Curriculum Council Comments on the Final Report of the Baccalaureate Core Ad Hoc Review Committee

The Curriculum Council has voted to endorse the Final Report of the Baccalaureate Core Ad Hoc Review Committee, with the following comments and/or reservations. We would like our comments to be read into the minutes at the Faculty Senate meeting when the report is discussed.

We approve of most of what is contained in the report, and agree with many of the specific recommendations, such as adoption of Learning Goals for Graduates, a First Year Experience, and more Experiential Learning. However, we are concerned that the report does not address several issues of pressing concern for the Bacc Core structure and implementation. These concerns, touched on in the report or discussed at least since 2002, include:

a) the number of credits required for Bacc Core requirements;

b) possible overlap of Bacc Core categories;

c) differences in how Bacc Core requirements are applied among different colleges and programs (e.g., whether “double dipping” or “double counting” are allowed);

d) restriction of some categories of Bacc Core courses to lower-division courses, requiring many students to take less challenging classes than appropriate;

e) lack of cohesiveness or integration among Bacc Core courses (the “smorgasbord” approach);

f) lack of coordinated, ongoing assessment of effectiveness of Bacc Core classes;

g) lack of specific learning outcomes for each category, uniformly applied for all courses within each category.

When the Bacc Core was first established, educators used a content-driven approach; as a result, the Bacc Core largely consists of distribution requirements, which, it was hoped, would deliver the desired content. Now, higher education has shifted to a model based on measurable outcomes, allowing assessment. The system of “Learning Outcomes” currently followed by OSU and required by current accreditation standards reflects this change. The Curriculum Council has been instrumental in helping to apply the “Learning Outcomes” model to individual classes and programs, but the change has not yet affected the Bacc Core.

It is important to establish measurable learning outcomes for the categories within the Bacc Core, and to require that all courses that are certified as Bacc Core classes have these explicit learning outcomes, along with whatever other specific learning outcomes are appropriate for the particular class. These actions would address several outstanding problems with the Bacc Core. Requiring students to achieve the Bacc Core outcomes, rather than take a specified number of classes, would obviate problems with “double counting”, credit requirements, and course level. This would also allow some departments to provide some of the Bacc Core Learning Outcomes within their own majors, if desired (although not the breadth-type outcomes). Students would be able to take upper-division classes to fulfill their Bacc Core, as
long as the classes they chose provide the required Learning Outcomes. Individual students, departments, or programs would be able to put together integrated series of classes to achieve their Bacc Core Learning Outcomes. In addition, adding the ability to do assessment fits very well into OSU’s accreditation process.

We note that the Learning Goals for Graduates are not the same as Learning Outcomes (Learning Outcomes refer to measurable results). Whatever Bacc Core oversight structure is established must have as an immediate task to establish and implement specific, required Learning Outcomes for each Bacc Core category.

Reviewing and revising the Bacc Core should be a priority, and should be addressed before new initiatives, such as the Learning Goals for Graduates, First Year Experience, and Experiential Learning, are put into place. Two important shortcomings we see with the Ad Hoc Committee’s report are: first, it is not clear who is responsible for reviewing and revising the Bacc Core; and second, there is no timeline for this process. We would like to suggest, as an addendum to the report, that such a timeline be established. The Curriculum Council, as the group within OSU’s faculty senate most immediately concerned with, and responsible for, curriculum, is looking forward to seeing the results the Bacc Core revision, and offers to assist in this process in whatever way we can.