2004 Report of the Core Curriculum Assessment Committee

Submitted to

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

by

Texas A&M University

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Executive Summary

The Core Curriculum Assessment Committee (CCAC) was tasked by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee with conducting an assessment of the Core Curriculum in November 2003. The CCAC sought to determine the extent to which (1) the curriculum is consistent with the elements of the Core Curriculum component areas, intellectual competencies and perspectives as described by the THECB, and (2) TAMU’s educational goals and the exemplary educational objectives of THECB’s common Core Curriculum are being achieved.

Membership of the CCAC included faculty members from the Colleges and staff members from Measurement and Research Services (MARS), Student Life Studies (SLS), General Academic Programs, Provost’s Office, Office of Institutional Assessment and Diversity, Distance Education, and the Center for Teaching Excellence. Membership of the CCAC is found in Appendix 1. The assessment study by the CCAC represented the first institution-wide effort to assess the Core Curriculum in the history of TAMU. The assessment effort is a major component of TAMU’s on-going response to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and includes an active Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

The CCAC began meetings in November 2003 and met routinely during the Spring 2004 semester. All major elements of the THECB request for assessment of the Core Curriculum were addressed by the CCAC. In order to determine a baseline for student learning outcomes assessment through 2009, a survey of faculty teaching Core Curriculum courses was conducted in Spring 2004. The survey instrument consisted of 43 questions which asked Core Curriculum faculty members to provide all of the learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment activities used in their Core Curriculum courses. The survey sought to determine how faculty members incorporated exemplary/learning objectives into their student learning experiences.

The faculty survey instrument was sent to 852 faculty members on the Texas A&M University College Station and Galveston campuses. This survey focused solely on those teaching Core Curriculum courses in Fall 2003 and Spring 2004 semesters. Two hundred and forty-five faculty members responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 28.8%. Fully, 71% of the respondents stated that they included learning objectives in their syllabi. Strong qualitative assessments of responses suggest that what faculty members believe are learning outcomes may actually be teaching strategies, programmatic goals, or simple statements about the Core Curriculum Course itself. Both quantitative and qualitative data evaluation sought understanding of the extent and appropriateness of the use of learning outcomes by faculty members teaching Core Curriculum courses.

In compliance with the THECB requirement for a plan to assessment the attainment of learning outcomes in Core Curriculum courses, a conceptual plan was prepared. The plan will achieve assessment of learning outcomes in all Core Curriculum courses by 2009.
Following are recommendations of the CCAC:

1. We (the CCAC) recommend a plan to ensure that Core Courses are satisfying the exemplary objectives of the THECB and the values of TAMU. This plan will include complementary work by all facets of the academic community at TAMU, including the Core Curriculum Council of the Faculty Senate, Vice-President for Institutional Assessment and Diversity, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and TAMU Student Government.

2. We recommend that management and oversight for the Core Curriculum should continue to reside with the Faculty at TAMU. The Faculty Senate should work with the Office of Institutional Assessment and Diversity on assessments of the success of the Core Curriculum. Courses for which degree audits have shown no, or minimal, recent use for Core Curriculum credit should be dropped from the Core.

3. We recommend that the Faculty Senate facilitate a discussion about the relative merits of a Distributive Education Core versus a Common Early Core Experience.

4. We recommend that the assessment of student learning outcomes for Core Curriculum courses should be integrated with the TAMU’s Quality Enhancement Process.

5. We recommend that the Center for Teaching Excellence be charged with implementing a comprehensive Professional Development Program to assist faculty who teach Core Courses in the development of measurable learning outcomes. We recommend that at least $275,000 be allocated annually to support the Professional Development Program.

6. We recommend that development of Educational/Learning outcomes should be considered a requirement for all Core Curriculum courses prior to 2008-2009 academic year. This would provide time for an assessment program to be implemented prior to the THECB requirement for student outcome assessment.