages. Liberal education places a premium on certain key disciplines that train the mind. Outside of foundation courses, however, UCC21 elevates process above content and encourages disciplines to teach beyond the area of their expertise if they can demonstrate a contribution to the process of learning. This invites non-experts outside of established disciplines to decide which content ought to be transmitted.

There is much to like about UCC21 as well. For example, the inclusion of an immersive or experiential learning experience is innovative and builds on successful models pioneered at Ball State. The current proposal is better than an earlier version and guarantees that foundation courses will be taught by host disciplines. But I don’t believe the job is yet done. The attempt to adopt the model hastily will, in my opinion, only generate hostility among faculty—especially if faculty are told they must adopt the model as is without the opportunity to exercise their responsibility in fashioning curriculum for the university. My preference would be to continue the dialogue and to broaden it by examining alternative approaches. Grappling with the difficulties of updating the liberal arts is not an easy task and institutions as prominent as Harvard have had lengthy setbacks in addressing changes to the core. We should take our time and do it right. We will likely have to live a long time with the decisions we make and we want to make sure the model we adopt reflects the true value we place on being an educated person in the 21st century.

Respectfully Submitted,

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