INPUT TO EC REGARDING REVIEW OF THE BACCALAUREATE CORE
DRAFT

• Significant international and technological changes have taken place in the past 20 years. Their significance for what a beneficial baccalaureate core experience should be for the next 20 years should be carefully considered. Perhaps some current core areas are no longer essential or as essential as areas not in the current core.

• Consideration of a reduction in the total number of required baccalaureate credits may be timely: OSU has made an effort over that last 10-15 years to make graduation under virtually all majors possible with a 180-credit hour program (from 192-credit hours or more) but has left the baccalaureate core at 48 hours with an additional 3-credit WIC requirement. So, de facto, the baccalaureate core has become a larger part of each student’s degree program. This has created a “credit hour crunch” for a number of colleges (Engineering, Business, and Forestry were mentioned in particular).

• In any review or revision of the core, the focus should not be on the number of credit hours per course but on the academic content of the course and the extent to which the course coverage advances the goals of the baccalaureate core program for our students.

• The baccalaureate core should be structured in such a way as to maximize flexibility for students in satisfying core requirements. For example:
  o Consideration should be given to double counting baccalaureate core courses that are approved for more than one area of the core. (Such a change will put pressure on the BCC to approve more courses for more areas. The BCC will need to be firm in only approving courses for multiple areas when the content fully merits that multiplicity.)
  o Consideration should be given to merging Western Culture and Cultural Diversity which are very similar in many respects. (This could result in a decrease in required credits in the core and/or more flexibility of course offerings and availability.)

• Revisions should be guided by the academic goals of the baccalaureate core and should take no account of gains or losses of student credit hours among units across the campus.

• Writing across the curriculum is a stated university goal (true?) of an OSU undergraduate education. The baccalaureate core program should include means to actually make this happen as concerns baccalaureate core requirements. (If OSU simply can’t afford to do this in some reasonable fashion, we should be honest and drop the claim that we do.)

• 4-credit or 5-credit baccalaureate core courses with an enhanced writing component emphasizing synthesizing ideas would be an effective learning experience for our students.

• Most departments cannot cover all the material they would like their students to learn in a 180-credit degree program. Departments do not
want baccalaureate core requirements to further restrict their programs.

- Consider how baccalaureate core goals (e.g., communication skills, critical thinking skills, etc.) tie in with or reinforce departmental degree program outcomes. Exposure to other disciplines is good, but a challenge with professional accredited programs. (In professional programs there are (can be) serious conflicts between the need for students to get more content-based curriculum and exposure to a baccalaureate core experience. Some departments are trying to find ways to better use the core to meet some of their content needs, and that is not always successful.)

- Departments who free up credits in their degree programs to increase elective choices for their majors don’t want those choices made by de facto increases in the baccalaureate core.

- Despite the last two items, departments may support some increase in the number of credits a student must take to really satisfy the baccalaureate core requirements if those extra credits were devoted to developing better writing (communication) skills in the context of the course, a la the History proposal.

- Decide at the beginning of the review process how many of the 180 credits needed to obtain an OSU degree will be dedicated to the baccalaureate core.

- To assist in a successful review, make an effort to determine how the membership of the 1988 Schaumberg Commission and the university environment at the time made it possible to institute the current core, which was a sweeping change from its predecessor. Appoint members to the new review group that have similar attributes and influences across campus.

- Provide a structure for a managed conversation. The issues on the table will be significant and without a shared plan that is understood by the university community about how the discussion will evolve the discussion could move quickly to gridlock.

- Make sure we have a basis for starting a discussion: Is there a shared vision among the faculty today about what the baccalaureate core is and/or what it should be? It seems likely that there is not such a shared vision, except perhaps to say that some kind of baccalaureate core is a good idea.

- If it turns out that the current baccalaureate core is still a good one for OSU, there are ways to tweak the existing model to provide more flexibility for students and major degree programs.