Appendix A – 2012-2013 Baccalaureate Core Committee Annual Report

Synthesis Category Review Final Report- 2012-2013
Baccalaureate Core Committee (BCC)

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The BCC spent much of 2012-2013 engaging in the 2012 Synthesis Category Review. Per the Seven-Year Category Review Cycle established by the BCC last year, the Synthesis Categories were in Cycle Year 1 in 2013-2014. The following report summarizes that activity and the decisions made by the BCC.

Review Process (ultimately evolved into two phases)

Phase I

- Units were asked to submit materials for category review via webform to the Office of Academic Program, Assessment, and Accreditation (APAA). Materials included responses to prompts on the webform and syllabi. APAA also worked with Institutional Research (IR) to provide demographic data on each course. The Phase I deadline was at the end of June 2012.

- Stefani Dawn, Assistant Director of Assessment, collected and collated information over the summer and created a secure SharePoint site where BCC members could access materials. She also actively reached out to units with courses that had Incomplete Files. Some of those units complied with sending information prior to fall term, and some did not.*

- Courses with Complete Files (e.g. files that had demographic info, a completed webform, and at least one syllabus) were divided equally and assigned to individual BCC members for review.

- Courses not offered in 2011-2012 were exempt from a recertification decision and were flagged for an Extensive Follow-up in Cycle Year 3 (2014-15).

- Review rubrics were created where BCC members could comment on how well the course was meeting category criteria and, more importantly, whether there was evidence of student learning relative to the BC Category Learning Outcomes (CLO) in the course.

- Courses in Phase I were either recertified or flagged for follow-up as we needed additional information to make our decision (These are labeled “Deficient Phase I” courses.**
The BCC held debrief sessions where our members could gather and offer feedback from the process. We also used this time to define parameters for a web questionnaire that we could use to secure additional information from those courses whose initial file was lacking in detail and specifics.

**Phase II**

- Units with recertified courses were notified in February 2013.
- *Synthesis courses with Incomplete Files (missing webform, syllabus, or both) at the time of our initial review in fall 2012 were shifted to Phase II. In February 2013, we sent the offering units a request for the missing information, with a notice that non-compliance would mean decertification. They were given an April 1 deadline.*
- **Units with Complete Files that were flagged as Deficient Phase I were notified in February 2013. They were provided with a link to a web survey where we requested additional information about the curriculum, student learning in the course relative to the Bacc Core CLO’s, and an assessment plan for the future. The deadline for submission of this additional information was April 15, and they, too, received notice that non-compliance would mean decertification.**
- The BCC reviewed these Phase II courses (the Deficient Phase I files and the Incomplete Files) in late April, early May. All were recertified, but some were flagged for an extensive follow-up in Cycle Year 3 (2014-15). This list will reside in the Office of Academic Programs, Assessment, and Accreditation and will be included in the BCC annual report.

### Synthesis Category Review Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review Classification</th>
<th>Number of Courses</th>
<th>Extensive Follow-Up in Cycle Year 3 (2014-15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not offered in 2011-2012</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete File Courses (Phase II)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11 (out of the initial 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recertified Courses (Phase I)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recertified Courses (Exemplary – Phase I)</td>
<td>6 (ART 367, PHL 444H, PS 476, SOC 454, 456, 480)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficient Phase I Courses (Phase I and II)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 (out of the initial 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses whose units requested their removal from the Bacc Core (either because the course had been discontinued or it no longer fit the Category)</td>
<td>6 (AREC 461, ECON 340, H 320, HDFS 471, PHAR 312, WS 450)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Institutional Research Summary Data of Note (Provided by IR and APAA)

- Approximately 4,000 students per term in Synthesis courses
- Courses taught by Asst/Assoc/Prof: 27%
Courses taught by Instructor/Senior Instructor: 45%
Courses taught by GTA/No Rank: 24%
Courses are at 83%-91% of their max capacity

**BCC Conclusions about the Process and Synthesis Courses**

- There was full acknowledgement by the BCC of the accelerated nature of the pilot process and admiration for units/faculty with Synthesis courses that followed through in this first go around with the “new” Category Review.

- The BCC is hopeful that the outcomes and assessment process will become more institutionalized as we make our way through the Category Review cycle. For example, a baseline expectation is that Bacc Core Category Learning Outcomes be listed distinctly and clearly identified on a Bacc Core course syllabus. *A third of the syllabi submitted for the Synthesis Category Review were missing the Bacc Core Category Learning Outcomes*. It will take time to get everyone on board. Category Review helps with those compliance numbers.

- Some discrepancies between what we thought we were asking for and what units thought we were asking for pointed towards a need for changes in how we ask for information on our webform. (*See Action Items Below*)

- The idea of thinking about their Bacc Core classes from Bacc Core Programmatic level (e.g., as part of a Bacc Core category with responsibility to that category), as opposed to simply a part of the unit curriculum, was foreign to many units. For example, it was evident that some faculty, while very comfortable with content, were struggling with implementing an intentional pedagogical approach to help students cultivate a competency in synthesizing complex information by utilizing the content of the course. Consultation and conversation often helped reframe and re-contextualize the way the unit approached their course, and it was vital to have Stefani Dawn and Vicki Tolar Burton at our disposal to conduct professional development workshops and be available for individual consultations to units and faculty teaching Bacc Core courses. (*See Action Items Below*)

- Of course, achievement of all Bacc Core Category Learning Outcomes varied across courses, but the BCC particularly noted variance in the presence of assignments (or lack thereof) that address Outcome #3 in both categories, and it is the outcome that proved to be the most challenging for units to integrate into their courses. This is the outcome in both categories that addresses writing:
  - Articulate in writing a critical perspective on contemporary global issues using evidence as support. (CGI)
  - Articulate in writing a critical perspective on issues involving science, technology, and society using evidence as support. (STS)

This noticeable variance corresponded with concerns articulated in the Review of Writing Report produced by the 2011-2012 Ad Hoc Committee convened by the Executive Committee. (*See Action Items Below and see [http://oregonstate.edu/senate/committees/bcc/BCCWritingReport.pdf](http://oregonstate.edu/senate/committees/bcc/BCCWritingReport.pdf) for the Review of Writing Report*)
~ BCC Action Items

- Stefani Dawn has already helped us to implement these changes in the reporting tool that will be used in the 2013 review. We used this in Phase II for some Incomplete File courses (i.e., those from units who had not submitted an initial webform).

- The BCC should continue to co-sponsor Category Review workshops with the Office of Academic Programs, Assessment, and Accreditation and connect individuals with that office for assessment consultations.

- While there are rationale statements for each individual Bacc Core category, Category Review brought to light the need for broader rationale statements to explain the purpose behind having Skills, Perspectives and Synthesis sections of the Bacc Core (DPD and WIC are stand alone and, thus, are defined by their category rationale). For example, a rationale for Synthesis might define and explore how courses in the category will help students to cultivate skills in synthesizing information gleaned through multiple disciplinary lenses.

- The BCC should request that the Center for Teaching and Learning offer a faculty learning community on pedagogies for teaching synthesis processes and approaches as well as critical thinking and using multiple disciplinary approaches to examine problems.

- The disparity in attentiveness of Outcome #3 and the challenges units face with integrating an appropriate level of writing in their Synthesis classes (as uncovered by this Category Review Process and the Review of Writing Report) prompted the BCC to work with the Writing Advisory Board to draft the explanatory statements (see the example below), which will be added to the official Bacc Core Category Outcomes, Criteria, and Rationale document in the near future (see http://oregonstate.edu/main/baccalaureate-core/learning-outcomes-criteria-rationale):

Evidence based writing is an essential component of the Synthesis categories and the exclusively “upper-division” general education academic experience they offer to students. The Baccalaureate Core Committee and the Writing Advisory Board recommend the following to Schools/Departments/Faculty offering Synthesis courses to help students achieve the writing–related criteria and outcome in Contemporary Global Issues/Science, Technology, and Society:

- A course capacity of 70 students. If enrollment is over 70, then break-outs (recitations) or GTAs should be used to ensure that students receive adequate and timely writing feedback.

- At a minimum, the course should include a single out-of-class written assignment with a minimum of 1250 words, plus references that develops and sustains a critical perspective using evidence as support and a multidisciplinary approach. The assignment should include at least two outside sources.

Communication Plan and Additional Items of Interest

- Phase II decisions communicated to units at the end of the academic year.
• This report will be distributed to all faculty, department/school heads, and Associate Deans with affiliation to courses in Synthesis.

• It should also be noted that the Office of APAA facilitated a volunteer pilot in spring 2012 where units with Synthesis courses could gather indirect assessment via the Electronic Student Evaluation of Teaching (ESET) to gain insight on student perception of Bacc Core CLO achievement. The BCC did not use this data as part of Category Review, but specific results were shared with participating units. Data of interest to complement the findings in our report:
  o 42% of the courses that were taught in the Spring 2012 participated in the volunteer pilot
  o 80% of the responding students indicated they were taking the course to satisfy a Bacc Core requirement (n=497)
  o When asked to rate their ability to ...(outcome): median was a 4 out of 6 (very poor, poor, fair, good, very good, excellent).