

The
North Carolina
Agricultural and Technical
State University
Greensboro, North Carolina 27411

**A Review of the Present: Toward a Design
for a Twenty-First Century Program
of General Education**

by

Dr. Harold L. Aubrey
Associate Professor and Director
Office of Institutional Assessment
Norfolk State University

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FOREWORD

FOREWORD

The author of this report accepted an invitation to review the existing General Education Program at North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University. A visit was completed on October 8-9, 1998. This report is based on an analysis of program strengths and weaknesses.

Subsequently, recommendations are provided to address weaknesses that were cited.

Curriculum revision is a complex task for any institution. However, such tasks must be pursued and accomplished in order to maintain institutional relevance and vitality. Therefore, the author will be available without additional compensation for continued consultation as the institution proceeds toward the development of an improved program of general education.

Dr. Harold L. Aubrey
Norfolk State University

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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There are many "schools of thought" which constitute current thinking concerning the scope and content of an ideal general education program. Contrary to popular belief, there are no "ideal general education programs." However, there are a few guiding principles concerning general education curricula in which some consensus does exist. During more recent experiences, relative to the on-going national debate over the scope and content of general education curricula, a few significant points have emerged. Those points are as follows:

1. An institution's general education curriculum must be comprised of groups of courses centered around a clear and focused set of program goals and objectives.
2. An institution's general education program must provide undergraduate matriculants with a solid foundation for progression toward the attainment of a baccalaureate degree.
3. An institution's faculty must be guided by common agreements concerning the general education program's purpose, scope, courses, content, instruction, and the evaluation of matriculant achievement.
4. An institution must have a uniform methodology for measuring the academic achievement status of general education program matriculants.
5. An institution must view the general education program as a dynamic enterprise requiring periodic review in order to remain relevancy.

Consequently, general education programs should be tailored to the specific needs of the institution. The entity that surfaces becomes a unique and dynamic curriculum. In particular, the emergent curriculum should provide educational experiences sufficient for continued intellectual growth and development of institutional matriculants.

As a result of an on-site visit with faculty and staff, key information was gleaned. A clear picture of the existing general education program's status evolved. The subsequent analysis is broadly organized into the following categories:

Observation of Existing Strengths, Observation of Existing Weaknesses and Recommendations. Moreover, expanded comments are provided in the succeeding sections of this report.

A. *Observation of Existing Strengths*

1. Significant indicators of the achievement of North Carolina A. & T. matriculants (present and alumni) exist.
2. Current efforts to improve the scope, content and instructional delivery of general education courses are indicative of a common agreement concerning the importance of the general education program.
3. It appears that the Department of Physics has developed a dynamic functional instructional delivery process that could serve as a model for other departments.

4. Common agreements exist among Physics department faculty in the following areas:
 - Course goals and objectives
 - Course syllabus
 - Course content
 - Course examinations
5. North Carolina A. & T. State University has a highly educated and outstanding faculty who offer courses in the existing general education program.
6. Significant evidence of cross discipline cooperation was evident.

B. Observation of Existing Weaknesses

1. Presently, a sound and functional structure for general education program leadership does not exist.
2. The reviewer could not definitively determine the existence of a coherent commonly understood set of general education program goals and/or objectives.
3. The reviewer found little evidence of a comprehensive strategic plan or strategic planning guide for the general education program.
4. Few common agreements concerning course goals and objectives, course syllabi, course content, instructional materials and course examinations exist among faculty in the majority of general education courses.
5. There is evidence of unacceptable degrees of variance in the educational experiences of students who are enrolled in the same course but different sections.
6. A weak or absent connection between course goals and objectives and course examinations is evident.

C. Faculty Perceptions

Substantial dialogue with a wide range of faculty occurred during the on-site visit. In addition, communication continued with some faculty members via e-mail and fax. Unfortunately, far too few faculty appeared to be concerned with the effectiveness of the general education core. The majority of the concerns expressed by the faculty centered on the following issues:

1. More fiscal resources for individual departments.
2. Questions concerning the need to include a particular departmental course as a general education requirement for all students.
3. The need for more departmental faculty.
4. Faculty course loads/class size.

It was clear to the reviewer that many faculty were more concerned about their individual disciplines rather than the broader view of the general education core. As a result, the existing general education core suffers from a level of fragmentation that is detrimental to the educational experiences of North Carolina A.& T. State University matriculants.

D. Matriculant Satisfaction

During the on-site visit, an opportunity was afforded to engage an assessment of matriculants in dialogue concerning their satisfaction with the educational experience at North Carolina A.& T State University. Prior to the

dialogue, the reviewer observed the same class of students actively engaged in a class setting.

These matriculants were observed while participating in a very well taught Political Science class. The interaction between the Professor and matriculants was extremely positive and engaging. Although this was basically a lecture class, significant exchange was observed between the professor and the majority of the matriculants throughout the period.

The dialogue between matriculants and the reviewer revealed a clear sense of satisfaction with their educational experiences. Their comments were quite positive even though some students mentioned a few incidents that were not very positive. Essentially, the "not very positive" comments (i.e., registration, computer services, cafeteria food, etc.) are not unique to North Carolina A.& T. State University. Overall, the matriculants indicated they were generally satisfied with their educational experiences.

E. Recommendations

1. North Carolina A.& T. State University should establish a University-wide General Education Program Council.
2. The faculty and staff of North Carolina A.& T. must arrive at a consensus about the expected role, scope, and purpose of general education relative to educational experiences of North Carolina A.& T. matriculants.
3. North Carolina A.& T. must develop a general education strategic plan with an integrated, systematic assessment component.

4. A restructured general education curriculum consisting of a theme oriented cluster arrangement should be developed.
5. North Carolina A.& T. must close gaps in the continuum of instructional delivery through implementation of the following practices :
 - Develop all course syllabi conditioned upon clearly articulated and measurable goals and objectives.
 - Design instructional content and materials that are consistent with course goals and objectives while reflecting best practices in instruction-learning processes
 - Develop effective matriculant evaluation plans consisting of multiple methods of evaluation reflecting best practices in the evaluation of matriculant learning.
 - Avoid evaluating matriculants on materials that are not consistent with course goals and objectives or course content.
6. Implement instructional delivery practices that minimize variance in the educational experiences of matriculants who are enrolled in the same course but different sections.
7. A formal **North Carolina A.& T. State University “Survey of Faculty Perceptions”** should be designed, pilot tested, and administered to the faculty on an annual basis.
8. A formal **North Carolina A.& T Matriculant Satisfaction Survey** should be developed and administered to particular segments of matriculants on an annual basis.

II. INTRODUCTION

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North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University is a major American institution of higher education. For more than one hundred years, thousands of matriculants have been provided outstanding higher educational experiences. Basically, this fact is evidenced by the many outstanding contributions that thousands of former students have made toward the advancement of the larger society. The magnitude of their contributions have been experienced in local communities in the state of North Carolina, regionally, nationally, and globally.

Today, North Carolina A.& T. has positioned itself and is aggressively pursuing solid status as a world class institution of higher education. A significant element in any institution's pursuit of world class status is a concise mission statement accompanied by a set of supporting institutional goals. The mission statement and supporting institutional goals should be reflective of the institution's ambition and the status that is sought. North Carolina A.&T.'s mission statement and supporting institutional goals are in accord with the aforementioned criteria.

Traditionally, public institutions of higher education have functioned as agencies concerned with instruction, research, and service. More recently, economic development has become another functional expectation. Political and economic concerns have forced all institutions of higher education

to think and operate more "strategically." Significant evidence indicative of North Carolina A. & T.'s strategic thinking and operating mode exists.

According to the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE, 1995):

"Extensive research on American college students reveals several characteristics of what a high-quality undergraduate education experience looks like. These characteristics form twelve attributes of good practice in delivering undergraduate education. Evidence is strong that when colleges and universities are engaged in these good practices, student performance and satisfaction will improve."

The AAHE's review of the research literature indicated that attributes of quality undergraduate education can best be characterized by the following practices:

Quality begins with an organizational culture that values:

1. High expectations.
2. Respect for diverse talents and learning styles.
3. Emphasis on early years of study.

A quality curriculum requires:

4. Coherence in learning.
5. Synthesizing experiences.
6. Ongoing practice of learned skills.
7. Integrating education and experience.

Quality instruction builds in:

8. Active learning.

9. Assessment and prompt feedback.
10. Collaboration.
11. Adequate time on task.
12. Out-of-class contact with faculty.

North Carolina A. & T. State University is in the midst of a national movement in which institutions of higher education are actively engaged in re-thinking the role and purpose of general education. Specifically, the national debate is centered around determining the scope and content of a sound general education curriculum.

Currently, the importance of general education as the foundation for more specialized studies in keystone and major courses appears to be underestimated. The University community must aggressively engage in a systematic process to address this broad issue. There are no alternatives that will suffice if there are plans to continue the delivery of high quality educational experiences to North Carolina A. & T. matriculants.

III. METHODOLOGY

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On-site formal and informal conferences were convened with administrators, individual faculty, and faculty groups primarily responsible for the delivery of instruction and the administration of the general education program. These sessions provided an important opportunity for in-depth conversations of relevant core issues and concerns pertaining to the scope and administration of the existing general education program. Also, the reviewer was engaged in the observation of conversations with a class of current North Carolina A.& T. matriculants. Additional communication with faculty was facilitated via e-mail and fax.

Core issues and concerns that were discussed included the following:

1. Existing general education core course requirements;
2. Traditional and alternative methods of instructional delivery;
3. Student/course load assigned to faculty;
4. Courses in the existing general education curriculum;
5. Content of courses;
6. Keystone courses;
7. Capstone courses;

8. Testing and measurement of student learning;
9. Frequency of the general education program review;
10. Faculty perceptions of the general education core; and
11. Matriculant satisfaction with their educational experiences.

Additionally, the reviewer was provided with significant primary and secondary documents to facilitate additional analyses.

IV. FINDINGS

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As a result of the aforementioned review process, the findings were broadly structured into two categories. The two categories are: Observation of Existing Strengths and Observation of Existing Weaknesses.

A. Observation of Existing Strengths

1. Existing Record of Student Achievement.

Historically, the achievements of North Carolina A. & T. matriculants and alumni have provided strong indicators of the strength of the North Carolina A. & T. educational experience. Currently, there are many strong indicators of the scope and quality of present matriculant achievement.

2. Planning Efforts for Program Improvement.

Current efforts to improve the scope, content, and instructional delivery of general education courses is an important undertaking. These efforts are signals of a common agreement that if general education is to be an effective component of the North Carolina A. & T. matriculant's educational experiences, significant improvements must be instituted.

3. Physics Course Component.

The Department of Physics has developed a dynamic functional instructional delivery process that should serve as a model for other departments. Information provided by the department's faculty representative indicated that a connected structure exists in the delivery of the Physics course component of the General Education Program. In essence, it appears that common agreements exist among

Physics department faculty responsible for delivery of instruction in the following areas:

1. Common course goals and objectives
2. Common course syllabus
3. Common course content and materials
4. Common course examinations that are consistent with the content of course instruction

However, it must be noted that the reviewer was not provided any systematic evidence of matriculant achievement, success attributable to the Physics faculty's efforts toward the improvement of instructional delivery. Systematic assessment must be an integrated element of a dynamic structure aimed at improving matriculant achievement outcomes. Otherwise the process model is incomplete.

4. Instructional Delivery.

North Carolina A.& T State University has a highly educated and outstanding faculty. There is considerable evidence of exceptional scholarship in all of the departments that offer courses in the existing general education program. However, faculty must focus more attention toward improving pedagogical methods to increase the academic success of their matriculants. Certainly, this is a challenge that is not unique to the North Carolina A.& T. faculty. But, it is a major issue that must be taken seriously by all faculty at institutions of higher education including North Carolina A.& T.

5. Interdepartmental/School Collaboration.

Significant evidence of interdepartmental/school cooperation was apparent. One noteworthy example is the collaboration between the Department of Foreign Languages and the School of Business and Economics. Another example is the collaboration between the Department of Mathematics and the School of Engineering. Far more cross discipline collaboration must be initiated. Cross discipline collaboration is an important means to effectively utilize increasingly scarce resources.

B. Existing Weaknesses

Currently, North Carolina A.& T.'s general education program does not have a clearly stated focus or purpose sufficient to promote common agreements among faculty who are responsible for the delivery of instruction. In addition, management oversight for the maintenance of a dynamic program of general education is inadequate.

1. Program Management Oversight.

Presently, a sound structure for program management oversight does not exist. General supervision is provided through existing levels of the institution's administrative structure (i.e., Department Chairs, Deans, and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs/Undergraduate Programs). But, no primary individual or group of individuals are accountable for leadership of the University's general education program. This leadership shortcoming circumvents the development and maintenance of a focused, dynamic, viable, and coherent general education program.

2. Uniformity of Program Goals and Objectives.

The reviewer could not definitively identify a uniform set of general education program goals and/or objectives. Without a uniform set of general education program goals and objectives, the development of a strategic plan for the general education program is not possible.

3. Strategic Planning for General Education.

The reviewer found little evidence of strategic planning for the General Education Program. The lack of a strategic plan for the General Education Program is a major weakness. An institution's general education program is the foundation upon which all other components (i.e., keystone courses, electives, courses in the major, etc.) rest. A strong coherent program of general education is the cornerstone of the

matriculating student's future educational success. A strong coherent program of general education cannot exist without a strategic plan.

4. Course Goals and Course Syllabi.

Few common agreements exist among faculty concerning course goals and objectives, course syllabi, or course content in the majority of courses designed to satisfy existing general education program requirements. In this regard, it is accurate to state that a range of differences exists in the content of courses. However, possible exceptions to the latter assertion are courses that are taught by one faculty member.

5. Consistency of Course Content Across Sections.

There are significant degrees of variance in the educational experiences of students who are enrolled in the same course but different sections. Without common agreements relative to course goals and objectives, course syllabi, course content, other course materials (i.e. textbooks, instructional aids, etc.) and examinations, an unacceptable wide range of educational experiences in students will exist.

6. Testing of Student Achievement.

The testing of student achievement is a major concern that was revealed during the review. There is a weak or non-existent connection between course goals and objectives and course examinations. In addition, there appears to be a weak or nonexistent connection between course content and course examinations. It is apparent that a significant number of faculty do not appear to see the essential need for this connectivity. Until the aforementioned gaps are closed, measurement of student achievement will be compromised.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are provided that reflect the author's analysis of findings coupled with best practices utilized at other institutions of higher education.

A. Program Management Oversight

North Carolina A. & T. State University should establish a University-wide General Education Program Council. This council would be primarily responsible for:

1. Developing and implementing more interdepartmental/ school collaboration;
2. Developing and implementing, with advice from the faculty and staff, a uniform set of program goals and objectives reflective of the University's mission statement and the broader institutional goals;
3. Developing and implementing, with advice from the faculty and staff, a general education strategic plan;
4. Developing and implementing, with advice from the faculty and staff, general education clusters consisting of courses that reflect the program's goals and objectives;
5. Developing and implementing, with advice from the faculty and staff, goals and objectives for each general education cluster;

6. Developing and implementing, with advice of the faculty and staff a common set of syllabi for each course taught as a component of each general education cluster;
7. Developing and implementing, with advice of the faculty and staff, increased use of technology in the instructional delivery process coupled with computerized testing and grading methods;
8. Developing and implementing the use of the University's testing services specialist to assist departments in the development of appropriate tests and other assessment instruments;
9. Developing and implementing, with advice of the faculty and staff, increased use of competency examinations to provide students with alternative options for meeting general education requirements;
10. Developing and implementing, the systematic integration of essential skills, such as writing, across courses in the general education program;
11. Developing and implementing, with guidance from the Office of Institutional Assessment, systematic assessment data that provide indicators of student achievement; and
12. Developing and implementing, with guidance and advice from the Office of Institutional Assessment, systematic schedules for syllabi and cluster reviews;

It is essential that the membership composition of the General Education Program Council be representative of all departments that offer courses in the general education program. Council members should be appointed for a term of not more than three years and no less than two years.

Structurally, the council must develop a functional set of policies and procedures to facilitate operations. One structural element that must be

included is a sub-committee system. At a minimum, council leadership should be comprised of an appointed Chair, Vice Chair(s), Secretary, and sub-committee Chairs.

B. Uniformity of Program Goals and Objectives

The faculty and staff of North Carolina A.& T. State University must arrive at a consensus about the expected purpose of general education relative to the education of the North Carolina A.& T. matriculant. This is an internal institutional matter. Program goals and objectives must be reflective of the University's mission and institutional goals. Only the faculty, staff and other members of the university community should develop program goals and objectives.

Institutions are similar and yet they are different. Therefore, the adoption of goals and objectives from other institutions is not an appropriate action to take.

C. Strategic Planning and Assessment

Development of a general education strategic plan is essential. The strategic plan must become the framework for program development and vitality. A strategic plan without a systematic assessment component is an incomplete plan. Analysis of assessment data is a basic element of the feedback loop. If the work is to be effective, assessment must be a functional part of the feedback loop.

Lewis' strategic planning model provides a sound approach to accomplish this endeavor. Development of a strategic plan using Lewis' model is premised on five basic guiding questions. A modification of the questions are:

1. Where are you now?
2. Where do you want to go?
3. What does it take to get there?
4. Who is responsible?
5. How will you know that the yours goals have been achieved?

D. Program Curriculum Model

It is the professional opinion of the reviewer that the faculty and staff of North Carolina A.& T. must determine the scope and content of the general education curriculum. In this regard, only general curriculum guidelines are recommended. However, the general education curriculum must be structured around a broad set of expected competencies that matriculants must achieve. Because the most basic purpose of general education is to provide matriculants with a foundation for more specialized study in a major, an appropriate balance for the general education curriculum must be sought. The North Carolina A.& T. faculty must move away from the "buffet" style general education concept that has been popular during the last two decades. A re-organized general education program must be structurally balanced and educationally sound.

A theme oriented cluster arrangement would permit a more focused approach to the selection and arrangement of general education courses. Therefore, this reviewer recommends that North Carolina A.& T. adopt the following theme oriented cluster arrangement:

1. The Communication and Technology Cluster

This cluster could be comprised of selected courses in Computer Science, English, Foreign Languages, Speech Communication, and/or Information Systems.

2. The Humanities and Fine Arts Cluster

This cluster could be comprised of selected courses in African American Studies, Art, History, Humanities, Music, and/or Theatre.

3. The Social Sciences and Global Studies Cluster

This cluster could be comprised of selected courses in African American Studies, Economics, Foreign Languages, History, and/or Political Science,

4. The Mathematics and Natural Sciences Cluster

This cluster could be comprised of selected courses in Mathematics, Agriculture, Biology, Chemistry, and/or Physics.

5. The Health and Physical Education Cluster

This cluster could be comprised of selected courses in Health and/or Physical Education.

Each cluster will be further distinguished by a small set of educational goals indicating expected competencies that the matriculant must acquire.

The overall number of required courses should be consistent with the current requirements. However, there should be greater consideration of the matriculant's needs regarding the proposed major and the selection of courses for the cluster requirements.

E. Course Goals, Objectives, Content and Testing

Considerable evidence of a disconnection between the continuum of instructional delivery was observed. In order to close the gap in the continuum of instructional delivery, the following instructional practices must be implemented:

1. The development of course syllabi must be conditioned on clearly articulated and measurable goals and objectives.
2. Instructional content and materials must be consistent with course goals and objectives and reflective of best practices in instruction-learning processes.
3. Effective student evaluation plans must be designed consistent with of multiple methods of evaluation reflecting best practices in the evaluation of student learning.
4. Students should not be evaluated on materials that are not taught.

Historically, faculty in institutions of higher education have not focused adequate attention on the best practices in the instruction-learning process. Perhaps one reason for this condition is the fact that in disciplines outside of Schools of Education, less attention has been directed to the training of future faculty in "the art and science of pedagogy."

Another reason pertains to the institutional emphasis on research. Traditionally, university communities believed that good research translated into good instruction. There has never been any definitive evidence of that connection. Good research does complement good instruction, but both are independent entities.

F. Consistency of Course Content Across Sections

There is evidence of variance in the delivery of instruction across sections of the same course. This finding is a phenomenon that is not unique to North Carolina A.& T. State University. However, variance in the students' educational experiences must be minimized. Common agreements among faculty who teach the same course but different sections must be developed.

Faculty who teach the same course but different sections must use a common syllabus, based on a common set of goals and objectives, common course content, common instructional materials and common examinations.

G. Instructional Delivery

Like many institutions of higher education throughout the nation, North Carolina A.& T. is faced with the problem of declining fiscal resources from traditional sources (i.e., the state and federal government). As a result, the University must continually review its needs and obligations in the face of traditionally inadequate and declining resources. The largest fiscal expenditure

in any institution of higher education is the cost of instruction. Under these constraints, the University must seek new ways of managing instruction while aggressively seeking nontraditional avenues for fiscal resources.

The University must aggressively explore new models and methods of instructional delivery that enhance the learning experiences of matriculants and maximize available resources. Therefore, the North Carolina A. & T. faculty and staff should aggressively examine the following:

1. Alternatives to the traditional three contact-hour model of instructional delivery.
2. Instructional delivery models designed with traditional lecture combined with technology based delivery methods.
3. WEB based instructional delivery models.
4. The traditional lecture delivery via interactive television methods.
5. Instructional delivery models designed with computer conferencing combined with independent study.
6. Expanded use of competency testing for course credit .
7. Computer-based testing.
8. Instructional delivery models designed with service learning combined with the traditional lecture methods.

There are an infinite number of instructional delivery possibilities that can be developed in a manner that maintains educational quality and maximizes the utility of existing fiscal resources. The North Carolina A. & T. State University faculty must take a proactive position on this issue.

Instructional delivery of selected courses in a restructured general education program can provide an important avenue for this endeavor.

H. Survey of Matriculant Satisfaction

A formal **North Carolina A.& T State University Matriculant Satisfaction Survey** should be developed and administered to particular segments of matriculants on an annual basis.

The matriculant satisfaction survey should be locally designed, pilot tested, and administered to establish instrument validity. This activity should be coordinated by the Office of Institutional Assessment. A committee composed of matriculants, faculty, and staff should be formed to generate domains of inquiry, and specific questions to be asked. This approach is the most effective means to determine levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the educational experiences of North Carolina A.& T. State University matriculants.

The author of this report is willing to share copies of matriculant satisfaction surveys that have been developed and successfully administered at other institutions. Surveys provided by the reviewer and other sources should serve as models for the development of a North Carolina A.& T. State University-specific matriculant satisfaction survey.

I. Survey of Faculty Perceptions

A formal **North Carolina A.& T Survey of Faculty Perceptions** should be designed, pilot tested, and administered to the faculty on an annual basis. A committee composed of faculty and staff should be formed to generate

domains of inquiry and specific questions to be asked. This approach is the most effective way to determine faculty perceptions of the general education core.

The author of this report is willing to share copies of faculty surveys that have been developed and successfully administered at other institutions. Surveys provided by the reviewer and other sources should serve as models for the development of a North Carolina A.& T. State University-specific faculty survey.

VI. CONCLUSION

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North Carolina A.& T. State University is a great institution of higher education. The University is a vibrant enterprise actively engaged in providing instruction to new generations of matriculants, conducting significant cutting edge research, and providing public service and outreach activities. However, the world has never been a static place or entity. Likewise, institutions of higher education are not static places nor do they exist in vacuums.

Finally, faculty and staff must view general education program revitalization work as a major project. Moreover, this work must be viewed and seen as necessary. By doing so, North Carolina A.& T. State University students will be guaranteed an outstanding educational experience.

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