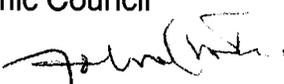


May 4, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Executive Committee of Academic Council

FROM: Folu Ogundimu, Chairperson 
University Committee on Academic Policy

RE: Review of Undergraduate Reports:
Quantitative Literacy, Writing, and Integrative Studies

After discussions with each chairperson of the task force or planning committee, the University Committee on Academic Policy (UCAP) provides the observations outlined below. The first section of this report serves as a preamble, the second addresses overarching issues that might be addressed by the Working Group on the Improvement of Undergraduate Education, and the third contains commentary by the Committee about specific matters that are germane to the task areas.

Preamble

UCAP acknowledges that all three areas addressed by the task forces – Quantitative Literacy, Writing, Integrative Studies – are part of the bigger picture of improving undergraduate education at MSU and they should be looked at as a whole, recognizing that each might require different actions because they are at different stages of development. Furthermore, UCAP recommends that there should be leadership for seeing the initiatives through as they move along. We believe that satisfactorily addressing the issues and recommendations that follow will require shifts in a) the ways in which we express the purpose and value of general education, b) the sense that the development and delivery of high-quality general education is a campus-wide responsibility, and c) the commitment to and support of faculty and units to engage in general education.

Overarching issues:

- Assessment for the purpose of documenting progress of individuals and of college programs seems to be a challenge across all of general education. What are the goals? How do we know if they are met? Where do we need baseline or “entry” data? Exit data? Colleges should be charged with the responsibility of

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upholding standards and monitoring outcomes for QL and Tier II Writing. To make evaluation and compliance possible, Colleges should be required to provide examples of discipline based outcome measures. As part of their monitoring and assessment function Colleges must look at their external stakeholders, as appropriate, and know what they want.

- To what extent do the recommendations make coordination of all general education more important? Is there a need for some sort of advisory committee (advisory to UCAP and UCC) to oversee general education and the coordination of its outcomes? What is the role of the advisory committee (or oversight committee) to the "Dean of Undergraduate Studies"? Where will support be obtained for the units responsible for delivering the required courses?
- Many of the recommendations and potential changes have implications for the hiring and training of TAs and recruitment and retention of graduate students. These implications should be specifically attended to in discussions about changes in the undergraduate program.
- Professional Development will be vital in making the needed changes in general education. Quantitative Literacy cannot go forward without support for faculty to integrate QL into courses; Tier II Writing cannot improve without support, and additional support for the Writing Center will be required. Integrative Studies faculty need to have a common understanding about the purposes of Integrative Studies.
- As for the Integrative Studies and Writing Programs, much of the success in development and implementation of a QL Program will depend on adequate funding. The University must make commitment to such funding before plans advance much further.
- Special attention needs to be given to issues regarding transfer students and transfer credits. The quantitative literacy and writing requirements will most certainly change transfer expectations. Whether or not the expected changes create barriers for students wishing to transfer must be examined and the implications of such barriers carefully weighed.

Commentary

Writing Task Force

The idea that writing needs to be taught, rather than merely assigned, in both Tier I and Tier II courses is extremely important. Regardless of where the problem lies – at the elementary, secondary, university, or perhaps at all levels of schooling – too many students graduate from college without having mastered the basics of accurate

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communication in English. This inability to write correctly and effectively hurts students in their post-graduate studies and in their careers, thus reflecting negatively on the University.

With the expansion of the Writing and Rhetoric requirement to 6 credits, it is important to include skills in other communication areas, including those containing elements of oral presentation and principles of rhetoric, such as argument structures. There is some concern that expanded credit hours may create hardships for graduation in some programs. Additional concern was expressed about the emphasis on web-based authoring (Overall Recommendation #6) especially if this were addressed at the Tier I level. If we devote time in Tier-I to the construction of hyper-linked documents, might the development of some basic organizational skills in writing suffer?

Quantitative Literacy

In developing the QL Program, it is important to proceed in a way that will ensure a broad base of faculty support. The key to making this work is (a) good foundation courses that vary perhaps by college and (b) support for faculty teaching in the Tier II category.

Like Writing, MSU needs to provide Tier II instructors more support in the form of examples and strategies for implementation.

Integrative Studies

- There is some concern that the current centers do not have a unified vision of Integrative Studies. These concerns need to be worked out before restructuring issues can be discussed.

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