

**From Principles to Process:  
A Report on Our Investigation into Principle-Based Distribution Requirements**

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**1.0 Rationale and Background for Our Study**

College graduation or degree requirements typically have two distinct parts. One, pertaining to the major, exists to ensure depth in a field of study. The other, distribution requirements, are typically justified on the grounds that they ensure exposure to a broad range of fields of study. One might say that the distribution requirements put the “liberal” in “liberal arts.”

Although the hope may be that distribution requirements will help students integrate ideas and issues and develop a coherent educational plan, this does not always happen. In many colleges and universities, the rationale for distributions requirements is not made explicit to students and is not discussed explicitly by faculty. In such cases, distribution requirements “. . . often times serve, not as a focal point for curricular discussions, but as simply a part of institutional history” (Elveton et al., 2000).

**2.0 Brief History of Distribution Requirements at Carleton College**

The documents which have been produced regarding curriculum are posted in their entirety on the Learning and Teaching Center’s web site. Those who wish to study the history in a comprehensive way should refer to that site. For faculty who prefer a summary of the documents most pertinent to the current curriculum review, we provide the following:

In the early 1980s, the EPC undertook a review of the college's distribution requirements, which were established in the early 1960s. There are three documents from this period which provide insights into the thinking of the faculty in the evolution of the current set of distribution requirements:

- Frank L. Wolf, Chair of EPC, Memo to EPC on Distribution requirements, May, 1983
- Tom Asher, Roy Elveton, Peter Stanley, Peter Ubel, EPC Subcommittee Report on Distribution Requirements, February, 1984.
- Gary Iseminger, Rich Noer, John Schott, Mike Zuckert, On Graduation Requirements, March 1984, the so-called "ZINS Report"

From these documents it is clear that the following principles had guided the faculty in establishing the distribution requirements in place before the review was undertaken:

- 1) The curriculum should provide depth ( through the major requirement) and breadth (through the language and distribution requirements).
- 2) The distribution requirement was to provide breadth by imposing a certain amount of academic variety both in terms of content and method.

Three concerns in the early 1980s had prompted the review of the distribution requirements:

- a) the lack of cross-cultural educational experiences
- b) the impact of science and technology on education
- c) insufficient encouragement in the performing arts.

The review process began with the discussion by the EPC of a proposal by Frank Wolf, chair of the EPC. The major points of the proposal are as follows:

Dimension I: Each student shall take at least 12 credits in each of the following groups, including courses from at least two departments in each group:

Group I: 12 credits in art and art history, music, and/or literature courses in the classics, foreign languages, and English

Group II: 18 credits in biology, chemistry, geology, physics and astronomy

Group III: 18 credits in economics, education, political science, psychology, and /or sociology and anthropology.

Group IV: 12 credits in history, philosophy ( excluding logic courses) and/or religion.

#### Dimension II:

Among the courses fulfilling the requirements of Dimension I or by other means, each student shall include;

- a) a 6-credit laboratory course
- b) 6 credits from the list of CROCUS- approved courses (a list of courses whose goals were knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity and breadth of intellectual perspective.)
- c) 6 credits in quantitative methods
- d) 3 credits in formal reasoning.

After discussing this proposal and studying the distribution requirements of Northwestern University and Stanford (requirements which were seen as emphasizing breadth), the EPC subcommittee concluded that several problems needed to be addressed:

1. The subcommittee was unsure about what was meant by “breadth”. They asked if breadth was achieved at the expense of coherence.
2. They asked if a “ core curriculum” should be adopted to provide coherence (Occidental’s program was studied in this regard by the subcommittee). The committee concluded that it was not clear whether a core curriculum did, in fact, provide coherence.
3. The subcommittee suggested that perhaps the study of Western Civilization could serve as a device for removing the shapelessness of distribution patterns.

This report was discussed and the following month the ZINS report was issued. This report was the result of an EPC mandate for the committee to provide a “modes of thinking” model for structuring distribution requirements.

The ZINS report organized its recommendations around five categories of courses:

I. Ways of Thinking

A. Scientific Explanation

1 course each in the physical sciences, biological sciences, human sciences, formal sciences

B. Humanistic Understanding

1 course each in human foundations, human acts and institutions, the history of appreciation of the arts, the practice of the arts, non-Western culture and/or minority and/or women's concerns.

II. Skills

By skills the report specified the ability which one demonstrates by doing something: something primarily which is a means.

The skills suggested were writing, foreign languages, swimming, computer skills, public speaking, a "life-time sport", computational skills, and critical reading and thinking.

III. Major

IV. Integrative Exercise

V. Experiences

Under this heading were residency requirements, phys ed requirement, lab course, a seminar and an Off-Campus Program

VI. Concentration

VII. Information

Under this heading, a "core" or a reading list with test were suggested.

A comparison of these reports with the 2004-2005 catalog list of graduation requirements shows that only the RAD requirement was instituted as a result of these 2

years of study. The faculty failed to approve any of the others nor did it agree on any statement of rationale for the distribution requirements as a whole.

It would appear, therefore, that the characterization of the rationale for the distribution requirements currently in place is essentially as it is stated in the ZINS report:

“ As things stand now the distribution requirements are not presented to students with any clear rationale, nor is it obvious that they have any, beyond insuring that, broadly speaking, departments do not lack for students.”

### **3.0 Survey of Similar Schools**

We began this aspect of the project by surveying the distribution requirements of the top 10 liberal arts colleges in the United States, as defined by the *US News and World Report* rankings. Although this selection was very focused, we wanted to ensure that we were clearly examining the practices of peer institutions. Table 1 presents a summary of the degree requirements of those 10 institutions.

Table 1. Graduation Requirements of Top 10 Liberal Arts Colleges

Rank	College	# of Equivalent Courses Required for Graduation	Discipline or Skills Distribution Requirements	Freshman Seminar Requirement	Writing Requirement
1	Williams	32	Discipline; 9 courses, 3 categories	No; tutorials offered	Starting in 2006, 2 courses
2 tie	Amherst	32	None	Yes; 1 <sup>st</sup> semester 19 offered	No
2 tie	Swarthmore	32	Discipline; 9 courses, 3 categories	No	3 courses in 2 disciplines
4	Wellesley	32	Skills; 9 courses	No	Yes
5 tie	Carleton	35	Discipline; 10 courses, 4 categories	No; frosh seminars offered	Yes; 1 course + 1 portfolio
5 tie	Pomona	32	Skills; 10 courses, 10 categories	Critical Inquiry	2 courses (incl Critical Inquiry)
7 tie	Bowdoin	32	Discipline; 6 courses, 3 categories	No	No
7 tie	Davidson	32	Discipline; 10 courses, 7 categories	No	1 course
9 tie	Haverford	32	Discipline; 9 courses, 3 categories	Yes; incorporates Writing req.	See Frosh Sem (1 course)
9 tie	Wesleyan	32 (34 until 2000)	Discipline; 9 courses, 3 categories	No	No

Rank	College	Foreign Language Requirement	Physical Education Requirement	Other General Education Requirements
1	Williams	None	4 quarters	4 winter study projects, 1 course each Formal Reading & People + Culture
2 tie	Amherst	None	None	None
2 tie	Swarthmore	None	2 semesters	Comps in major
4	Wellesley	4 semesters	8 points (2 semester courses)	Quantitative Reasoning Multicultural
5 tie	Carleton	4 or 5 courses	4 courses	Senior exercises in major Speaking interactive course
5 tie	Pomona	3 courses	1 course	None
7 tie	Bowdoin	None	None	2 non-Eurocentric courses
7 tie	Davidson	3 semesters	3 units	Senior Project
9 tie	Haverford	2 semesters	6 quarters (1.5 years)	Quantitative Requirement Social Justice Requirement Senior Project or Exam
9 tie	Wesleyan	None	None	Some majors require comprehensive exam

Rank	College	Majors
1	Williams	9+ courses in dept; up to 8 in associated field
2 tie	Amherst	8 courses (average)
2 tie	Swarthmore	8+
4	Wellesley	8-18 courses
5 tie	Carleton	≤ 12 courses
5 tie	Pomona	Includes senior exercises # courses = up to 16
7 tie	Bowdoin	7-10 courses; no official minimum or maximum
7 tie	Davidson	≤ 12 courses; 5 at 300 or 400 level
9 tie	Haverford	≤ 13 courses Admittance according to GPA
9 tie	Wesleyan	At least 8 and no more than 14 courses

We found in our survey that these colleges' distribution requirements could be categorized into three types. The first category was "no distribution requirements", and it is exemplified only by Amherst College. The second, and most common category is to base distribution requirements upon academic departments or divisions, as we currently do at Carleton. Six of the 10 colleges use such a scheme, including Williams, Swarthmore, Carleton, Bowdoin, Davidson, Haverford, and Wesleyan. Although the specifics vary somewhat from school to school, typically the curriculum is divided into



three areas, prototypically Natural Science and Mathematics, Social Science, and Arts/Literature/Humanities, and students are required to take 2-3 courses in each grouping.

A third scheme for distribution requirements drew our interest and focus. This was what we would call principle- (or skill-) based distribution requirements. Two schools, Wellesley and Pomona, exemplified this scheme. Here, a variety of skills are listed, and students must take at least one course in each. The courses that fulfill the requirements come from across the curriculum. Table 2 presents the specific skills/principles required at Wellesley. The old distribution categories, which had been in place at Wellesley for decades, were the traditional ones of humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Each of these categories was essentially defined in terms of a group of academic departments. The new categories adopted at Wellesley divide courses in terms of their substance or methodology rather than departmental provenance. Thus, three categories have been replaced by eight:

1. languages and literature
2. visual arts, music, video, film and theatre
3. social and behavioral analysis
4. epistemology and cognition
5. ethics, religion, and moral philosophy
6. historical studies
7. natural and physical science
8. mathematical modeling and problem solving in the natural sciences, mathematics and computer science.

Table 2. Wellesley College's Distribution Requirements

Grouping 1: Three courses required, with at least one in each area:
Language and Literature
Visual Arts, Music, Theater, Film, and Video
Grouping 2: Three courses from the following four areas, with one from social/behavioral analysis and two additional from 2 of the 3 other areas
Social and Behavioral Analysis
Epistemology and Cognition
Religion, Ethics, and Moral Philosophy
Historical Studies
Grouping 3: Three courses required, with at least one from each Area and one to be a laboratory course
Natural and Physical Science
Mathematical Modeling and Problem Solving in the Natural Sciences,
Mathematics, and Computer Science
Other Wellesley Requirements: Foreign Language, Writing, Quantitative Reasoning, Multicultural, PE, Major

A different principle-based distribution scheme was adopted at Pomona College in 1994. The Pomona website describes this scheme as follows: “Unique among college and university programs, the program has generated great interest among faculty and deans at many other institutions. It recognizes both the remarkable breadth and depth of the curriculum and the enormous range of student interests, while bringing both together to create a common core of intellectual experiences and skill development. Students are encouraged to be open intellectually, to identify assumptions--their own and those of others--and to be willing to question them. The capacity to explore ideas, evaluate evidence, and draw balanced conclusions and communicate one's findings will serve our graduates well.”

Table 3. Pomona College's PAC (Perception, Analysis, and Communication)
Requirements
One course required for each category
1. Read literature critically
2. Use and understand the scientific method
3. Use and understand formal reasoning
4. Understand and analyze data
5. Analyze creative art critically
6. Perform or produce creative art
7. Explore and understand human behavior
8. Explore and understand an historical culture
9. Compare and contrast contemporary cultures
10. Think critically about values and rationality
Other Pomona Requirements: Frosh Critical Inquiry, Foreign Language, PE, Major

### 3. Visit to Wellesley College

We visited Wellesley College on February 3, 2005. Prior to that visit we conducted a telephone interview of Nancy Kolodny, Professor of Chemistry, who had been Dean of the College and is widely acknowledged as the architect of Wellesley's most recent curriculum reform. On February 3, we interviewed ten other faculty members and administrators. Of these, three were or had been Deans of the College (the current dean, and the immediate predecessors, all of whom came from the Wellesley faculty). In addition, three others had or were currently serving as an associate dean. A list of the faculty we interviewed is shown in Table 4, and the questions we used are in Table 5.

Table 4. Faculty Interviewed at Wellesley College

Nancy Kolodny, Cohen/Heller Professor of Chemistry (Former Dean of the College)
Maud Chaplin, Virginia Onderdonk Professor of Philosophy (Former Dean of the College)
Lee Cuba, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Sociology (Former Dean of the College)
Elissa Koff, Margaret Hamm Professor of Psychology
Andrew Shennan, Dean of the College and Professor of History
Adele Wolfson, Professor of Chemistry and Associate Dean of the College
Karl Case, Katharine Coman and A. Barton Hepburn Professor of Economics
Mary Lefkowitz, Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities (Classical Studies)
Jens Kruse, Professor of German (Former Associate Dean of the College)
Mary Allen, Jean Glasscock Professor of Biological Sciences and Director of Biological Chemistry
Margery Sabin, Wang Professor of English (Former Class Dean)

Table 5. Interview Questions for Faculty

1. What was the impetus for your institution changing its curriculum?
2. What was the process by which your institution's faculty and administrators evaluated the curriculum?
3. As they were envisioned, what were your current distribution requirements meant to accomplish?
4. Were there any points of controversy over either the creation or implementation? If so, what were they?
5. What is working well, in your opinion, about these distribution requirements?
6. What is not working well, in your opinion, about these distribution requirements?
7. If you could unilaterally make changes to the distribution requirements, what change(s) would you make?
8. How unified is your faculty regarding the functioning of your distribution requirements?
9. What is student perception of your distribution requirements? Are there groups of students for whom distribution requirements have differential impact?
10. Are there different departments, programs, or divisions at your institution who have different points of view about the distribution requirements?
11. Tell us about your science curriculum, and how it fits with the rest of the curriculum.
12. Tell us about your foreign language curriculum, and how it fits with the rest of the curriculum.

From the first, we were struck by the success that the Wellesley process had in bringing all interested faculty into the discussion of curriculum. The process they used began with then Dean Kolodny reviewing past internal documents so that she felt “on solid footing” as she led a discussion with faculty. Her rationale for an examination of the Wellesley curriculum came from her conviction that this examination was the only

intellectually responsible thing to do, given that the overall structure of the graduation requirements had not changed in 30 years,. She used the term “due diligence” to describe the need she felt, and compared it to a person visiting a physician for a regular check-up.

The process at Wellesley had begun in 1993 with some general faculty meetings in which people discussed what the ideal curriculum would be for a liberally educated student. Later meetings (also open to all) were structured around the question of how well the then-current Wellesley curriculum matched the ideal vision, followed by a third set of meetings to discuss how a process of curriculum revision ought to be structured. Of the official 220 FTE at Wellesley, Kolodny estimates that around 160 faculty participated in one or more of these discussions.

After these meetings, committees were formed to work on different issues. Faculty could volunteer to be on one or more committees, and there ended up being five committees, with a total of 120-150 faculty participating. The committees were: Degree Requirements, Pedagogy (including Academic Standards), Common Educational Experience, Technology in the Curriculum, and Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching. These committees met over a period of 18 months, holding several open meetings, and bringing recommendations back to the Academic Council, Wellesley’s general faculty meeting.

As described by Professor Kolodny in a follow-up email: “A number of significant changes to the curriculum were passed in Academic Council, including (1) a new quantitative reasoning requirement for all Wellesley students; (2) a complete revision of the distribution requirements providing students with greater intellectual guidance (described in Table 2, above); (3) the introduction of half-unit courses to afford

greater flexibility in course design and innovation; (4) a revised multicultural course requirement. In addition, a number of additional reform proposals were deferred for longer term study.”

Of the faculty we spoke with, two could be identified that were not particularly enthusiastic about the new graduation requirements. One person stated her objection that there were too many requirements in total—that if one counted up major requirements, distribution requirements, and other “overlay” requirements (such as the foreign language requirement, multicultural requirement, and quantitative reasoning requirement), they “took up” around half of a student’s 32 courses required for graduation, thus robbing a student of the chance to choose courses for herself. However, she reported smilingly, that there was no single requirement that she objected to or would be willing to give up. She was also unhappy that the distribution scheme seemed to have been “plagiarized” from Princeton.

The other unenthusiastic faculty member believed that the Wellesley faculty hadn’t needed to review the curriculum as a whole again, since it seemed to her that there was ongoing revision as courses were added and deleted. Moreover, she reported a sense from other faculty of feeling coerced to participate in the process, specifically worrying about political consequences if they chose not to engage in the discussion. She also thought that after the long process had been finished, not much had changed.

The majority of faculty we spoke with were much more enthusiastic. Some felt that the process by which the new requirements were constructed was open, democratic, and encouraged students to be more thoughtful in their course selections than had the previous “three courses from each of three divisions” distribution requirements. Many

felt that without specific requirements, students (perhaps especially weaker ones) would avoid essential realms of the curriculum, specifically sciences and possibly quantitative courses. One faculty member emphasized that, “We are the adults—we need to provide guidance,” a sentiment with which many others agreed. Two faculty members noted that sometimes in selecting a course solely to fulfill a requirement, a student discovered a new interest or passion.

Most all the faculty interviewed agreed that the process of redesigning the curriculum was slow, and necessitated some political compromises. Former dean Kolodny urged us to plan for a 3-5 year timetable, and to be prepared to only be able to implement some of the changes within that frame. Some issues, such as a policy on grade inflation, were not acted upon until just last year and still others, on interdisciplinary issues, await resolution (but are slated for discussion in the near future).

Another former dean urged us not to be too ambitious—and to try to talk as much as possible with as many faculty as possible along the way. As the associate dean involved with curricular reform, he took the time to go to the offices of individual faculty who had voiced strong objections to try to talk some issues through. There was a general sense that a scheme for distribution requirements had to be tailored to the institution—because cultures differ.

Many faculty talked about implicit worries everyone had before the changes about enrollment patterns and FTE. Surprisingly, very few differences seem to have resulted from the change in requirements, despite fears. One department, Africana Studies, that had a sort of monopoly on enrollments to fulfill the multicultural requirement did decline, although several faculty characterized that program as “weak” and probably deserving to



decline. Some faculty thought enrollments in Studio Art rose, but overall, popular departments continued to be popular and with about the same ranking in student enrollments.

#### 4. Visit to Pomona College

We visited Pomona College on March 3, 2005. Prior to our visit we interviewed Deborah Burke, Professor of Psychology, by telephone and Laura Hoopes, Professor of Chemistry, by emailed questions. At Pomona we interviewed ten faculty and administrators. Three of these were currently deans or associate deans, seven were or had been on the Curriculum Committee, and one was chair of the Teaching/Learning Center. A list of the faculty we interviewed is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Faculty Interviewed at Pomona College
Deborah Burke, Psychology, Former Chair of Curriculum Committee (CC)
Laura Hoopes, Biology, (Dean of the College when the PAC system was implemented)
Gary Kates, Professor of History, Dean of the College
Rena Fraden, (English) Associate Dean (Former Chair of the Curriculum Committee)
Adolfo Rumbos , Mathematics, ( Current CC chair)
Shahriar Shahriari, Mathematics ( Former Chair of CC)
Margaret Adorno, Registrar and CC member
Paul Saint-Amour, English, Chair of Teaching/Learning Center
Jill Grigsby, Sociology, former CC member
Frances Pohl, Art History, current CC member
Fred Greiman, Professor of Chemistry
Ann Quinley, Dean of Students

Whereas Wellesley has moved from a department-based set of requirement to a principle-based set, Pomona is likely to be doing the opposite. In 1994 it had adopted a set of ten “Perception, Analysis and Communication Skills” (PACS) as its distribution requirements (see Table 3). In addition, students have a rich selection of 26 or 27 Freshman Seminars in their first term. These are like Carleton’s Freshman Seminars except that every student takes one.

Despite the fact that Peter Stanley, then the President of Pomona, strongly supported this system and it became well-known across the country, its problems became increasingly hard to ignore. After a review of the requirements in 2004, the faculty concluded that the problems of implementation of the PACS had become numerous and were longstanding and thus deserved reconsideration.. They are currently discussing a new set of distribution requirements and are considering a range of possibilities, from a system of no requirements, such as Amherst or Grinnell currently have, to another system of department-based requirements. These discussions are on-going.

We asked how the PACS system had been originally adopted and what had gone wrong. We were told that in response to specific criticisms raised in the 1991-92 Reaffirmation of Accreditation Report, the Curriculum Committee began to look at possible changes to Pomona’s approach to its general education requirements. What seemed lacking in the “Breadth of Study” requirements, as they were called, was a coherent rationale for their choice as requirements and some way to group courses that corresponded to that rationale. The Committee concluded that the concept of “intellectual

skills” could serve as an umbrella to promote various ways of learning and to convey knowledge across disciplines.

The AACU had produced a book in the early 1990s which urged colleges and universities to offer courses which incorporated the kinds of skills needed for future citizens, especially the kinds that psychological evidence supports a long-term-retainable skills. Studies such as Latzer (2004), or the National Panel Report (2002) have sparked a similar debate across the country in the current deliberations about curriculum across the country. One particular faculty member, then chair of the Curriculum Committee, championed this approach, and the Curriculum Committee used the AACU book’s outline of a group of such skills as a basis for forming the list of PACS requirements. All classes were to be small (20) and participatory, as needed for skill practice. Many of the skills were possible to satisfy by a variety of courses in different disciplines as long as the proposers of the courses could satisfy the Curriculum Committee that the skill was actually being emphasized in that course. Although input in the process was solicited and informed the committees deliberations, in the end the PACS proposal was presented to the faculty to be voted on as a package.

Two faculty that we talked with were strong supporters of the PAC, and expressed the belief that all of the problems could, in principle, be fixed, if faculty will were strong enough. People we talked with were practically unanimous in their assessment of what had gone wrong with the PACS.. These were the major difficulties:

1. The Curriculum Committee had the responsibility to approve courses which could satisfy a given “PAC” and faculty made applications to the committee if they wanted a particular course to be listed as fulfilling a certain PAC. (A course could only satisfy one

PAC). The committee used the original conception of a skill as expressed in the original PACS document to guide their decisions in a process some described as “Talmudic interpretation.” But the make-up of the committee changed as did the people teaching various courses and the concerns of a given discipline, so it was soon the case that some approved courses no longer fit the PAC description but continued to carry PAC credit; others that might have been approved by a curriculum committee one year were not approved in another year, and some courses that ought to have been given a PAC designation were not. In this latter case, we discovered, some professors deliberately avoided a PAC designation for a course to prevent the presence of students merely satisfying the requirement but not interested in the material [so-called PAC-RATS] and to keep the classes smaller.

Almost everyone agreed that had the Curriculum Committee not been in charge of deciding on the list of courses and had the interpretation of the description of individual PAC skills been allowed to evolve, the PAC system might have been workable. As they are, some PACs are thought to lack “intellectual integrity”.

2. Although the Curriculum Committee had counted courses and class times and determined that there were enough courses to satisfy the PACS, the limited number of class slots in a day and the failure of enough new courses to be offered as originally envisioned, made it hard in the first few years for students to find enough classes to satisfy the requirements.

3. There were specific problems with parts of the PACS. Some scientists argued that the PACs were not science-friendly, Although a laboratory science was required, it could be taken in Psychology, so students could entirely avoid the so-called “hard” sciences of

physics, geology, and chemistry. Some said that having two arts requirements was a political compromise rather than a well-considered requirement.

4. The total number of PACs—10—seemed too high, especially in light of the restriction that a course could only fulfill one PAC requirement.

5. There seems to be an imperfect alignment between how professors teach and organize their courses and the expectations of the framers of the skills, whose descriptions bind them. Some felt that by having to focus on the skill for which their course is listed, they do not do justice to their discipline or to the liberal arts

Although the Curriculum Committee remains in charge of the current discussions of curricular change, they told us they have learned a lot from the mistakes of the past. This time they are proceeding more slowly, with time at each stage for general faculty discussion and for potential problems with the proposed changes to be identified and addressed before the system is in place. Faculty feel part of the process and have time to understand and reflect on the proposals without, as was done with the PACS, a small group of dedicated and enthusiastic champions rushing the process.

To begin their current curricular review process, the Curriculum Committee invited faculty to submit proposals for changing the distribution requirements and received six proposals. Each one of these was presented and discussed at a faculty retreat on Curriculum. They then conducted a survey to see which proposals had support and are working on the most promising one now to help it evolve into a proposal which a majority of faculty support. Many of the faculty we spoke with had been a part of both curriculum reforms, and said that the current, slower and more inclusive process, was by far a better, albeit a seemingly less “efficient” one.

## 5. Recommendations

Our visits and discussions convince us that, above all, the process by which the curriculum is discussed is the single most important thing in the curriculum review process. Wellesley succeeded where Pomona apparently failed because Wellesley had a slower, more inclusive set of discussions, and “grew” their graduation requirements organically from the faculty. At Pomona, the process was largely driven by a very enthusiastic chair of the Curriculum committee, backed by an eager administration, who “sold” the proposal to their faculty. At Pomona, several issues of implementation and administration which turned out to be severe problems were not anticipated as they might have been. When problems arose, the lack of widespread faculty “buy-in” led to dissatisfaction and a lack of willingness to try to make the adopted requirements work.

In light of this, we intentionally are not making recommendations for what a Carleton system should look like. It is our belief that no single faculty member, administrator, committee, or ad-hoc task force should design new (or adapt old) graduation requirements. They must evolve from discussion with as large a group of faculty as it is possible to involve, and because of this, the plan that emerges will reflect the culture and character of the college, and will mean that faculty will take ownership of the new curriculum.

We believe, perhaps idealistically, that the process of curricular evaluation really does represent an opportunity for Carleton faculty to come together, to discuss important issues, and to learn to deal honestly and collegially with differences of opinion. We have heard comments suggesting that this process might “be a waste of time” or “be too difficult” or “have a high opportunity cost.” Handled well, we believe the process could

be one where faculty not only design a terrific program, but engage in a conversation that gets to the heart of what Carleton as an institution is and should be, which could lead to more purposeful teaching and advising.

Finally, we believe it is important that the discussion not start or be focused around a “tweaking” of what is already in place. Because an assessment of our overall curricular structure has not occurred for decades, it is time to take a fresh, “from-first-principles” look at what the curriculum should be. To center debate on whether this or that aspect of our graduation requirements is too much or too little strikes as a very wasted opportunity.

With these thoughts in mind, and because we have been encouraged to formulate specific proposals based on our findings, we propose the following recommendations for the process we use to analyze curriculum at Carleton:

1. Use the fall faculty retreat to engage faculty in thinking about the possibilities of curriculum reform. Invite Nancy Kolodny from Wellesley to the retreat as plenary speakers, to talk both about the processes she led and about her view of graduation requirements generally. We can also suggest other people to consult, if that is needed.
2. Invite the Academic Affairs Committee of trustees to attend as well, so that they can participate in this important moment in the institutions’ history, and to also forge stronger connections to faculty in a intellectual setting.
3. Follow the plenary session with breakout sessions, with small and diverse groups of faculty and trustees, focused on the question: “What do we expect every liberally educated person to know or to know how to do?” Have FCPC members attend and

facilitate each group, taking notes on the points raised, and prepare a summary of the same to be distributed to all faculty early in fall term.

4. Invite any interested faculty member or group of faculty members to submit an outline of proposed distribution requirements along with a statement of educational purpose.

5. Distribute these proposals to all faculty, and at a subsequent faculty meeting (or meetings) offer the authors time to answer questions about their proposals.

6. After this process is completed, using surveymonkey, assess faculty support for each proposal, identifying those which have broad faculty support.

7. Convene a meeting of the FCPC and any other interested faculty members to discuss the results of the breakout sessions, the proposals, and the faculty survey, in order to prepare two alternative proposals that come the closest to embodying general faculty sentiment.

8. Bring these two proposals to a faculty meeting, and let the faculty discuss their pros and cons. This discussion may need to extend to several meetings.

9. Take a faculty vote (using surveymonkey) on the two proposals. If one is identified as a clear favorite (e.g., it garners 60% of the faculty vote), proceed to the next step.

Otherwise, continue the discussion until a clear favorite emerges.

10. Form committees to look at each of the elements of the remaining proposal. Invite anyone who wants to work on a particular committee to join. These committees should meet until they have a proposal to bring to the faculty, and should not be tied to a specific deadline. Avoid meetings over the summer or other breaks to provide all faculty the opportunity to participate fully in the discussions.



11 Vote on each of the proposals after the faculty feel there has been sufficient time for the discussion. At the end of the process, faculty can consider if any of their courses fulfill the new requirements and can apply to have them listed.

12. Reduce the requirements for graduation from 35 to 32 credits, the number required by every other liberal arts college on "the list". This will give students the option of having 4 terms of their choosing in which they take only 2 courses. They could choose these terms in consultation with their advisors based on the need to concentrate on a particularly difficult course, to do an off-campus program which gives less than 18 credits, to do comps, to do the job search, or to be involved in a time-consuming extra-curricular activity.

13. Reduce the teaching load for full-time faculty to five courses per year over three terms.. Three courses per term would not be allowed.

To accomplish the paired goals listed in (12) and (13) above, make the following changes:

- a. Do not allow overloads except for music courses or for students who must retake a course because of failure. Do not allow retakes to improve grades.
- b. Eliminate late drops. All courses must be dropped by the end of the second week. ( The number of late drops per term averages over 100. This amounts to about 10 courses per term of students who are taught but do not complete the course and then enroll in another course.
- c. Reexamine the issue of course releases and decide on a governing principle.
- d. Give course credit for comps on some formula such as 9 supervisions per course credit.

e. Then, simply turn the matter over to the departments to decide how best to absorb the loss of courses. Some courses may need to be dropped or taught in alternate years, some class sizes may need to be larger. Do not allow a course with very small enrollment to be taught unless the department can make a compelling case for extenuating circumstances. Assess the needs for additional faculty from the 15 proposed and allocate them after this course load reduction is in place and it is clear where the genuine needs are. Do not do this by formula, but by a thorough assessment of program needs.

We talked to numerous faculty and the deans at Wellesley and Pomona, who adopted (5) as their method of implementation. They had been very worried about the outcomes, but everyone said that the transition was "remarkably smooth". One faculty member was "amazed that there were hardly any problems".

## **6. Miscellaneous Observations**

The following are specific, content-related ideas that we think are worth thinking about:

1. Consider a core-course(s) model for the freshman year. Such a course (or courses) could combine first-year advising with instruction in various competencies (writing, informational, oral proficiency), and could provide all incoming students with some shared experience. A logical theme for a core course might be the American Experience. This course could be taught from a variety of perspectives by faculty from a variety of disciplines. Both Pomona and Wellesley have a required freshman seminar that involves writing instruction, although topics in individual sections vary. Both schools regard their freshman seminar programs as very successful.

2. Consider a principle-based scheme of distribution requirements. Such a list would grow out of the process described in our recommendations. From our many discussions at Wellesley and Pomona, we have come to believe that such a system has the following desiderata:

It makes more transparent the institution's educational goals

It encourages more thoughtfulness in students' course selection and planning.

It makes more room for interdisciplinary studies.

It creates a framework that allows the curriculum to evolve in an orderly way as new channels of scholarship arise.

It encourages faculty to be more intentional in planning courses.

It may allow for more flexible deployment of FTE between programs and departments.

3. Both Wellesley and Pomona are struggling with the issue of a multicultural requirement. Pomona's students are asking for one, and the faculty are considering, as an alternative, a lecture series of 5-6 lectures that sophomores would be required to attend that focus on issues of diversity and power. Such an idea might be worth discussion here as well, or we may decide that the RAD requirement has lived its life and can be eliminated.

We see curriculum review as presenting an exciting intellectual opportunity for faculty to come together, articulate their educational priorities, and to proceed deliberately to fashion a curriculum which will serve the needs of Carleton in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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