Foundations Curriculum Work Group Report

Provost Mitchelson reviewed the charge for the workgroup as indicated below:

**Recommendations assigned to work group:** (AP4)
Evaluate and, where appropriate, revise the Foundations Curriculum for effectiveness and efficiency.
Fundamental questions are: What should it do?; is it doing what is intended?; and is it delivered in a cost-effective manner?

**Work group Leader:** Sylvia Brown  
**Coordinating Liaison:** Ron Mitchelson

**Work group Members:** Evelyn Brown, Robert Campbell, Kristen Cuthrell, Cynthia Deale, Jayne Geissler, Kate Lamere, Marianne Montgomery, Jeff Popke, Paul Schwager, Kindal Shores, John Stiller, Becky Whitley, and Ying Zhou

**What should the foundations curriculum do?**
The work group discussed SACS accreditation requirements for general education curriculum.
Core Requirement 2.7.3:

“In each undergraduate degree program, the institution requires the successful completion of a general education component at the collegiate level that (1) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. These credit hours are to be drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification if it allows for fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit of general education courses.”

The work group affirms the need to distinguish between **general education** (defined and mandated by SACS as specified above) and the **foundations curriculum** (ECU curriculum incorporating general education and additional courses in composition, health, and exercise).
The broader foundations curriculum is defined in the ECU Catalog: “Its goal is to provide students with the fundamental knowledge and abilities essential to their living worthwhile lives both private and public. The foundations curriculum is based on the faculty’s belief that the best way to prepare students for living worthwhile lives is to provide them with a solid foundation in the core disciplines in the liberal arts (the humanities, arts, natural sciences and social sciences) in conjunction with a multidisciplinary education in the specific areas of health promotion and physical activity and mastery of writing and mathematics competencies.”
The work group reviewed ECU’s current foundations curriculum. ECU requires 42 semester hours (SH) of foundations curriculum courses. Of the 42 SH, 33 SH are considered general education and 9 additional SH are also part of ECU’s foundations curriculum. ECU has 536 courses designated as foundations courses in the catalog as of March 2015 (Table 1).

Table 1. Current ECU Foundations Curriculum (FC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Required Number of Semester Hours</th>
<th>Number of Courses Designated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Education (SACS):</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities/Fine Arts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>171/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science</td>
<td>8 (including 1 lab)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional ECU FC:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Composition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Kinesiology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total ECU FC</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also note: There are 97 courses designated as domestic diversity or global diversity and 300 Writing Intensive Courses (with 99 additional “WI by section” courses). The Writing Intensive (6 SH) and Diversity (6 SH) requirements are NOT considered FC requirements, but were included in the work group’s discussion of the impact of course requirements on students.

**Is the foundations curriculum delivered in a cost-effective manner?**
The work group noted the challenge of determining cost-effectiveness without specific data on instructional costs and decided to focus on best practices/peer institutions, institutional assessment, and advising, retention, and time to graduation.

1. **Best Practices and Peer Institutions.** The work group reviewed the requirements of schools in the UNC system and the requirements of ECU’s 18 peer institutions. Group members reported on the number of SH required and the course categories for the 33 schools reviewed. UNC System SH ranged, on average, from 41 to 44 SH; the peer institution average was 36 to 39 SH. Categories varied among schools reviewed, but basic components included arts and humanities; social sciences, communications (English and foreign language); mathematics, and the natural sciences. Several schools included study in global culture and diversity, wellness classes, writing intensive course(s), and/or a first year seminar. The work group was impressed with the process and results of recent foundations curriculum revisions at the University of South Carolina (Columbia) and at Virginia Tech.
In addition, the work group requested a customized report from the Education Advisory Board (EAB) about how large, public institutions structure foundations/general education curricula to address current trends in general education requirements and to determine how institutions measure the success of these efforts to improve student success and financial efficiency.

**EAB Research Questions:**

**Overview**
- How many SH do contact institutions require for general education? What is the mean number of SH?
- How do contact institutions divide these SH between disciplines or competencies? What disciplines and competencies are most common?
- Are courses outside of the typical arts and sciences (e.g., diversity, technology, freshman seminar, personal financial management) required in the foundations curricula?
- Within disciplines and competencies, how many courses can students select from to fulfill the requirements?

**Structure**
- What office has purview over general education curricula at contact institutions?
- How often do contacts review and revise general education curriculum? When was the last significant change to the foundations curriculum and what is the process for implementing amendments?
- At contact institutions can a student change majors and easily apply earned general education courses or do some majors require major-specific general education courses?
- For transfer students, how do contact institutions determine which previously earned credits to apply to general education requirements?
- Do contact institutions have individual articulation agreements with community colleges? Are these system-wide articulation agreements or with individual community college?

**Assessment**
- What trends do contacts anticipate in general education? What changes to their model do they anticipate in the future?
- Do contact institutions have a competency based general education model? If so, how do contacts measure competency? How do contacts determine which competencies to require?
- How do contacts assess students on general education content? Is assessment consistent across the various disciplines within the general education curriculum?
- When did contact institutions last evaluate the general education curriculum? Do contacts anticipate or plan any changes to the general education curriculum?
• What is the budgetary impact of changing the curriculum? How do contacts evaluate this, and how does it affect decision-making processes?

Seven institutions were profiled in the EAB report. The profiled universities required an average of 42 SH in five disciplines with a range of 30 to 54 SH. Three profiled institutions have three general education disciplinary categories. The maximum number of disciplinary categories required was seven. It was common for institutions to allow some credits to fulfill more than one requirement (double counting). The five common general education disciplines and subsets were:

• Arts and humanities (history, art, literature, and philosophy);
• Scientific reasoning (natural sciences);
• Quantitative reasoning (math);
• Cultural experience (global experience, diversity, foreign language); and
• Skills for the 21st century (communication, writing, technology, and personal finance).

Most institutions had a general education committee dedicated to the review of current and proposed general education courses and advise on how these courses meet student learning outcomes, but often do not test how well the courses accomplish these goals.

2. Institutional Assessment. Dr. Ying Zhou, Associate Provost of Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research, presented information on learning outcomes related to the foundations curriculum and suggestions for a sustainable assessment process. She reviewed the SACS Standards, LEAP (Liberal Education & America’s Promise) Essential Learning Outcomes, and VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) Initiative. Dr. Zhou’s suggestions for consideration included:

• Identify broad learning goals for the general education curriculum;
• Identify specific competencies and require further definition of the competencies and learning outcomes;
• Require alignment of courses (or category of courses) to identified foundations competencies/learning outcomes;
• Require a systematic assessment plan to improve the overall program and student learning; and
• Connect course development/assessment with faculty development.

3. Advising/Retention/Time to Degree. Dr. Jayne Geissler, Executive Director of Retention Services and Undergraduate Studies, presented information to the workgroup on foundations curriculum advising challenges. Among the challenges and areas for discussion are:

• 10 SH of humanities and fine arts are required when there are few 1 SH hour courses; therefore, most students graduate with 10+ SH in this category.
• We currently require 8 SH of natural science (including 1 lab). Is this the best use of critically needed lab space? Students in science related majors often have difficulty staying “on track” in their major due to lack of space. Reducing the natural science requirement from 8 to 7 SH might better utilize our lab resources.
• Why do we require four social sciences from three distinct areas? Would three courses be adequate?
• Are Health and Exercise needed?
• Could foreign language be included in the foundations curriculum requirements?
• Can students not use a required course that has an FC attribute for both major and FC requirement (double count)?

Dr. Geissler also described the new CAA policy for transfer students entering the university with an AA and AS regarding FC requirements. AA and AS students will enter ECU with no additional foundations courses required, unless additional courses are specified by their majors. Because of the articulation agreements with the NC community colleges, native students have different FC requirements than transfer AA/AS students (Table 2).

**Table 2: Comparison of AA and AS to ECU Foundations Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>ECU SH</th>
<th>FC</th>
<th>AA SH Requirements</th>
<th>AS SH Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Composition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities &amp; Fine Arts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Required for graduation from the university:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>ECU SH</th>
<th>FC</th>
<th>AA SH</th>
<th>AS SH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34-35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specified foundations courses represent another major challenge that limits student flexibility to change majors without impacting time to degree. Specified foundations courses are designated by programs as required of their majors within their 42 hours of Foundations. For example, across ECU’s professional majors, an average of 5.33 hours of the 12 hours of social science courses are specified by the major, not chosen by the student. In 7 majors all 12 hours of social science are specified and in 18 majors 9 of the 12 hours are specified. This makes it difficult for students to change majors and for transfer students to declare and complete these majors in a timely fashion.

**Recommended Revisions of ECU’s Foundations Curriculum**
The Foundations Curriculum Workgroup recommends that revision of the foundations curriculum occur in several stages: Stage 1 = Adjustments (short-term) and Stage 2 = Reconceptualization (long-term).

**Stage 1: Adjustments (Timeline—1 year)**

1. Adjust the current FC curriculum as follows:
Reduce required SH of general education:

- Humanities and Fine Arts from 10 SH to 9 SH
- Natural Science from 8 SH to 7 SH (retaining the requirement of one laboratory hour); Units should review 4 SH Natural Science foundations courses and reduce to 3 SH when feasible.
- Social Science from 12 SH to 9 SH from at least two different areas
- Require a 3 SH “general education elective” from one of the general education categories (humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences or natural science/mathematics).

Based on the above recommendations, the SACS general education SH would be reduced from 33 SH to 31 SH and total foundations curriculum would be reduced from 42 SH to 40 SH (Table 3).

### Table 3: Comparison of Current and Proposed Foundations Curriculum Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Current FC Semester Hours</th>
<th>Proposed FC Semester Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Education (SACS):</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities/Fine Arts</td>
<td>10 (at least one HU/one FA)</td>
<td>9 (at least one HU/one FA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>12 (three different areas)</td>
<td>9 (two different areas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Science</td>
<td>8 (at least one lab)</td>
<td>7 (at least one lab)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any of the above</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional ECU FC:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Composition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness Literacy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Health/Kinesiology)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total ECU FC</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Allow a maximum of 3 SH FC to count for a major requirement (e.g., a 3 SH ART FC could double count for a major and FC requirement, though the student would earn just 3 SH).

3. Designate additional courses in wellness literacy so that is not limited to KINE and EXSS prefixes.

4. Foundations Curriculum & Instructional Effectiveness Committee (FCIE) should develop a process for expedited removal of foundations designation for all courses at the 4000-level or above.

5. Each college/degree program should audit and when possible eliminate specified foundations requirements to ensure students have flexibility in the selection of foundations courses.
6. The University Curriculum Committee (UCC) should develop a process for expedited removal of specified foundations courses for degree programs.

7. Formation of Stage 2 Committee.

The work group recommends that the above recommendations be assigned a priority status for implementation in **Fall 2016** (Table 4).

**Table 4: Stage 1 - Process and Responsible Parties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment of FC SH (Table 3) from 42 to 40</td>
<td>FCIE committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double-counting of 3 SH for FC and Major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expedited removal of 4000+ FC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit of specified FC courses for majors</td>
<td>Appoint a project leader to work with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broaden Wellness Literacy</td>
<td>departments/programs/FCIE/UCC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stage 2: Reconceptualization (Timeline—3 to 5 years)**

Students and faculty should be able to recognize and understand the Foundations curriculum as a coherent exploration of the various tools different disciplines use to create knowledge and understand the world. The work group recommends reconceptualization of the Foundations curriculum by faculty, to include the following:

1. Base the foundations curriculum on learning outcomes and organize it by knowledge areas rather than strict disciplinary boundaries (i.e. “aesthetic appreciation” might be a category or sub-category of humanities and fine arts). Work groups from each of the disciplines (natural science, social science, and humanities & fine arts) should identify learning outcomes, category labels, and sub-categories if appropriate. The work groups could also consider how learning outcomes will align with UNC system emphases and ECU’s mission. The work groups would report back to the FCIE and work closely with IPAR. The work groups should also ensure wide faculty input in development of the curriculum and facilitate department and college-level discussions.

2. Review the current courses classified as foundations courses to determine if they contribute to the learning outcomes established in #1.

3. Develop an assessment plan for the foundations curriculum (see Appendix A for initial recommendations).

4. Ensure alignment between the objectives of curriculum, the courses designated, the way the content is taught, and how the content is measured.
Conclusion
The recommendations outlined in this report meet requirements for university accreditation, reflect a contemporary foundations curriculum that will meet the learning needs of students, focus on measurable learning outcomes, and demonstrate efficiency with respect to time to degree.

Appendix A: Recommendations for Assessment of the Foundations Curriculum

ECU’s culture of learning outcomes assessment is characterized as course-embedded, faculty-led, and improvement-focused. As with other program-level assessment activities, foundations curriculum assessment focuses on the overall effectiveness of the curriculum and the competency of students. It is not an evaluation of individual students or faculty members. It is recommended that the foundations curriculum assessment be conducted on a five-year cycle, focusing on one or two foundations categories per year. It is recommended that a new assessment approach be designed and implemented through a partnership between a faculty committee designated by the Faculty Senate, and the Office of Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research (IPAR).

Role of the Designated Faculty Committee (the Committee)
• In consultation with faculty from related disciplines, develop learning goals for the foundations curriculum as well as distinctive, common learning outcomes for each category of courses.
• Develop a cyclical system for assessing all categories of foundations courses.
• Lead efforts in reviewing courses for alignment with common learning outcomes for each foundations category.
• Lead efforts in assessing students’ achievement of common learning outcomes through a systematic review of student work or work samples.
• Interpret assessment results, identify areas for improvement, and make recommendations on actions to improve courses/the curriculum.

Role of IPAR
• Research and promote best practices for general education assessment.
• Support a faculty-led, institution-level assessment approach to the foundations curriculum.
• Support the collection of assessment data (e.g., student work samples, syllabi, student/faculty surveys, etc.).
• Analyze assessment data and summarize results.
• Provide administrative support to the Committee as needed.

Role of Faculty who Teach/Coordinate/Oversee Foundations Courses
• Actively participate in the development of foundations learning goals and outcomes.
• Integrate common learning outcomes in approved foundations courses. Within the context of the course:
  o Communicate learning outcomes to students
  o Offer sufficient learning opportunities to introduce and/or reinforce common learning outcomes
  o Design effective assignments to assess common learning outcomes.
• Participate in the assessment of the foundations curriculum by providing student work samples (when requested) or by serving as a reviewer.
• Use assessment results to improve student learning and solicit feedback.

Recommended Implementation Plan:

1. Develop learning goals of the Foundations Curriculum and communicate to faculty and students. The Foundations Curriculum should be presented as one coherent learning experience that contributes to major areas of student learning, such as critical and creative thinking, effective communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, collaborative and engaged global citizens, life-long learning skills, etc.

2. Develop common learning outcomes for each of the categories in the Foundations Curriculum. Each category of courses has its common learning outcomes that are distinctive from other categories and aligned with one or more learning goals of the
Foundations Curriculum. No category is expected to address all learning goals of the Foundations Curriculum.

3. Incorporate common learning outcomes in approved courses. Common learning outcomes apply to all courses in the same category regardless of the discipline. Approved courses are required to emphasize these outcomes by offering sufficient learning opportunities.

4. Assess common learning outcomes and collect data. For a successful course-embedded assessment, faculty need to intentionally design assignments or other assessment tools that closely align with the common learning outcomes. This enables faculty to monitor students’ performance and identify areas for improvement or reinforcement. When a Foundations category is under assessment, faculty submit samples of student work from ONE assignment that best demonstrates student achievement of the common learning outcomes. Faculty may also be asked to provide course syllabi.

5. Analyze and report assessment data. The Committee and its working groups develop review criteria and standards, and conduct the review. IPAR provides assistance with data collection, analysis, and reporting. Assessment results are interpreted by faculty and used to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning. Results are shared with participating faculty and chairs, the Committee, the Faculty Senate, and the Academic Council. Results are also used for the University’s reaffirmation of accreditation and/or requests from General Administration. No individual instructor or student results are made public.

6. Improve courses and/or the Curriculum. Based on assessment results, the Committee makes recommendations on actions to improve student learning and/or the Curriculum.