

**Recommendations to the UAF Faculty Senate
for the Revision of UAF's Core Curriculum
and
Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

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Prepared by the Core Revitalization and Assessment Group

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Executive Summary

The Core Revitalization and Assessment Committee make the following major recommendations (further details are given in the detailed recommendation section):

1. UAF should adopt the AACU Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Essential Learning Outcomes as the new major learning outcomes from a new hybrid Core curriculum. The LEAP outcomes are as follows (<http://www.aacu.org/leap/essential-learning-outcomes>), and [A gngag.c \(Cond\)Tj](#)

LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes include modern expectations such as integrative and applied learning, civic knowledge and engagement at both local and global levels, skills for lifelong learning and teamwork. Fourth, much of UAF's current Core curriculum will carry over into a new hybrid Core based on the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes.

2. UAF should implement a simple effective assessment of the new hybrid Core using multiple tools (e.g., survey and course embedded learning assessment) and have a clear assessment oversight process.
 - a. The National Survey of Student Engagement and

Introduction

UAF's baccalaureate Core curriculum was approved in 1990 and implemented during the fall semester 1991. The Core has not been reviewed in depth since its inception. Thus, the time has come for

Review of National Trends

To help prepare the Core Revitalization and Assessment Group for their work, four faculty members attended the AACU "Ready Or Not: Global Challenges, College Learning, and America's Promise" conference, January 21-24, 2009 in Seattle, Washington and two faculty members attended the "General Education, Assessment, and the Learning Students Need" February 26-28, 2009 in Baltimore, Maryland.

Educating group members through attending the above national meetings, reading national trend sources (see below), and discussing among themselves significantly impacted member opinions about appropriate learning outcomes and assessment. In particular, discussions about the diversity of UAF's students e.g., nontraditional, full time versus part time, AA/AS and traditional

Gathering

Detailed Recommendations

1. UAF should adopt a hybrid Core Curriculum (A Core/A 1).

4. Implementation of the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes should include the specific learning outcomes listed

this course will assess the students' ability in those topic areas and allow placement into the next course module or require further skill development in those topics. Because word processing and accurate information searching are critical to many beginning courses, it is important that we address these topics early on in every student's career.

- f. The committee recommends that a capstone course in each major should be an element of the Core curriculum to facilitate the *synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies* element of the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes and assessment of a revised Core. However, a capstone course would not be required for AA or AS students.
 - g. The committee recommends that the upper division oral and written communication requirements be retained.
5. There are three common approaches to assessment of Core or General Education curricula (http://amps.tools.mit.edu/tomprofblog/archives/2006/04/719_three_level.html#more, accessed April 23, 2009). Below is an excerpt from that URL

THREE LEVELS OF GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

Campuses typically use one or more of three basic approaches to assessing the general education program. They focus on assessment at the course, program, or institutional level. Course level assessment ascertains how well students have mastered learned outcomes associated with specific general education courses. Faculty who staff these courses routinely assess course outcomes, refine their courses based on results, and report findings and changes to an oversight committee. Assuming course outcomes are well aligned with program outcomes, results can be generalized to the program, as a whole.

Program level assessment embeds assessment within general education courses, and results are summarized for the program, as a whole. For example, Noel (2001) and colleagues examined two arts and humanities learned outcomes by developing a rubric and using it to assess student products from a sample of upper division arts and humanities courses. The focus was on the program, not each individual course.

Institutional level assessments usually embeds assessment in

complete a general education portfolio in senior level capstone courses in the major, and the portfolios are assessed to see how well students have mastered general education outcomes. This approach includes a check that students who have transferred from other institutions have developed the marks of a Truman State graduate.

The committee makes the following recommendations:

- a. UAF should implement a simple effective assessment of the new hybrid Core using multiple tools.
- b. The National Survey of Student Engagement and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (at least for AA/AS students) have already been implemented at UAF and should continue to be administered on a regular periodic basis as indirect measures of student learning in the new hybrid Core.
- c. For direct assessment of student learning, the committee recommends that assessment be embedded within the new hybrid Core and, where appropriate upper division major courses, e.g., writing intensive but results summarized for the Core curriculum, as a whole. Thus, UAF would adopt both the program level and institutional level assessments in the three approaches discussed above. Because the AA and AS curriculum is largely comprised of the Core, care must be taken to ensure that the learning outcomes of these students are assessed in the process. The UAF should establish objectives for the LEAP major learning outcomes and adopt a process for gathering assessment information on whether those objectives are being met or not in Core courses. Because students are more likely to do their best if assessment processes also have course grade and completion consequences, the committee generally supports a course embedded process. However, the focus of the embedded assessment should be on Core learning objectives, not an assessment of an individual course. As an example of an embedding process, consider the assessment of written communication. In writing intensive courses a sample of papers could be scored using a common rubric and sub scores for word choice, effective use of evidence, sentence structure, voice, organization, etc., assessed for strengths and weaknesses across students. This would provide information about possible curricular reform in the Core curriculum. A similar approach could be taken in the natural sciences and mathematics; rubrics with sub scores would have to be established for these areas.
- d. The majority of the committee preferred portfolio assessment over capstone course assessment of the Core and both of those approaches over the use of a national test; a minority supported using a national test for assessment of the core or at least parts of the core. The faculty and staff survey supported capstone assessment (74.7%) over portfolio (55.1%) and a national or local exam (25.9%).
- e. The committee supported the use of a portfolio for either a sequence of courses, e.g., English 111, 211 or 213 and writing intensive courses or for individual students as one tool

- to assess the Core. However, portfolios may work better for some outcomes, e.g., written or oral communication, than others, e.g., globalization or sustainability. Some committee members noted that a portfolio assessment process could be very time consuming and could become the responsibility of a small number of departments. If portfolios are adopted, fairness and appropriate compensation or workload will need to be addressed.
- f. A majority of the committee did not support the use of a national test to assess Core learning outcomes because this approach could lead to “teaching to the test.” However, several committee members supported the use of the Collegiate Learning Assessment test after hearing positive support for it at a national meeting and because it provides a simple assessment process. This test could be administered to all students in a common required course, e.g., the ethics course, late in a student’s program; however, AA and AS students are not required to take such a course so an alternative would have to be determined to assess their outcomes.
 - g. The committee did not support the use of a capstone course to assess the Core. Some committee members argued that capstone courses should focus on the major not on the Core. In addition, the committee recognized that AA and AS students currently do not take such a capstone course but their learning outcomes are based on the Core and so need to be assessed. However, the committee recognized that a capstone course was a likely prospect for assessing the integrative and applied learning, including synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies intended LEAP learning outcome and supports the idea of a capstone experience in each major.
 - h. More than one learning objective may be assessed using the same process or tool. For example, written communication assessment could serve multiple purposes if the writing prompt addressed sustainability, globalization, and/or real world challenges.
 - i. A sample of student work, say ¼ of available student papers assessed according to a rubric, may be used to assess learning outcomes for the new hybrid Core. A census of all student work is not necessary.
 - j. The committee recognizes that different assessment processes and/or tools may be used for the various LEAP intended learning outcomes e.g., we could have one assessment technique for communication and another one for everything else.
 - k. The committee was supportive of empowering colleges, schools and relevant departments to formulate assessment of new hybrid Core components instead of dictating an approach.

The committee discussed and voted upon a number of other outcome proposals. These proposals arose from committee members, comments submitted in the faculty and staff survey or suggestions received

at public forums. These outcomes are listed below with an indication of whether the committee was unsupportive or split in its opinion:

Family issues – including prenatal care, child rearing, family types and family issues was not supported by the committee.

Personal finance (split opinion)

Fitness/health/nutrition (split opinion)

The committee also offers the following comments and recommendations related to specific courses in the current Core curriculum:

1. In addition to the currently offered courses in the traditional disciplines of science to fulfill the natural science requirement, offer an interdisciplinary more general science course for non majors that teaches the scientific method through active inquiry and focuses on how different scientific disciplines approach related problems (, e.g., Integrative Studies 240 Scientific Thinking and Doing, and Interdisciplinary Approach (various topics) at

Appendix 1

UAF's 2008 09 Baccalaureate Core Curriculum

Through the baccalaureate core experience, every UAF student is expected to achieve:

Multidimensional competency in written and oral English — including comprehension of complex materials and creation of clearly organized presentations of soundly reasoned thought in both oral and written form;

A solid grasp of quantitative reasoning and mathematical application;

An intellectual comfort with the sciences — including the scientific method, frameworks that have nurtured scientific thought, traditions of human inquiry and the impact of technology on the world's ecosystems;

An appreciation of cultural diversity and its implications for individual and group values, aesthetics and social and political institutions;

An understanding of global economic interdependence, sense of historical consciousness and a more critical comprehension of literature and the arts;

A better understanding of one's own values, other value systems and relationships between value systems and life choices.

The AACU Essential Learning Outcomes

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World – through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages and the arts – focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring;

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork and problem solving – practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects and standards of performance;

Personal and Social Responsibility, including civic knowledge and engagement – local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning – anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real world challenges;

Integrative and Applied Learning, including synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies – demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.

Underlining indicates new learning outcomes compared to UAF's current Core curriculum

Appendix 2 Connecting Essential Learning Outcomes with High Impact Practices

Fostering Broad Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural World

Common