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REVIEWING AND RETHINKING RHODES' CURRICULUM

A Preliminary Report from the Educational Development Committee

I. A Brief Review

In the recent past, Rhodes has been thinking seriously about the issues of curricular review and planning for reform. During the academic year 1997-1998, Rhodes undertook a strategic self-study as part of the accreditation review process of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). In that same year, the Curriculum Committee of the faculty raised serious questions and made recommendations concerning long-term curricular review and planning, including recommendations about the general degree requirements. During the summer of 1998, a Curriculum Work Group of the faculty, under the direction of Dean John Planchon, considered seven issues related to the academic program and the curriculum of the college. These were:¹

1. An investigation into the divisional model we now use as the foundation for our general education goals as well as researching alternative models.
2. A clarification of discipline-specific goals of the distribution requirements.
3. An analysis of the major, minor, and elective hours, their purposes and their relationships to general education goals.
4. An analysis of the senior seminar across departments and programs.
5. An examination of ways in which to achieve more of an interdisciplinary synthesis.
6. An examination of internships, service learning, practica, their purposes and their relationship to general education goals.
7. An examination of the desirability of an honors program or other program which provides special opportunities and recognition to students who excel academically.

The work of this group, which is summarized in an extensive fifty-eight page "Curriculum Report," provides a foundation for the work of the present Educational Development Committee of the Faculty.

On April 14, 2000, President Bill Troutt's inaugural address included ten points or "steps forward" to be undertaken by the faculty, administration, staff, and students of Rhodes College. One of these, the "third step forward," concerned "reviewing and rethinking the curriculum." In his address, President Troutt outlined this curricular review as follows:

As I look to the future, I see a Rhodes known for a coherent integrated curriculum that speaks to our deepest values and to what we believe is the best in liberal arts education Imagine with me a curriculum so thoughtfully designed, so coherent, so engaging, so intellectually vibrant that academic leaders seek it out for emulation . . .²

¹ From the memo, "Recommendations Concerning the Curriculum," from John Planchon, Dean of Academic Affairs, to the Rhodes Faculty, August 28, 1998.

² From the Inaugural Address by President William E. Troutt, Idlewild Presbyterian Church, April 14, 2000.

As President Troutt and the faculty worked together to form ten Task Forces to implement the ten “steps forward” into the future, the Educational Development Committee received its charge to lead the way in a review and rethinking of the current Rhodes curriculum, a task that has been both challenging and unenviable, affecting as it does and being affected by many of the other initiatives outlined in the President’s Inaugural Address.

II. Initial Steps and Reports

Among the various steps taken in considering a review of the Rhodes curriculum was a survey sent out to the faculty. It was intended to help the EDC in identifying the first steps to educational development by asking fifteen questions about the present educational program. 61% of the Rhodes faculty responded, with the result that the EDC was able to target three overarching “areas of concern” and six particular ones. These were presented in the form of a report to the Rhodes faculty and to the Board of Trustees in their respective April meetings in 2001. [See attached “Issues of Concern”] While we need not reiterate these areas in detail, issues that were of most concern to the faculty were concerns with the amount and kind of general distribution requirements and the unwieldy divisional model presently in place, the current course loads for students, and students’ lack of writing, communication, and quantitative skills. Overall, while there is general agreement on the basics of a Rhodes liberal arts education, there is perceived to be little connection between stated general education goals and the rationale for degree requirements.

Accordingly, the Educational Development Committee continued studying both peer-group and top-tier liberal arts colleges³, especially with an eye to the following areas outlined by the 1998 Curriculum Task Force:

1. An investigation into the divisional model we now use as the foundation for our general education goals as well as researching alternative models.
2. A clarification of discipline-specific goals of the distribution requirements.
3. An examination of ways in which to achieve more of an interdisciplinary synthesis.

In addition, the committee investigated:

1. Course-based vs. credit-based programs;
2. Course loads and schedules

In its examination, the committee operated on the assumption that the Rhodes curriculum has “served us well,”⁴ and was not in crisis, so that while revision was called for, it need

³ These colleges included those surveyed by the Curriculum Task Force of 1998 and the recent *US News and World Report* (2002) ranking of the top ten first-tier liberal arts colleges. The list includes: Amherst, Carleton, Centre, Davidson, Grinnell, Haverford, Macalester, Oberlin, Pomona, Reed, University of the South (Sewanee), Swarthmore, Wellesley, and Williams. Other colleges surveyed in various areas, such as course load, contact hours, course-based vs. credit-based requirements, and core requirement rationale were: Albion College, Bard, Bucknell, Drew, Colgate, Furman, Lawrence, Occidental, Trinity, Union (Schenectady, NY), Union (Jackson, TN), and Washington and Lee.

⁴ Cf. President Troutt’s Inaugural Address.

not be a radical one. Thus, the committee sought ways in which the Rhodes curriculum could be reconfigured by incorporating existing courses and departments.

The EDC has not resolved where the four-course Search/Life Requirement fits or whether it be used to satisfy several areas, nor has it done anything specifically about requirements for a major or minor, nor has it specifically addressed the role of Area Studies.

III. Some Models for Consideration

The EDC found the following general trends among the colleges that it investigated:

- 1) None had as many general degree requirements as Rhodes (17). The colleges with the fewest were Amherst (#1), with no general degree requirements other than a first-year seminar and a major; Swarthmore (#2), which requires one year of a foreign language and a major ; Wellesley (#4), with three “course units” in each of three divisional areas; and Grinnell, with a first-year tutorial and an academic major. Pomona (#10) requires “no specific course or department,” to graduate, with the exception of a first-year course called “Critical Inquiry.”⁵
- 2) Among the top colleges, Amherst, Swarthmore, Haverford, Wellesley, Davidson, and Pomona had course-based, rather than credit-based programs (32 each). Reed College was also course-based (30 “units”). Bucknell, Colgate, Union and Occidental are also course-based (32-36 courses). Other top colleges that were credit-based (Carleton, Centre, Grinnell, Macalester, Oberlin, and Sewanee) had courses that were four to six credit-hours each, without regard to number of classroom hours of contact. (Some, such as Reed and Wellesley, do have quarter-courses, which appear equivalent to our current 1- credit hour courses).
- 3) An increasing number of colleges in our peer group and amongst those we seek to emulate have organized their curricula and general degree requirements around skills and abilities deemed essential for students in the liberal arts, rather than around traditional divisional or departmental distribution requirements. ***We offer two of these models as distinct, creative possibilities for a restructuring of the Rhodes general education requirements. For purposes of comparison, we offer two possibilities based on recommendations from the Curricular Task Force of 1998 and on the current wording of the College Catalog (pp. 7-8). PLEASE SEE THE ATTACHED:***
 - A. **Skill-based general education requirements.** The EDC has dubbed this “Awareness, Analysis, Articulation” (AAA). It is based upon the PAC (“Perception, Analysis, and Communication” program of Pomona College. In 1994, Pomona’s faculty developed this unique innovative program, based upon skills in ten different areas. This core curriculum is intended to recognize flexibility in student interests and in the liberal arts curriculum, while at the same time providing certain common intellectual experiences and development of skills appropriate to a liberal arts college. The EDC

⁵ Pomona does, however, have a General Education program (developed in 1994) that is organized around ten skills in “perception, analysis, and communication” (PAC). Cf. Pomona’s website at www.pomona.edu.

has modified these ten areas for use at Rhodes and has shown how existing courses in the Rhodes curriculum might fit into this scheme.

- B. General education requirements based on “areas of inquiry and ability,” based on similar models from Albion College and the University of Puget Sound’s undergraduate program. [With suggestions of existing Rhodes courses to fulfill these requirements.]
- C. General education requirements originally recommended by the Curriculum Task Force of 1998, based on slight modifications to existing Rhodes courses. [Note: “Search” and “Life” requirements are divided between first-year and senior year. The EDC has been discussing some further recommendations with regard to these requirements.] The EDC believes that further reduction of the number of required courses is needed.
- D. General education requirements based on the nine “areas of skill” outlined in “Rhodes’ Educational Ideals” (pp. 7-8 of the 2001-2002 Rhodes College Catalog). The EDC believes that this model is not workable in terms of defining distribution requirements because the skills areas overlap too much.

A. AWARENESS, ANALYSIS, ARTICULATION

1) Thinking critically about values and rationality	Eng. 221, 223; WS 400; Hum. 101-102; 201-202 [Religion, Philosophy tracks]; Phil. 201, 202, 212, 213, 232, 250, 304, 305, 310, 311, 314, 318, 320, 350, 360, 370, 401, 411, 415; Pol. Sci. 214, 310, 311, 314, 316, 411; RS 101-102, 211, 212, 213, 220, 232, 233, 210, 214, 251, 253, 255, 256, 258, 259, 300-301; Phil. 833, 835; RS 830 (Study Abroad)
2) Critical reading and interpreting literature	Eng. 210, 215, 220, 221, 223, 225, 230, 235, 260, 261, 262, 265; Eng. 831, 834, 843 (Brit. & European Studies); Chin. 205, 210, 212; Fr. 313, 314, 335, 336, 345; Ger. 340, 401, 403, 405, 407; GRS 212, 393; Rus. 212, 214; Sp. 306, 330, 340, 350, 360, 370, 395, 405, 406, 408, 410, 412-413, 421-422; Hist. 326 [Hum. 101-102; 201-202 lit. track]; Pol. Sci. 211. [RS 101 could fulfill this]
3) Understanding and using techniques of observation, experimentation, and scientific reasoning (Advanced and research courses not included)	Bio. 105, 120-120L; 121-121L; 200; 201; Chem. 105, 111, 112, 122, 180; Bus. Ad. 375 (?); Geol. 111-111L, 112-112L, 214-214L; Phys. 101, 103, 105, 106, 109-110, 111-112; Psych. 212
4) Understanding and using quantitative and formal reasoning	Math. 105, 107, 111, 115, 121, 161-162; Comp.Sci. 195 & 195L, [295, 298]; Phil. 206, 319; Phys. 401, 402; Econ. 308
5) Understanding and analyzing statistical and quantitative data	A/S 261, 262; Bio. 120L, 121L; Chem. 111L, 112L, 122L, 180; Econ. 201, 205, 290, 302, 307, 308, 320; Bus. Ad. 241; Geol. 111L, 112L, 214L; Urban Studies 450 (?); GIS 222; Math. 105, 111, 161-162; Comp. Sci. 195L, 295, 298, 390, 394; Phys. 101L, 103, 105, 106, 113L-114L, 213L-214L; Poli. Sci. 270; Psych. 105, 110, 120, 200, 211

6) Critically interpreting and analyzing works of creative artistic expression	Art 150, 225, 227 (Arch.), 231, 232, 265, 321, 323, 326, 328, 334, 337, 341, 343, 345, 356, 365, 440, Art 836, 833, 843 (Study Abroad); Eng. 241, 242, 245 (Film); Fr. 234, 334 (Film); Ger. 307; Russ.210, 214; Mus. 101, 105, 116; Theat. 100, 210, 280, 281, 370, 380
7) Performing or producing works of creative artistic expression	Art 101, 105, 107, 108, 111, 122, 166, 300, 301, 305, 307, 311, 322, 366; Eng. 200, 201, 300, 301, 310, 311; Hist. 254; Mus. 160-177 (Performance); 190-197 (Performance) (NB: All are one-credit); Theat. 120, 200, 220, 222, 231, 240, 250, 251, 254, 255, 310, 320, 331, 334, 340, 352, 470/471/472; 129, 139, 229, 329, 339, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346 (?)
8) Exploring and understanding human behavior in society, social relations, and social categories	A/S 103, 105, 203, 205, 206, 207, 208, 215, 264, 300, 301; Bio. 370; Econ. 101-102, 205, 222; Eng. 455 (Linguistics); GRS 211, 242; Urban Studies 350, 351, 450; Am. St. 250 (?); Ed. 201; Hist. 345; WS 200; IS 100, 190, 221, 243, 244, 245, 261, 262, 263, 264, 271, 274, 281, 283; Phil. 232, 318; Pol. Sci. 151, 161, 211, 212, 214, 260, 261, 310; Psych. 105, 110, 120, 150; RS 232, 233, 256
9) Exploring and understanding an historical culture	A/S 207, 208; Fr. 302; Ger. 303-304; GRS 211, 221, 222, 231, 232, 241, 242, 305; Sp. 410, 412-413, 421-422; Hist. 101, 205, 211, 212, 213, 215, 216, 217, 224, 231, 232, 233, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 247, 249, 252, 254, 257, 258, 261, 262, 264, 267, 281, 282, 285, 288, 289, 293, 294, 296, 305, 312, 314, 318, 319, 326, 328, 332, 334, 335, 336, 339, 341, 343, 345, 351, 352, 363, 394; Hum. 101-102 & 201-202 (Search; Hist. track); IS 190, 221, 333, 336; Phil. 201, 202; RS 101 (potentially) 210, 251, 253, 260, 272; Art 836, 843; Hist. 830, 834, 844; Phil. 833, 835; RS 830 (Study Abroad)

10) Comparing and contrasting contemporary cultures	A/S 103, 205, 206, 209, 264, 300; Eng. 220, 235, 364, 375, 242; Chin. 205, 210, 212, 300, [301-302]; Fr. 234, 308, 317, 345; Germ. 155, 303-304; Russ. 205, 214; Sp. 205, 209, 305, 309, 310, 360, 365, 370, 406; Hist. 252, 262, 264, 267, 289, 294, 296, 382, 388; Int. 195 (1 credit only); IS 200, 243, 244, 245, 246, 250, 261, 263, 264, 274, 281, 282, 283; RS 255
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1. Many of these courses could be used to fulfill other requirements, like "writing intensive" and "speaking intensive" (Pomona, for example, requires two such courses)
2. In addition, fluency in a foreign language at the level of the third-semester is to be required. Elementary and intermediate language courses are not included on the above list.
3. Physical education courses would also be required.
4. Most liberal arts colleges require at least a first-year seminar of all students, but this course may be used to fulfill other requirements, especially writing.
5. Note also that "Search" and "Life" requirements at Rhodes (4 courses) may be integrated into these ten categories, if desired.
6. Some of these courses have pre-requisites at a lower level (Not all 300 and 400 courses have pre-requisites, and some are by "permission of instructor.")

B. AREAS OF INQUIRY, ANALYSIS & ABILITY

<p>Values Inquiry (At least four courses)</p> <p>4 courses</p>	<p>Search: HUM 101, 102, 201, 202</p> <hr/> <p>Life: RS 101, 102 +</p> <hr/> <p>Related: Business Admin: 265 (Topics: Business Ethics) Philosophy: 304, 305, 320 (? : 300 <i>level</i>) Relig Stud: 213, 232, 233</p>
<p>Writing Ability</p> <p>1 course</p>	<p>Eng: 151, 155, 200 (Intro Poetry Writing), 201 (Intro Fiction Writing), 251 (Advanced Essay Writing)</p> <p>[Any course designated by "W"]</p>
<p>Effective Communication</p> <p>1 course</p>	<p>Foreign languages (at the 201 level) [Some kind of "speaking intensive" courses]</p>
<p>Artistic Awareness and Analysis</p> <p>1 course</p>	<p>Art: 101 (Drawing), 105 (Painting), 107 (Sculpture), 108 (3d Design), 111 (Photography), 122 (Arch Design), 166 (Studio Art) Chem: 180 (Art & Sci of It Painting) Eng: 200 (Intro Poetry Writing), 241 (Hist & Crit of Film) Russian: 214 (Dost. in Lit & Film) Music: THEORY OFFERINGS (103-4, 205), APPLIED, ENSEMBLE Theatre: 100, 120, 200, 210, 220, 221, 222, 231, 254, 255</p>
<p>Quantitative Analysis</p> <p>1 course</p>	<p>Math: 105, 107, 111, 115, 121-2, 161-2, 223, 251, 261 Comp Sci: 195, 295, 298 Philosophy: 206</p>
<p>Scientific Inquiry</p> <p>2 courses, 1 with lab</p>	<p>Bio: (105, 120-1, 200, 201, 202, 204, 206, 207, 209, 240, 250, 252, 253, 254) Chem: 105, 111-2, 122, 211-2 Geology: 111-2, 214, 254 Physics: 101, 013, 105, 106, 109-10, 111-2, 211-2</p>
<p>Historical Inquiry</p> <p>2 courses</p>	<p>Art: (History of Art courses: 150, 225, 227, 231, 232, 265) Eng: 241 (Hist & Crit of Film) Grk/Roman Studies: 221, 222 History: 101, 205, 211-296 [Most courses in History Dept. without pre-requisites] Music: 227-8 Philosophy: 201, 202 Theatre: 280, 281</p>
<p>Social Inquiry and Analysis</p> <p>1 course</p>	<p>Anthro/Soc: 103, 105, 203, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 215, 261-2, 264, 275) Econ/BA: 101-2, 222 (Classical & Marxian Poli Econ) American Studies: 200, 250 Education: 201 IS: 100, 190, 200 Comp Sci: 185 Music: 116, 133 Poli Sci: 151, 161, 200, 211, 212, 214, 260, 261, 270 Psych: 105, 110, 120, 150, 200, 211, 212, 216, 222, 223, 226, 227, 229, 230, 234</p>

<p>Global Awareness & Inquiry into Diversity (non-canonical texts, courses that broach the theme of diversity)</p> <p>1 course</p>	<p>Anthro/Soc: 208 Econ/BA: 210 (Intntl Econ) Eng: 220 (Topics in Women & Lit) German: 155 (Germ Cult Studies) Russian: 205, 210 Spanish: 205, 209 History: 261-296 Asian Studies: 150 Women Studies: 200 Interdisc Studies: 195 IS: 221, 243, 244, 245, 246, 250, 261, 262, 263, 264, 273, 274, 282, 285 Music: 118, 120 Poli Sci: 230 Psych: 232</p>
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C. Recommendations from Curriculum Task Force 1998

- 1., 2. The Search for Values or Life, Then and Now (two designated courses in the first year)**
- 3., 4. The Search for Values or Life, Then and Now (two designated courses in the senior year)**
- 5. Basic Writing for College-level Studies (one course)**
--may be met with acceptable AP scores
- 6. Mathematical Reasoning (one course)**
--may be met with acceptable AP score
- 7. Foreign Language Competency (one course at the 201 level)**
--may be met with acceptable AP or competency test score
- 8., 9. Humanities (two courses)**
--two designated courses in Literature, History, Philosophy, Religious Studies, with at least one from Literature or History
--may be met with a major in the department of English, Foreign Languages and Literatures, History, Philosophy, Religious Studies
- 10., 11. Fine Arts (two courses)**
--two designated courses
--may be met with a major in the department of Art, Music or Theatre
- 12., 13. Social Sciences (two courses)**
--two designated courses
--may be met with a major in the department of Anthropology/ Sociology, Economics/Business Administration, International Studies, Political Science or Psychology
- 14., 15. Physical and Life Sciences (two courses)**
--one designated physical science course with a laboratory component and one designated life science course with a laboratory component
--may be met with a major in the department of Biology, Chemistry or Physics
- 16. International perspectives (one course)**
--one designated (IP) course
--upper-level ["202"-level or above] foreign language studies
--met by international students seeking degrees from Rhodes and by students whose

native and dominant languages are other than English.

D. CURRENT CATALOG SKILL AREAS

From Rhodes' Educational Ideals (pp. 7-8 of the current catalog)

Goals: "to acquire and informed understanding of the world, cultivate an appropriate set of dispositions and sensibilities, and develop a comprehensive personal philosophy." (p. 7)

Areas of skill: 1) Critical skills; 2) creative skills; 3) communication skills; 4) research skills; 5) evaluation skills; 6) empathic skills; 7) aesthetic skills; 8) synthetic skills.

Rhodes general education requirements organized around these "skills":

Critical skills: the ability to analyze arguments, to assess evidence, to discover, articulate, and evaluate assumptions	Religious Studies; Search; Social and Behavior Sciences; History courses
Creative skills:	All creative writing courses; music and theatre performance; studio art
Communication skills: include writing, proficiency in foreign language	Writing-intensive courses, English 151; Foreign language courses to 201 level
Research skills:	Senior paper; natural sciences; psychology; anthropology/sociology
Evaluation skills:	Not sure how different this one is from "Critical skills"
Empathic skills:	Courses in diversity could go here from a variety of areas; study abroad; service-learning?
Aesthetic skills:	Philosophy; Art, Theatre, and Music History
Synthetic skills:	Mathematics; History; some Interdisciplinary courses

**Issues of Concern in the Rhodes College Curriculum:
A Report to the Faculty and the Board of Trustees
From the Educational Development Committee, 4/25/01**

It seems clear that our curriculum is not in a 'crisis' and thus a radical restructuring is not required. We have, however, identified three overarching areas of concern and six particular ones. First, What do we want students to know, both as specialists and generalists? Second, How can our stated educational goals be most clearly related to our general degree requirements? Third, How can the culture of intellectual pursuit be fostered and facilitated by our curriculum design?

The Six Areas of Concern:

- 1) Our course load 'norm' of 14 hours per semester in order to fulfill the 112 hours required for graduation in 4 years is not 'natural,' given our assignment of an average of three credit hours per course without labs or extra work. This disparity results in confusion and anxiety on the part of students and advisors, and militates against students' taking courses that they want rather than those that will 'fit.'
- 2) Faculty in all divisions have expressed concern with the writing competence of students beyond English 151, in addition to the lack of other communicative skills (speaking, presentation).
- 3) Faculty in all divisions, as well as outside evaluators, have expressed concern with Rhodes students' lack of quantitative skills, which is perceived as a weakness. There is no specific 'math' requirement, a lack that may contribute to the problem. That is not to say that adding a math requirement would be the solution; rather, it would further exacerbate the problem of too many requirements.
- 4) There is a perceived imbalance in the curriculum, with four courses of the student's program dedicated to Search or Life, thus 'privileging' certain areas, while the Fine Arts area is correspondingly devalued by having the fewest number of distribution requirements.
- 5) The area distribution model for the curriculum may have surpassed its usefulness, as indicated by the proliferation of 'topics' courses that blur traditional disciplinary boundaries. This may in fact be desirable, given #6, below.
- 6) 'Experimentation in a non-penalty environment' is difficult for students, given the emphasis on core and major requirements, anxiety over G.P.A.'s, and faculty reluctance to expand pass/fail options. So many required courses severely limit the options for electives. Courses that contribute to the understanding of diversity, study abroad, experimental and service-learning courses, while all desirable, cannot currently be required of -- or in many cases, taken by -- students who are already overloaded.

Towards a solution:

We seek the middle ground of modifying the existing scheme, rather than doing away with it or keeping it as is. One of the means of doing this may be by the designation of certain courses as 'qualitative options', such as writing-intensive, quantitative, diversity, service-learning, research, environment, global citizenship, etc. There are already a number of existing courses within our areas of distribution requirements that would qualify for these designations and might also be counted as four-credit-hour courses, along the lines of existing lab science courses, foreign language courses, and senior seminars. That would provide some flexibility within the curriculum.