STANDARD TWO

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND EFFECTIVENESS
Educational Programs and their Effectiveness:

Boise State’s Story

—A SHIFTING FOCUS AND AN EMERGING PRESENCE

Until recently, Boise State University was the comprehensive state institution of higher education in the region, and we shouldered the bulk of the responsibility for post-secondary education in our community. It was our role and mission to offer an array of programs that spanned from certificates in professional-technical vocations all the way to doctoral programs in education and the sciences. In one sense, we had no choice but to be “all things to all people.”

However, effective July 1, 2009, Boise State transferred its Professional-Technical Educational (PTE) programs to the College of Western Idaho, a new community college in our region, along with responsibilities for non-credit workforce training and adult basic education. The College of Western Idaho will also take on substantial responsibility for offering developmental coursework and lower division general education academic coursework.

This transfer of our PTE function to another institution was a watershed moment for Boise State. We are now better able to focus on our vision to become a metropolitan research university of distinction, substantially increasing the (i) the number and size of our graduate programs and (ii) the capacity and sophistication of our research.

—A CAUTIOUS TRANSITION

Boise State University has a long history of adaptation and transition in response to growth in the University and to growth in and changing needs of the region and community. Our roots as a junior college provide foundational core values of access, responsiveness to the region, and a broad range of offerings.

As we move forward to achieve our vision, we fully understand our transition to increased graduate programs and research must be responsible and well planned. It is important not to lose focus on a key aspect of our mission, our undergraduate programs. Towards that end we have undertaken a major effort to enhance the undergraduate experience at Boise State.

It is also important that our expansion of graduate programs and research is done with deliberate attention to quality. We understand the need to (i) develop the mechanisms by which we ensure quality, (ii) develop and implement programs that are consistent with our goals and aspirations and that meet the needs of our community, and (iii) do so in ways that make the best possible use of the resources available to us.
Educational Programs and Effectiveness

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Undergraduate Programs

Creation and Elimination of Undergraduate Programs

—FOCUS OF PROPOSED PROGRAMS

2.A.2 The goals of the institution’s educational programs, whenever and however offered, including instructional policies, methods, and delivery systems, are compatible with the institution’s mission. They are developed, approved, and periodically evaluated under established institutional policies and procedures through a clearly defined process.

The first step of the process by which new undergraduate academic programs are proposed and approved is prompted by the Idaho State Board of Education’s (SBOE) biennial revision of our 8-year plan, in which universities are asked to list the programs they plan to initiate during the next 8 years.\(^1\) Departments discuss potential new programs and develop, for each program to be proposed, a description and justification.\(^2\) The Boise State Deans’ Council discusses and decides upon entries to the 8-year plan. Programs that require substantial resource investment, e.g., graduate programs, receive an additional layer of scrutiny, which will be discussed in the graduate programs section. Note that the 8-year plan is not binding, but rather serves as a planning tool. There is no requirement that proposals for programs will, in fact, be acted upon in the timeframes proposed or approved by the SBOE and it is possible to bring forward programs that are not on the 8-year plan.

If and when a department decides to bring forward a proposal for the new program, it pursues two parallel processes in gaining approval, as shown in Figure 2.1. For undergraduate programs, one of those processes is specified by the University Curriculum Committee (UCC), which will be discussed in the following section. The other process ends with the submission of the proposal in the form of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to the Idaho State Board of Education.\(^3\) It is primarily this latter track that addresses the focus of proposed programs.

The faculty members completing the NOI must describe and document (i) the need for the program, (ii) the connection of the program with the University’s mission, (iii) the mechanisms by which quality of the program will be ensured, and (iv) the resources needed to sustain the program. Following endorsement by the appropriate dean, the NOI is evaluated by the President, the Provost, and the Vice President for Finance and Administration (VPFA) to

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1 SBOE policy on 8-year plans; Most recent 8-year plan at SBOE website
2 2008 set of Boise State’s proposed programs
3 Folder: Notice of Intent form and examples
determine whether the program fits with the mission and vision of the University, whether there is sufficient demand for the plan, and whether resources are available for the proposed program.

If new central resources are required to offer the program, those resources are requested via the Annual Planning and Budget Process, which evaluates proposals primarily based on the connection of the proposed program to the University’s strategic plan (See Standard 1 and Standard 7).

Following approval by the Provost, the VPFA, and the President, the NOI is reviewed by the Council on Academic Affairs and Programs (CAAP; consisting primarily of chief academic officers from all state public post-secondary institutions), and then considered by the SBOE. In both venues, the Provost describes how the proposed program fits with our SBOE-approved role and mission and our vision, how there is not undue overlap with programs at other institutions, and that institutional resources can be brought to bear to sustain a quality program.

The Bachelor of General Studies (BGS), a recently created program, will illustrate how our new programs are tied to the mission and vision of the University. The BGS is a degree completion program designed for individuals who have completed a portion of a degree program, have stopped out for various reasons such as to raise a family or to pursue employment, and now see the need to return to college. The program meets our strategic goal to serve the educational needs of the region, which has more than 40,000 individuals with significant college but no degree.
— STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF PROPOSED PROGRAMS

2.A.3 Degree and certificate programs demonstrate a coherent design; are characterized by appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, synthesis of learning, and the assessment of learning outcomes; and require the use of library and other information sources.

2.A.4 The institution uses degree designators consistent with program content. In each field of study or technical program, degree objectives are clearly defined: the content to be covered, the intellectual skills, the creative capabilities, and the methods of inquiry to be acquired; and, if applicable, the specific career-preparation competencies to be mastered.

2.A.7 Responsibility for design, approval, and implementation of the curriculum is vested in designated institutional bodies with clearly established channels of communication and control. The faculty has a major role and responsibility in the design, integrity, and implementation of the curriculum.

2.A.9 The institution’s curriculum (programs and courses) is planned both for optimal learning and accessible scheduling.

2.A.11 Policies, regulations, and procedures for additions and deletions of courses or programs are systematically and periodically reviewed.

As shown in the internal review process of Figure 2.1, new programs must also be approved by the UCC. The UCC is a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, and is comprised of a representative (typically a member of the college curriculum committee) from each college (except the Graduate College), with ex-officio membership from the Registrar's Office, the Library, and the Provost's Office.

The structure and content of the proposed undergraduate program are developed by a group of faculty members, often a department. That faculty group is primarily responsible for developing a program that meets typical academic standards of appropriate depth and breadth and sequencing of courses. The faculty group develops a Request for Curriculum Action (RCA), which describes the proposed program, including a complete catalog statement containing the curriculum. Also required in the RCA are a justification of the proposed programs, a description of the projected enrollment and fiscal resources required for the proposed program, a description of library resources required for the program, and endorsement by academic departments affected by the creation of the program.

Once developed, the program is evaluated and endorsed by the dean, then by a college-level curriculum committee, and finally by the UCC. The UCC does not have formal criteria against which new programs are judged, but relies on the judgment of the submitting group and the narrative provided justifying the program.

There are a number of specific policies regarding structure that must be followed, and it is generally the representative from the Registrar's Office on the UCC who provides scrutiny in terms of University policies. Those policies require that new baccalaureate
programs contain 128 credits total, 40 upper division credits, and credits to complete the University’s general education requirements.\(^9\) Policy also specifies that 15 hours of classwork are required per semester credit.

The focus of the UCC has primarily been on the process of program approval. Recently they have widened their focus to consider several broader-scale curricular questions.

- It was noticed that there is inconsistency in what differentiates an upper division course from a lower division course and that in a few cases, there are no prerequisites to upper division courses. The UCC is now considering guidelines about what constitutes an upper division course. Those guidelines will also ensure that upper division courses have appropriate prerequisites so as to ensure that only properly prepared students take upper division courses and to ensure that upper division courses have a more sophisticated content that builds on that of lower division courses.

- It was found that it is technically possible for students in a few majors to graduate with more than 30 credits of “workshops.” Workshops have the numerical designation 294, 494, and 594, indicating that they can be taken as lower division, upper division, and graduate credits. In spite of the fact that they count as academic credit, workshops do not receive the same level of scrutiny in the approval process as other courses. Whereas standard courses must each be approved by the UCC, workshops are created by department chairs and listed in the course schedule without going through any sort of formal approval process. As a first step, the UCC is considering a rule that students be limited to no more than 9 credits of workshop in their total of 128 credits required for a baccalaureate degree.\(^{10}\)

- An examination of curricula at a number of peer institutions revealed that most require 120 semester credits to graduate whereas Boise State requires 128 credits. The UCC is exploring whether it is reasonable to reduce the number of credits while still ensuring that students achieve learning goals for their programs.

The process of Periodic Review of Academic Departments (described in Standard 2B) further reinforces the processes above that address depth, breadth, and sequencing of a curriculum.\(^{11}\) In particular, departments are asked to evaluate how the courses in a program build on one another and how well their courses map to program learning goals and vice versa.
—PROGRAM ELIMINATION

2.A.12 In the event of program elimination or significant change in requirements, institutional policy requires appropriate arrangements to be made for enrolled students to complete their program in a timely manner and with a minimum of disruption.

When we discontinue individual programs, we inform affected students of the change and provide them with advising to facilitate their completion of the program. Students may graduate under a catalog up to 6 years old. In the case of the transfer of PTE programs to CWI, we developed a “teach out” agreement that includes as signatories CWI, College of Southern Idaho (CWI’s accreditation partner), and the SBOE. That agreement ensures that students will be able to complete their programs without needing to take additional courses. Annual lists of discontinued programs are contained in our annual reports submitted to the NWCCU.

Quality of Existing Programs

—ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

2.A.3 Degree and certificate programs demonstrate a coherent design; are characterized by appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, synthesis of learning, and the assessment of learning outcomes; and require the use of library and other information sources.

2.A.5 The institution provides evidence that students enrolled in programs offered in concentrated or abbreviated timeframes demonstrate mastery of program goals and course objectives.

2.A.9 The institution’s curriculum (programs and courses) is planned both for optimal learning and accessible scheduling.

Assessment of undergraduate programs is addressed at length in our response to Standard 2B. Here we give an overview of the elements of the assessment process. All programs have produced a Department Assessment Report (DAR) that lists student learning goals, describes the way in which student success in achieving those goals are assessed, describes results, and lists changes that have been made to the program in response to assessment results. The learning goals and assessment plan for each program are available on the web.

Periodic Review of Academic Programs provides substantial reinforcement for the assessment process. Departments are asked to describe their processes of review and revision of their student learning goals and assessment plans, and are asked to describe and evaluate the way in which they ensure the sustainability of a process by which departments make use of assessment data to improve academic programs.
The creation of “Finish in Four,” a graduation guarantee program, has helped to ensure accessible scheduling of coursework. Departments have adjusted the timing and frequency of course offerings, as needed, to ensure that students can complete their degree in four years, if they desire. For several programs, departments needed to add offerings in one semester or another and/or balance offerings between terms to respond to demand. To help students in programs requiring courses offered once a year or every other year, curriculum planning tools were developed to assist in course selection.

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**PHYSICAL, FINANCIAL, AND PERSONNEL RESOURCES**

2.A.1 The institution demonstrates its commitment to high standards of teaching and learning by providing sufficient human, physical, and financial resources to support its educational programs and to facilitate student achievement of program objectives whenever and however they are offered.

2.A.6 The institution is able to equate its learning experiences with semester or quarter credit hours using practices common to institutions of higher education, to justify the lengths of its programs in comparison to similar programs found in regionally accredited institutions of higher education, and to justify any program-specific tuition in terms of program costs, program length, and program objectives.

The adequacy of physical and financial resources will be addressed in detail in Standards 7 and 8. Resources for faculty hires are addressed in Standard 4.

As stated above, adequacy of resources is an important consideration in the evaluation of whether to proceed with new programs. In addition, the question of adequacy of resources is addressed in detail in the process of Periodic Review, and receives attention both from the department during its self study and from the external reviewers during their evaluation.

The creation of special course fees, as spelled out in Policy 4200, has enabled us to enhance resources for our educational programs. For example, special course fees are used to mitigate the cost of laboratory supplies and equipment. The result is that, in spite of tight budgets, laboratory courses have been able to substantially improve the experience of students. We developed a comprehensive reporting system that requires department chairs to examine the expenditures of course fees to ensure that their use was consistent with policy and that the amount of those fees is appropriate.

The SBOE recently approved a proposal from the Department of Nursing for the first “professional fee” to be charged at Boise State to support such items as simulation equipment, testing fees, and specialized software.
Standard 4.A describes in detail the qualifications of our faculty members. Following is an overview of key points:

- Our expanded focus on graduate programs and research has led to the diversification of faculty roles to incorporate more substantial research agendas and an enhanced complexity of service to the University and community. This diversification of faculty roles has been accompanied by several actions to ensure that we are addressing the instructional needs of our students. One potential result of a shift of faculty roles is a continued reliance on adjunct faculty. However, we have converted a number of adjunct faculty positions into 28 permanent special lecturer positions since 2006. For the remaining adjunct faculty members, we have increased professional development opportunities and have facilitated better incorporation of adjuncts into University life (see discussion in Standard 4A).

- Figure 2.2 depicts the number of full-time tenured/tenure-track and lecturer faculty members in each of our academic departments. As can be seen, each department has a core of at least four tenured/tenure-track/clinical faculty members (a comprehensive listing is in evidence).

- Faculty members receive extensive support in the development of their teaching expertise from the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The CTL, which opened in July 2006, runs numerous workshops on a wide range of subjects and also provides consultation to individual faculty members (see additional discussion in Standard 4A).24

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**FIGURE 2.2 NUMBER OF FACULTY LINES PER DEPARTMENT**

Form submitted to faculty senate on new lines

Listing of departments with number of faculty members
• Faculty members also can receive support in the technological realm from Academic Technologies (AT), a unit of the CTL. That office provides consultation on the development of Blackboard learning tools, personal response systems (clickers), use of rich media images, online and hybrid courses, and the like. This support is provided for all faculty and instructors regardless of the primary mode of course delivery (see additional discussion in Standard 4A).

—LIBRARY

2.A.8 Faculty, in partnership with library and information resources personnel, ensure that the use of library and information resources is integrated into the learning process.

Our response to Standard 5 deals extensively with the adequacy of library resources.

—CRITERIA FOR GRANTING OF CREDIT, AND DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES

2.A.6 The institution is able to equate its learning experiences with semester or quarter credit hours using practices common to institutions of higher education, to justify the lengths of its programs in comparison to similar programs found in regionally accredited institutions of higher education, and to justify any program-specific tuition in terms of program costs, program length, and program objectives.

2.A.10 Credit for prior experiential learning is awarded only in accordance with Policy 2.3 Credit for Prior Experiential Learning.

2.C.4 The institution’s policies for the transfer and acceptance of credit are clearly articulated. In accepting transfer credits to fulfill degree requirements, the institution ensures that the credits accepted are comparable to its own courses. Where patterns of transfer from other institutions are established, efforts to formulate articulation agreements are demonstrated.

2.C.6 Whenever developmental or remedial work is required for admission to the institution or any of its programs, clear policies govern the procedures that are followed, including such matters as ability to benefit, permissible student load, and granting of credit. When such courses are granted credit, students are informed of the institution’s policy of whether or not the credits apply toward a degree.

Idaho State Board of Education policy states that 45 hours of work are required per semester credit. The policy also includes the assumption that for lecture courses, one hour of class time is accompanied by two hours of student preparation and/or learning activities. Thus, an hour of lecture per week for a 15-week semester produces one credit hour. Lab courses, in which students conduct the bulk of their learning activities in class, have a different structure: 3 lab hours per week constitute one credit hour:

24 http://ctl.boisestate.edu/
25 http://itc.boisestate.edu/
26 SBOE policy on hours per credit
The acceptance of transfer credits and credit for prior learning is handled by the Registrar’s Office according to well-articulated policies. All academic credits from a regionally accredited institution are accepted in some form with the exception of professional-technical education credits and some religion courses. The acceptance as equivalencies for Boise State courses relies on an assessment by department chairs. The Registrar’s Office has compiled sets of equivalencies of courses at common transfer institutions within the Transfer Equivalency Guide. A student who is “core certified” at another accredited institution is regarded as having completed his/her general education core at Boise State. The process of evaluation and transferring of credit is more fully discussed in Standard 3.

Credit for prior learning is primarily awarded through examination processes for existing courses and is guided by our Credit for Prior Learning policy. Students can earn credit for a course not taken at Boise State by achieving sufficient scores on exams assessing the competencies of the given course (e.g., CLEP). The exams are developed both nationally and locally.

Boise State offers developmental courses in two areas, mathematics (MATH 15 Pre-algebra and MATH 25 Elementary Algebra) and English (ENGL 90 Developmental Writing). Each of these courses carries a three-credit load in terms of cost to the student, for financial aid, and in calculating the maximum load for which a student may enroll. They do not count toward the number of credits required for a degree. Students are placed into these courses as a result of their ACT, SAT, or Compass scores, or can self-select these courses as a means to prepare for later coursework. Minimum placement score cutoffs are set by the SBOE.

Success of students in our developmental courses is recognized as an important contributor to success in progressing to graduation. In particular, it was recognized that failure in developmental math courses is correlated with poor freshman retention. As will be discussed below, a number of actions resulted.

General Education

2.C.1 The institution requires of all its degree and pre-baccalaureate programs a component of general education and/or related instruction that is published in its general catalog in clear and complete terms.

2.C.2 The general education component of the institution’s degree programs is based on a rationale that is clearly articulated and is published in clear and complete terms in the catalog. It provides the criteria by which the relevance of each course to the general education component is evaluated.

2.C.3 The general education program offerings include the humanities and fine arts, the natural sciences, mathematics, and the social sciences. The program may also include courses that focus on the interrelationships between these major fields of study.

27 Policies and procedures regarding acceptance of transfer credits
28 Transfer equivalency guide
29 Prior learning policy
In its 1999 review\textsuperscript{30} of Boise State University, the NWCCU review team noted that:

“Where the institution does need to focus attention, however, is on that part of the Standard which requires not only the ‘competencies’ more or less suggested by the Core requirement in place, but explicitly ‘identifiable outcomes’ that are assessed in order to guarantee that the goals and expectations of the Core are actually being achieved. There is no evidence that the institution at present has the necessary ‘outcomes assessment’ of its core in place to guarantee that the students who complete the requirement do, in fact, achieve the competencies claimed. They may or may not be; but there is insufficient ‘assessment evidence’ to determine whether ‘expected outcomes’ are being achieved or not. Such assessment results would also enable the institution to know what specific changes might be required to improve that Core requirement.”

In this section we will describe changes we have made in our outcomes assessment for our Core Curriculum: we now have in place a solid process that assesses student mastery of intended Core learning outcomes. We have also undertaken a major overhaul of the Core.

\textbf{—OVERVIEW}

The expected outcomes for a Boise State undergraduate student are characterized by what we expect will be gained by an academic career. Therefore the outcomes are categorized as follows:

\begin{itemize}
\item The student will gain the knowledge, perspectives, and skills provided by a specific academic degree program as described in the University catalog and Department Assessment Reports (DARs). The specific expected outcomes of particular degree programs will be discussed in our treatment of Standard 2.B.
\item The student will gain the knowledge, perspectives, and skills provided by our general education curriculum described in the catalog, which is required of all graduating students and which is comprised of (i) the University Core Curriculum, which includes a mathematics course, (ii) a set of English composition courses, and (iii) a diversity course.
\item The student will learn and demonstrate skills in co-curricular components of an academic career, including disciplinary student clubs, student government, cultural offerings, intercollegiate and intramural athletics, counseling, residential life, and student organizations. Co-curricular components will be discussed in our treatment of Standard 3.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{30} 1999 Review team report
• The student will successfully complete a degree program and graduate from our University. Successful completion is measured by graduation rate, with retention rate as a reasonable “milestone” measure. Successful completion is aided by comprehensive strategies to prepare and support students, including (i) orientation activities for new students, (ii) developmental coursework, which is designed to give under-prepared students the tools they need to master the rigors of college level coursework, and (iii) academic and career advising, which facilitate successful navigation of academic requirements and successful transition to post-graduate life. Our strategy regarding successful completion will be discussed later in this standard (page 24) and in Standard 3.

—BEGINNINGS OF THE UNIVERSITY CORE CURRICULUM

Boise State’s general education is comprised of the Core Curriculum and University requirements of English composition and a diversity course.

The “Core Curriculum” was first adopted in the fall of 1981, with only minor changes and refinements since that time.\(^{31}\) During the period 1990 to 1994, a revision of the Core Curriculum was attempted, and the proposed curriculum represented an effort to move from a content-based curriculum to one that was focused on the skills of critical inquiry and communication. The attempted revision failed for the following important reasons: (i) there was not broad-based agreement with the concept of creating a “critical inquiry” course to be required of all students or with the concept of senior-level interdisciplinary capstone courses, (ii) budget constraints at the time made it difficult for departments to develop the new courses that would be required of the revised curriculum, and (iii) a statewide articulation policy instituted requirements that the Core be transferable among the state institutions and that the Core requirements include mathematics coursework.\(^{32}\)

One major change did emerge from that period. In 1996, the Faculty Senate established a standing committee, the University Core Curriculum Committee, to establish general learning outcomes for the Core and to develop a process for periodic reviewing of Core courses.\(^{33}\) There have been refinements to the policy, the learning objectives, and the review process since that time.

The diversity requirement was instituted in 2006. A standing committee approves courses and conducts assessment of existing courses. The assessment process has been coupled with the Core assessment process for courses that meet both core requirements and the diversity requirement.
English composition is required by the SBOE. Placement criteria for those courses are specified by ACT, SAT, and Compass cut scores set by the SBOE. There is currently a state-wide initiative to review the placement criteria and process.

—PHILOSOPHY, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

As stated in the Core Policy Document and the Undergraduate Catalog,

“It is the University’s responsibility to help students learn to think critically, to communicate clearly and concisely in oral, written, and visual form, to appreciate themselves as part of a larger world, and to cultivate the imagination and intellectual curiosity required for life-long learning. The Core curriculum is designed to help students develop skills, knowledge and understanding that can be applied toward these ends. The curriculum provides a variety of foundational courses in each of three broad areas that approach learning and problem solving in different ways and contribute to the preparation of students as both local and global citizens.”

To fulfill this general philosophy, expected learning outcomes were developed. They are grouped into the following four categories; a comprehensive listing may be found in the Undergraduate Catalog:

- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving: The development of critical thinking and problem solving skills are essential to lifelong learning and for professional growth/success.

- Communication Skills: Effective communication skills are essential for sharing ideas between individuals and organizations and enhancing both personal and professional success.

- Cultural Perspective: The ability to appreciate perspectives and experiences different from one’s own is important both for individual growth and for society. Such cultural perspectives can be defined by history and geographical location as well as by race/ethnicity, gender/gender identity, age, sexual orientation, disability, faith, national origin, political affiliation, as well as other identities within our society.

- Breadth of Knowledge and Intellectual Perspective: Study in a wide variety of fields is important preparation both for lifelong learning and for local and global citizenship.

The University enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the Core by requiring 12 semester credits from approved lists of Core courses in each of three areas, as described in the Undergraduate Catalog.
“Area I courses are generally offered by disciplines in the humanities, arts, languages, and philosophy. They provide opportunities to engage in the study of intellectual and aesthetic products from a variety of cultures. Knowledge of expressions of culture promotes understanding of the diverse ways in which human thought, experience, and communication are historically and ideologically shaped and culturally preserved.

Area II courses are generally offered by disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences, history, education, and economics. They engage students in the study of how people, cultures, societies, and institutions function and have evolved both in specific situations and over time. They examine the forces that shape human and social activity. Appreciation of methods of inquiry provides insight into human cultures and societies.

Area III courses are generally offered by disciplines in the natural and physical sciences, engineering, and mathematics. They promote understanding of the observable physical world. They engage students in the exploration of the relationships among variables. The skills of scientific inquiry expand each student’s ability to understand the world and the ways in which applications of science, engineering, and mathematics transform our lives in substantial ways.”

No single course is required to support all Core learning outcomes. Instead, this distributed model assumes that each course supports a subset of the Core learning outcomes and that students will be exposed to the full complement of learning outcomes by completing the 36 credits of Core. The distribution of credits meets SBOE guidelines as to the minimum number and type of credits and courses to be included in the Core.

Note that as a result of the 1994 state articulation agreement, all students must achieve a level of competence in mathematics. As a result, all students must, as part of their Area III requirements, take a mathematics course. This was not the case prior to 1994.

Presently, there are 38 Area I courses, 24 Area II, and 32 Area III courses in which students may enroll.

—GENERAL EDUCATION: REVIEW OF COURSES PROPOSED FOR INCLUSION IN THE CORE CURRICULUM

Responsibility for oversight and approval of the Core curriculum rests with the Core Curriculum Committee (CCC), which is a standing committee of the Faculty Senate and which is charged to “work with the Provost to address the issue of developing objectives and outcomes for Core classes including assessment methods
that can be used to ensure all existing, as well as new, courses meet the intent of Core...”42 The committee has faculty membership from each academic college, as well as administrative (ex-officio) membership consisting of the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Studies, the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Director of Assessment, and the Registrar.43

The CCC is responsible for identifying intended learning outcomes of the Core, approving new courses from which students can select for Core credit, and assessing the extent to which student are achieving Core expected learning outcomes in Core courses (last modified in Spring 2007).

Departments seeking approval of Core designation for a course must submit a catalog description and a syllabus for the course. They must also submit a “New Core Course Assessment Form,”44 completed for each offering of the course during the prior academic year, which includes (i) identification of the Area (I, II, or III) of the Core to which the course contributes, (ii) a listing of Core-related intended learning outcomes for the course, (iii) information about how the learning outcomes are measured in the course, and (iv) reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of intended learning outcomes.

The evaluation of proposals for Core course status is based primarily on evidence that (i) student learning outcomes that contribute to the General Learning Outcomes of the Core can be articulated for the course and (ii) departmental faculty have engaged in a thorough review of the proposed Core course with respect to its ability to achieve intended learning outcomes of the Core curriculum.

—GENERAL EDUCATION: PERIODIC REVIEW OF CORE COURSES

Prior to 2005, the periodic review of Core courses involved the creation of a short report by the department; that report was focused on “inputs” and asked for no documentation of success in achieving intended learning outcomes.

During 2005 – 2006, a moratorium in new course approvals was instituted by the Faculty Senate to enable the revision of the review process. The revised process was initiated in Fall 2006, after a pilot run during Spring 2006 that involved several instructors from each of several departments.45

The following are the most important elements of the revised review process:

• All Core courses are reviewed for continued inclusion in the Core on a regular, rotating basis. While not specified in the

42 http://www.boisestate.edu/facultysenate/committees/corecurriculum/charge.shtml
43 Membership of the CCC
44 New core course assessment form
45 Folder: Listing of pilot study depts & courses and results from the pilot study
policy, this regular review occurs on a 5-year cycle. The process itself takes place over two years.

- During year 1, course level assessment within a department is conducted. Each instructor of a Core Course completes an assessment report of his/her class(es). All instructors, including adjunct faculty, graduate student instructors, and those teaching online, are required to conduct course-level assessment. In the report, instructors identify course outcomes that align with Core intended learning outcomes, identify the ways in which outcomes are assessed in their courses, and evaluate whether student learning of the outcome was high/moderate/low. In addition, the faculty members are asked to identify overall strengths and weaknesses of Core intended learning outcomes, describe any changes that should be made, and describe any resource requirements.

- Also during year 1, students in Core courses complete a “Core Survey” in which they rate their perceptions as to the degree to which Core intended learning outcomes are emphasized. The results of that survey are made available to the instructors to inform the course-level assessment report.

- Based on the course-level assessment data, the department chair completes a departmental report in which he/she discusses the strengths and weaknesses of Core intended learning outcomes in the department and identifies planned changes to Core courses or to department processes with regards to Core offerings.

- During year 2, the department submits to the CCC all the course level reports and the department report. The CCC creates a report that reviews the results for each department and summarizes and synthesizes the results for the courses and departments assessed during that cycle.

- Additionally, the CCC inserts the results into a curriculum map that aggregates results for Core intended learning outcomes over multiple review cycles. These results are shared with the Faculty Senate, the Provost, and other stakeholders.

Because the process involves departments in a five-year cycle of review, a full picture of the strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum at large will not be realized until the end of the full cycle. The fifth cohort is due to submit reports to the CCC in Fall 2011.

The first full report, based on Cohort 1, was submitted to the Faculty Senate in Spring 2008. It summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of student learning of Core intended learning outcomes
based on an examination of Cohort 1 courses. Importantly, this first round of assessment has found that faculty can identify strong student learning in their courses for some Core learning intended outcomes. Furthermore, outcomes that need improvement have been identified and departments have outlined steps they plan to take to address deficiencies. An example area for improvement is the need for consistency of learning outcomes emphasized across all section offerings of a Core course. The report notes that, overall, the process worked smoothly in its first full round of implementation.

One department in particular, Modern Languages and Literatures, provided an excellent example of an assessment process thereby providing the CCC with detailed information about Core intended learning outcomes and enabling the department to identify specific areas for improvement.52

There were, however, several problems with departments not completing reports. To address these problems, the CCC responded by: (i) identifying a committee liaison to each department, (ii) changing the forms to make it easier for faculty-articulated outcomes to be mapped onto the Core intended learning outcomes, (iii) proposing policy changes (later approved by the Faculty Senate) to address the question of what to do when a department (or a subset of faculty in a department) does not participate in the review process, (iv) developing exemplar reports that can be posted on the CCC website for faculty and chairs to consult, and (v) revising the “Core Survey” to make the results more focused, and therefore more useful to faculty.

Several additional enhancements to the process are needed: (i) at present the CCC does not collect evidence that any actions are taken by departments in response to the plans they developed and (ii) there is no mechanism for dealing with the resource issues identified by departments.

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THE FUTURE OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

Parallel to the conversations and efforts of the Core Curriculum Committee were discussions about “the liberal arts” at Boise State. The impetus for this questioning may have been the denial from Phi Beta Kappa of Boise State’s application to initiate a local chapter. In response to that denial and with support and encouragement from President Kustra, a group of faculty began a year-long series of conversations about the role of liberal arts and the role of our Core Curriculum in a University education.53 The result was the Learning for Life Initiative, which produced a report to the Faculty Senate and to the Provost.54 As a result, the Faculty Senate and the Provost commissioned a Core Reform Task Force (CRTF) to explore what the general education curriculum should be at Boise State. That

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52 MLL materials
53 Learning for Life Homepage
54 Report from Learning for Life Initiative
The composition of the task force included representation from all academic colleges, the CCC, the Registrar's office, and the Provost's Office. The charge to the task force was to:

- Examine Boise State University's current philosophy, learning objectives, and structure for the Core.
- Research how other institutions are addressing their Core requirements.
- Examine SBOE policies that relate Core articulation for students with associate degrees.
- Develop recommendations to the Faculty Senate as to how Boise State's Core requirements might best facilitate student learning of Core intended learning outcomes through modification of the current structure or objectives, an alternative Core path, and/or reaffirmation of existing intended learning outcomes or structure.

A progress report of findings, recommendations, and timeline for campus conversations and refinement was submitted to the Provost this June. Importantly, the CRTF identified five underlying flaws in Boise State's present general education curriculum (a more detailed analysis of each is found in the progress report):

1. A decentralized curricular structure contributes to lack of vision and unfocused delivery.
2. The structure of the Core Curriculum requirements does not support intended outcomes.
3. Design and delivery of Core courses is not focused on Core intended outcomes.
4. The Core lacks vision; there is nothing distinctive/special in our offerings.
5. There are gaps in the intended learning outcomes.

The CRTF will continue to meet through the summer and fall of 2009. As of this writing, the next steps are to:

- Have structured, campus-wide conversations about university intended learning outcomes, possible structures to achieve those intended outcomes, and assessment models.
- Based on those discussions, develop an implementation plan that includes pilot projects, sequencing of components, assessment strategies, and mechanisms for addressing resource issues.
- Obtain the necessary approvals of changes to the Core from Faculty Senate, Provost, and SBOE.
- Proceed with implementation of changes to the Core and with assessment of the success of that implementation.
Our efforts related to reform our Core speak directly to Boise State’s culture of campus conversation about issues and questions, followed by critical assessment of practices. The ultimate goal is the improvement of our curriculum.

—OTHER UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS (DIVERSITY, ENGLISH COMPOSITION)

In addition to the Core Curriculum requirements above, all students are required to fulfill a diversity requirement and to take coursework in English composition.

The Diversity requirement was developed by a faculty committee and approved by Faculty Senate in response to the realization that in order for our graduates to function in a diverse society, they must be exposed to a diversity of cultures and ideas.57 Beginning in 2006, students are required to take one course that has a “diversity” designation. That designation was assigned by the faculty committee after reviewing an application for consideration from the chair of the department offering the course.58 There are presently 97 diversity courses listed in the Undergraduate Catalog.59 A student may use education abroad credit to fulfill the diversity requirement. It should be noted that the group presently considering the revision of the Core Curriculum is looking at ways to incorporate the diversity requirement into the Core.

The English composition requirement is mandated by the state. In practice, Boise State requires that all baccalaureate graduates complete the equivalent of six semester credits of English composition. The Department of English uses its “Student Outcomes Assessment Program,” which has been in place for 14 years, to determine whether English composition students achieve the competencies the department aims to teach them.

The assessment program consists of an annual sampling of three student portfolios or folders of collected work from each course section, representing ~20% of the total student population. A committee of readers reads the portfolios and assesses them in terms of how well they meet the competencies listed for each course. The team also evaluates comments from the readers and undergoes a guided reflection on the results. The findings are evaluated and a curricular or programmatic response to the assessment results is developed.60 An illustration of the effectiveness of the assessment program is given in Figure 2.3, which shows the increased number of students who are competent in a particular defined competency. The graph is from the 2007 Focused Visit report, in which the English composition assessment program is discussed in detail.61
Student Success: Retention and Graduation

For our educational programs to be successful, not only must they be appropriately structured, but the students who undertake those programs must successfully complete them. In some institutions with very high retention and graduation rates, such completion is not an issue. However, retention and graduation are important issues for the state of Idaho, which, at present, has one of the lowest freshmen to sophomore persistence rates in the nation. The issue is compounded at a metropolitan institution such as ours, with many students balancing their educational careers with other demands on their time such as family and employment.

In 2005, in response to a low freshman retention rate at Boise State, the Provost, in collaboration with the Vice President for Student Affairs, created the Freshman Success Task Force (FSTF). The FSTF was created specifically to further assess how well our new students are able to complete their first year of college, to identify barriers to the success of those students, and to make recommendations as to how to remove those barriers. Several key recommendations have been accomplished:

- A new Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Studies position was created to report to the Provost, and was given the roles of implementing many of the recommendations of the FSTF and, in general, enhancing the success of our undergraduate students.

- New Student Orientation has been completely restructured and is now required of all incoming traditional-aged freshmen. See Standard 3.

- Enhancements in UNIV 100, first year seminar, were created by connecting the course to academic department curricula and learning goals, increasing student enrollment, and adapting the course to emphasize engagement in learning. See Standard 3.

- We created clear pathways to academic advising and we increased the number of opportunities were created for general advising and program-specific advising. In the past three years, the advising structure on campus was revised and at least four professional advisors were added. Advising is dealt with in more detail in Standard 3.

- Modifications in developmental math sequence course structure have resulted in significantly higher pass rates in these courses.

- Early warning systems were created to identify and intervene
with academically at-risk students. At-risk students are identified in a number of ways, including low grades in courses important for future success (English 101 and Math 025/108), the Academic Alert system implemented by Advising and Academic Enhancement, and queries to identify students who do not register. Students indentified through these mechanisms receive phone calls and e-mails, and are invited to “chat” to assist in addressing areas of concern.

- Modifications were made to better ensure students are placed into the correct level of mathematics and English composition courses. If students are placed into too high a level of course, they are likely to be unsuccessful and as a result need to either repeat the course or begin farther down in the sequence. If a student is put into too low a level of course, that student would end up taking unnecessary coursework. The Department of English is working with departments at other public state universities and colleges to pilot self-placement strategies.64 Additionally, there have been actions at the college and department level. For example, the College of Engineering secured a 4-year grant from the Hewlett Foundation, designed to develop the means to increase the retention and success of their majors. They developed an integrated first-year experience for their majors, reasoning that if students must wait until they are sophomores or juniors to take an engineering course, they will be less likely to be retained. They also pursued a number of avenues to help their majors with mathematics, including the development of ENGR 110 Engineering with Pre-Calculus, to focus on mathematics success. That course uses a model of supplemental instruction that is based on the Active Learning in Math program, which was used effectively to support students in difficult mathematics courses.65

In response to a low graduation rate at Boise State, the following actions have been taken.

- As described above, a “Finish-in-Four” program was initiated, which guarantees that students participating in the program will have access to the coursework needed to be able to complete a degree in four years. Interestingly, the creation of such a program presented a number of challenges. For example, some departments needed to offer additional sections of courses to enable students to complete their programs in four years. Although only a handful (~40) of students are enrolled in the program, the collateral benefits to other students have been substantial because the analysis of course availability in preparation for “the guarantee” has resulted in increased capacity in

64 English pilot study of self-placement strategies
65 COEN Hewlett Proposal & Report
bottleneck courses such as general chemistry. Also, better planning has ensured availability of upper division courses in high demand majors such as business and communication.\(^{66}\)

- A concerted effort has been undertaken to provide colleges and departments with information on the graduation of their students, including time to graduate and number of credits at graduation.\(^{67}\) Additionally, a new analysis has been developed that shows the “fate” of students each year for a department, enabling a department chair to see whether the students in his/her department are more likely than expected to depart from the University without a degree.\(^{68}\)

The Provost has recently called upon all departments to re-examine their curricula to determine if they are imposing overly restrictive requirements on their students and thereby reducing the likelihood of graduation. The Provost also has asked the Faculty Senate to examine credits to degree to determine if the requirement of 128 credits is warranted.\(^{69}\)

Fortunately, it appears that the actions cited above are having positive effects on the retention and graduation rates of our students (see figures 2.4 and 2.5). As is widely discussed, however, retention and graduation rates are incomplete measures of student success at urban institutions because they focus only on first-time, full-time freshmen and not on the success of part-time, stop out, and transfer students.

—HONORS COLLEGE

The Honors College provides students with opportunities to expand their intellectual development through stimulating classes, co-curricular activities, leadership responsibilities, and working closely with the best faculty. The twenty-six credit Honors curriculum enhances existing Core courses, and offers interdisciplinary colloquia, a capstone experience, and an Honors Research Project. All components of the curriculum are implemented through close working relationships with faculty. Outside of the classroom or lab, the Honors College provides students with opportunities to learn from the world around them, through study abroad and through service projects and cultural activities in our community.

Co-curricular activities are an important component of the Honors College experience at Boise State University. Recognizing that impor-
tant education occurs beyond the walls of the classroom or laboratory, the Honors College provides cultural activities that range from attendance at plays and concerts to participation in student trips.

The Honors College also promotes student civic engagement in the form of leadership development opportunities and service activities in our community, such as building homes for Habitat for Humanity, working with the Idaho Foodbank, and helping a host of other service organizations both on and off campus.

Commendations, Recommendations, and Action Plan

—COMMENDATIONS:

- Boise State has a clear understanding that it is important to respect its roots in undergraduate programming as it evolves to become a metropolitan research university. The institution has a solid focus on creating and maintaining quality undergraduate programs, and is responsive to changing needs of students and the region.

- Increasing student success and learning has been a focus of considerable effort, and has resulted in a freshman success task force and action plan, student-centered programs such as Finish in Four, enhanced advising structures, and enhanced support for faculty development in pedagogy. Those efforts are beginning to pay off in increased retention and graduation rates.

- Boise State takes its general education requirement seriously, and has undertaken a complete examination of its Core Curriculum. All indications are that there will be revisions that will be solidly founded in a set of intended learning outcomes, and that a structure will be created for the effective assessment of success in the achievement of those intended learning outcomes.

—RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Although progress has been made on the success and retention of undergraduate students, efforts need to be expanded to all academic levels and career types. For instance, the unique needs of transfer students, students with financial needs, adult students, and under-represented students have not yet been fully addressed.
• Given the identified weaknesses of the current Core Curriculum, it is imperative that the Core Reform Task Force continue with development of new general education requirements, implementation plans, and assessment structures.

—ACTION PLAN:

• The University will gather and analyze data related to the success of various student populations. That analysis and possible response efforts will be the focus of (i) cross-departmental and -division conversations and goal setting regarding student success, (ii) faculty development programs, and programming and support for department chairs, and (iii) financial incentives to departments for curriculum redesigns.
• The Core Reform Task Force will continue its progress on reform of the Core Curriculum. During the fall, it will hold open forums to gather input, and in February will present to the Faculty Senate a plan for phased implementation and for processes of review.