

**Outline Presentation of “Proposed Modifications” before the UCF
October 23, 2008**

Premise:

The Liberal Education Program outlined in the most recent GETF document contains valuable elements that we would like to see enacted. Like many of you, we are inspired by the idealism of the proposal.

But, inadvertently, the Task Force proposal also creates a slew of problems that we would like to see eliminated before the matter comes to a vote by this body.

Our “Proposed Modifications” offers mechanisms that we believe will correct or, at the very least, manage some of those problems.

We mean today to identify four matters of particular concern to us, and to explain how our plan aims to address them.

Problem #1: The current Liberal Education Program is too constricting, especially in the first year.

1. Explanation

- a. Tier 1 too fully dictates the schedules of entering students, some of whom may be left with few or no non-compulsory courses in the first year.
- b. Most affected will be those students requiring remedial courses in English and Math. For those students, under a variety of circumstances, almost every class would be compulsory. They would have virtually no choice.
- c. But also affected would be our better students, especially those wishing to begin their foreign language sequence in their first year. They too would have their first year schedules more or less dictated by the program.
- d. How can we become a “university of choice” if we eliminate choice for our students? We don’t think it possible.

2. Our Proposed Solution: To reduce the number of required courses in Tier 1.

- a. The current LEP requires all students to pass a 3-credit, stand-alone course in Technological Fluency. Our revision eliminates “Tech Fluency” as a stand-alone course, stipulating instead that we address that competency in each and every course that we offer in the General Education program.
- b. The current LEP also requires all students to pass a 3-credit First-Year Experience Seminar *and* a 3-credit course in Critical Thinking, six credits in all. Our revision melds these two independent requirements into one 3-credit course, a First Year Experience Seminar that takes as its focus the competency of “Critical Thinking.”
- c. We propose these FYE/Critical-Thinking sections be taught by faculty members across the disciplines, so that any of us so inclined with the right training could contribute to the program, and so that students could have a meaningful choice about the context in which they encounter this crucial competency.

- d. Critical thinking is also identified as a so-called “embedded competency” in our modified plan, to be developed in every course in the Gen Ed program.
- e. Not only are these modifications pedagogically sound, in our view,
- f. They also have the practical value of un-encumbering up to 6 credits in the first year, restoring to students the freedom to tailor their own programs, at least to some degree, at that crucial juncture after high school when autonomy matters most.

Problem #2: The LEP, as currently construed, will interfere with our students' efforts to choose and to complete their academic majors.

1. Explanation

- a. Currently many SCSU students first encounter their major academic fields of study in required, discipline-based General Education courses.
- b. Because, under LEP, most students will no longer encounter similar courses, at least until their second and third years, the new program will complicate their selection of subject-area majors.
- c. Some students may even have to make their decisions without the benefit of having completed even one course in their chosen fields.
- d. Moreover, because it increases the total required hours of Gen Ed, the LEP makes timely completion of many academic majors, particularly those leading to the BS degree, even more difficult than it is today.

2. Solution: ease a restriction.

- a. One of the benefits of trimming Tier 1 is to decrease the total required hours in the program. That reduction should give students more time to devote to their departmental majors once they are underway.
- b. But how will they find their majors in the first place? Here is our plan.
 - i. We eliminate the proviso in the current LEP that restricts students from beginning their Tier 2 courses before completing Tier 1.
 - ii. Under our plan, students could enroll in any Tier 2 course at any time, as long as they met the prerequisites associated with the course in question.
 - iii. So, for example, a Philosophy course in Tier 2 might bar students who have not yet completed English 112, whereas an Art History course in the same tier might only require the completion of English 111.

- c. That simple change would permit more students to encounter more professors teaching content courses from the get-go, a very good thing in our view, and
- d. It should significantly simplify and rationalize the process by which our students will select their academic majors if and when the LEP comes into affect.

Problem #3: If implemented, the LEP will create unwanted instability among our divisions and academic departments.

1. Explanation

- a. The LEP calls for the establishment of new required courses in areas that we currently have neither the faculty nor the physical resources to teach.
- b. It also drops or marginalizes certain courses long established in the AUR that we *are* able staff and service handily.
- c. This feature of the plan will cause some departments to grow, and others to shrink, and will empower some faculty members, and marginalize others, placing a strain on our collegial relationships, and causing uncertainty and instability throughout the university.
- d. Among the unintended and undesired consequences of the GETF proposal, this one is perhaps the most consequential, for the uncertainty and unhappiness it threatens to create will work against good teaching and the success of our entire enterprise.

2. Solution: bring Tier 2 into line with the current AUR.

- a. Our plan makes two structural changes in Tier 2.
 - i. It reinstates “Intellectual Foundations” as an “Area of Knowledge and Experience” on a par with other required categories in the division.
 - ii. It also expands the existing category “Creative Drive” to capture competencies currently excluded from its domain.
- b. Once transformed in these ways, the new program comes into close alignment, both in terms of the nature and number of its constituent categories, with our current system of Core Requirements.
- c. That means that just about every department now offering courses in our old program would, at least theoretically, have a place of equal significance in the new system.
- d. Individual faculty members and departments would have much less justification for worry about losing their prerogatives or the size of their audiences under the new program, were the LEP to be modified along the lines that we propose

Problem #4: If implemented in its current form, the LEP will place undue pressure upon our faculty to write and to authorize an exceptionally large number of courses in great haste. Under such circumstances, the quality of the new courses would surely suffer.

1. Explanation

- a. Right now, in the School of Arts and Sciences, gaining approval for a single new course takes more than a year from start to finish, despite the fact that very few courses are proposed for addition to the catalogue.
- b. Implementing the LEP will require the near instant creation and approval by departmental, school, and university committees of scads of new courses in every area.
- c. How will our system, with its slowly grinding gears, ever cope with the crushing burden placed upon it by the proposed program?
- d. Moreover, under the circumstances, what real hope is there that the courses stocking the new program will be as well organized, well thought-through, or well staffed, as our current Gen Ed offerings?
- e. In our view, almost none!

2. Solution: Permit courses in the current Gen Ed lineup to migrate into appropriate categories of the LEP on a temporary basis.

- a. Within two years of program implementation, such migrant courses from the AUR would be required to undergo review and to demonstrate to the appropriate committees that they satisfy the requirements of the revised LEP. Failure to do so would entail their elimination from the program.
- b. Allowing such a provisory migration would immediately provide a full complement of courses for the new Gen Ed program during the first years of implementation.
- c. It would also relieve pressure on faculty and faculty committees to write and to approve vast numbers of new courses in haste.
- d. This approach will, moreover, permit departments to offer revised courses in the new Gen Ed program using the numbers assigned to courses in the old program. This freedom would advantage us

greatly, for in many cases, it would free departments from having to revise their major programs to accommodate the changed curriculum.

Our “Proposed Modifications” also address other matters of concern to us and to many other faculty members with whom we have consulted. Our plan takes steps to ensure:

- 1. that the program provides an equitable distribution of courses among the three main academic divisions – Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities – and requires students to enroll in courses from each of them, as specified by NEASC;**
- 2. that all courses in Tier 2 foster a true measure of competency by requiring broad and deep treatments of their subject areas;**
- 3. that course content is coordinated across the program to the greatest extent possible (through the expansion of Links);**
- 4. that members of the full-time faculty are actively recruited and rewarded for teaching in the program; and**
- 5. that the requirements of the program are made fully transparent to students and faculty members (by revealing all “hidden requirements” in the LEP).**

We hope that you give our “Proposed Modifications” your careful consideration. Whether or not you agree in whole with our specific solutions, we hope that you will acknowledge the four problems and other matters signaled here to be substantial and requiring of remedy.

**David Levine
David Pettigrew**