

## **IDEA GATHERING FOR DOCUMENT ON 4X4 THAT WILL POTENTIALLY SERVE AS THE BASIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**In the form of a goal, articulate what it is you think we are trying to achieve from an academic standpoint by reconsidering the 4x4 curriculum.**

**Goal:** Increase learning and retention of information and development of relevant skills by undergraduate students in preparation for graduate and professional study, entry into the workforce, and informed global citizenship.

Sub-goals:      increasing the rigor of course work  
                      increasing student engagement

**Objective:** Examine the feasibility of a 4x4 curriculum structure that would create a more engaging and outcomes-based learning environment at GW. This objective reflects GW's mission statement content: "The University values a dynamic, student-focused community stimulated by cultural and intellectual diversity and built upon a foundation of integrity, creativity, and openness to the exploration of new ideas." The issues underlying this examination of a move to a 4x4 curriculum are both curricular and non-curricular based. Curricular issues have to do with student engagement, development of critical thinking skills, general education requirements, and integrating faculty research activities into teaching. Non-curricular issues have to do with work loads of the faculties, class sizes, class scheduling, etc. The proposed 4x4 shift can be viewed as a vehicle to achieve curricular change and to address the non-curricular issues. Such a shift requires a change of culture and trust among those involved. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2005), "... culture is the most important element that must be altered and managed in order to change what an organization or institution values and how it acts." Has the time arrived for GW to attempt such a shift in its academic culture through a shift from a 5x3 curriculum structure to a 4x4 curriculum structure where the goal is an improved environment of learning brought about by

- Revised and reduced in number general curriculum requirements;
- Development of interdisciplinary core courses developed to enhance critical and analytical thinking;
- Improvement of student engagement through structured academic, advising, and collaborative learning activities centered around greater student-faculty interaction both in and outside the classroom;
- Enhanced academic rigor connected to approaches aimed at reducing grade inflation;
- Increased participation of undergraduates in research activities?

**Goal:** To save 20% on faculty costs per year – estimated to be \$20M.

Sub-goals:      reduce the number of part-time faculty members  
                      increase existing faculty salaries  
                      increase student financial aid to attract better students

**Goal:** To have GW students fully present in their education – present in mind and spirit as well as in their seats. Since “the great differences that divide mankind are not about ends but about means [Samuel Johnson],” we probably all agree that we are interested in seeing our undergraduate students seriously engaged with their education. Engagement is marked by

- Courses, readings, pedagogical encounters, lines of inquiry perceived by students as life changing;
- The habitual consciousness of a need to connect thought with action, studies with practices, the campus with the Hill;
- Student-faculty connection (conversation, discussion, research collaboration)
- Undergraduate research;
- The face-to-face classroom as the center of university life not simply a scheduling necessity;
- Increased focus on course work – more real hours spent;
- Improved student morale, as evidenced by warmth towards GW, not just towards DC.

**Goal:** Increase student engagement and academic challenge for our students through a fundamental cultural change that begins with the recruitment of our students and extends to our faculties’ attitudes and commitments. Use as the mechanism for this cultural change a shift from a 5x3 curriculum structure to a 4x4 curriculum structure owing to the latter’s ability to release resources to further enhance the academic enterprise of GW. The available resources will initially provide the incentive base for carrying out the change and afterwards can provide funds for investment in academic programs.

**Goal:** Determine the best strategy to increase academic challenge and student engagement as outlined in the Strategic Plan for Academic Excellence. When academic challenge and student engagement exist, students are pushed, both by faculty members and internal motivation, to a deeper analysis and understanding of the concepts and ideas to which they are being exposed. Challenged students are expected to think critically and to synthesize material in order to gain understanding.

**Goal:** At the undergraduate level, GW will enhance student engagement and learning through academic challenge and a rigorous intellectual environment that permeates every aspect of student life [Source – GW’s Strategic Plan for Academic Excellence]. This goal can be defined by ensuring that the curriculum (General Curriculum Requirements as well as within a major) challenges students in all courses in terms of active course participation, research, reading, writing, thinking, analyzing, and collaborating. A demanding (rigorous) intellectual environment treats all students as adults who are required to think independently, come to their own conclusions, and communicate their thoughts and conclusions precisely to others.

**Goal:** Increase the level of student academic engagement on the GW campus.

**Goal:** To achieve an intellectually stimulating and cohesive undergraduate education that

- Provides students with a strong foundation in the liberal arts and in a specific field of study;
- Emphasizes but is not limited to the classroom experience;
- Provides academic rigor while being intellectually engaging.

The curriculum is developed within the context of the institutional, school, and program goals, and reflects a coherent plan of study. Both faculty members and students need to understand the organizing principles of the curriculum and how courses address the broader goals and objectives of the program and the University. Clearly stated learning outcomes for all goals must exist at all levels. Achievement of the expected learning outcomes must be demonstrated in order to measure progress toward the goals.

**Goal:** Move to a 4x4 curriculum structure in order to provide more academic challenge for GW's students and more opportunity for academic engagement. By moving to fewer courses, it is expected that students will get more out of the more limited scope – depth vs. breadth. The premise is not to give students fewer courses to “blow off,” or to give faculty less or more work: it is to provide the opportunity for challenge and engagement, which can be fully accomplished if both faculty members and students approach this new curricular structure with the right spirit of mind.

**Goal:** The goal of conversion to a 4x4 course system addresses three issues: student engagement, academic rigor, and financial savings. Lack of connectivity of students to their academic experience at GW can be addressed through focus on student engagement. Engagement can be enhanced by expecting students to participate regularly in class, to meet with their professors periodically during the term, to develop a genuine interest in the subject matter, and to pursue a research opportunity outside the classroom. Academic rigor can be achieved when academic expectations demand a significant increase in student attention and interest in order to perform at a high level. Challenge differs from rigor in that a subject may be difficult but not demanding and it may not inspire interest but rather defeat. Financial savings can be realized through the conversion and can lead to a reduction in the number of part-time faculty members and funds to invest in full-time faculty members.

**Goal:** The objective of implementing a 4x4 curriculum is to increase the challenge and rigor of the education offered to GW students so that they increase their investment, achievement, and pleasure in learning. Educational challenge can be defined as requiring that students meet demands beyond their present skills and conceptual tools. The point is to move them from the predisposed and familiar ways of thinking and learning in order to master new skills and ideas – all through working harder! Educational rigor can be defined as the comprehensiveness and depth of the body of knowledge that the student is required to achieve. To show that they have mastered a body of knowledge, they must display both verbal and written capabilities in reproducing this knowledge and in using it to ask additional questions leading to applications in the world. Rigor includes both scope/depth of content of knowledge and capacities (verbal and written) to demonstrate

mastery. They must know the substance and be able to apply critical capacities to use, question, and extend their subject material.

Challenge and rigor should be increased with the goal in mind that we want the students to invest in their own learning. That is, the learning of a comprehensive substantive field of knowledge should be a stepping-stone to their use of this knowledge, their capacity to be productive with it. All students should be expected to be active participants invested in their chosen field of study, no longer passive responders.

**Goal:** Through a 4x4 curriculum, reduce the number of courses required for graduation while laying the groundwork for more student concentration in the remaining courses without undoing student options for internships and other external experiences. The measures of accomplishment of the goal are the amount of thinking students could devote to their reading, the number of opportunities to require students to attend events outside the classroom, the amount of time spent by the students outside the classroom in discussions and meetings with faculty members, etc. Progress on such measures will require a cultural change at GW.

**Goal:** Change the perception that “GW only serves as a housing resource for DC’s overzealous free-labor workforce,” to one where the real and perceived thinking is that academics are the most important thing at GW. A major shift is needed to change the “culture” of GW. A change to a 4x4 curriculum structure could provide a great vehicle for change, both psychological and structural, but the “baggage” that comes with the 4x4 often clouds the original vision of increased scholarship at GW.

**Goal:** To engage students in

- Critical analysis in their courses (rather than “mere learning”);
- Curiosity development and expansion of their capacity for it;
- Social commitment towards improving their society.

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**Once you have defined the academic goal, provide two or three scenarios for achieving that goal.**

**Category I**

**Scenario:** If one accepts *a priori* that learning and retention of knowledge and skills are enhanced by rigorous, in-depth examination and application of knowledge focused in four rather than five courses during each semester, then one is drawn to the 4x4 or 32-course curriculum model. Conversion to this model will require all academic units to carefully construct outcomes and valid assessment methods at the university, school, and department levels.

Conversion to a 4x4 model is best accomplished through a carefully managed project executed over an 18-to-24-month period. A critical path with appropriate

milestones and time intervals needs to be established. This particular scenario envisions no increase in seat time; indeed, seat time might be reduced. Rather, this scenario incorporates the principles of “course redesign” that seek to promote enhanced learning through carefully developed and explicitly stated learning outcomes, learner-centered pedagogies, and the creative application of technology. In this scenario, many, if not most, courses are likely to fall into the hybrid variety.

The resource issues that need to be addressed for this scenario are not given here but are available. It is also noted that this scenario could, in theory, be accomplished in a more incremental manner through a rigorous application of the Academic Program Review process.

**Scenario (A road):** Total reconfiguring of the General Curriculum Requirements so that first- and second-year students will have some common courses or, at any rate, courses that are in conversation with each other. This reconfiguration could be connected to a 4x4 curriculum. Indeed, with a rationalized GCR system (fewer but deeper requirements), a 4x4 would make good sense. We want to start students off with courses that require extensive reading/writing/analysis. The expectations of greater time spent would be telegraphed by the fact that each course would represent one quarter of the course load. With luck and craft and skillful rethinking of majors, the same habits/attitudes required by the GCR courses would be carried on into all other courses.

We must NOT go to a 4x4 before making serious curricular changes. The discussion of the changed curriculum must go to the faculties before any transition to 4x4 is enacted. Though 4x4 makes sense coupled with curricular change, it would be an useless and expensive nuisance without such change.

**Scenario:** Review curriculum, reduce class size, go to 4x4 curricular structure. Savings derived from the lower number of courses should be used to reduce class size. Research shows that there is an inverse relationship between class size and student engagement. To move to a 4x4 curricular structure requires revisiting the curricula in order to make courses more challenging in a way that requires substantially more intellectual effort on the part of the students.

**Scenario (Possibilities):** When I think of the 4x4 curriculum, I try to envision how each 4-credit course will fulfill the objectives of the curriculum as a whole. The undergraduate program will have to be modified to accommodate the reduction from 40 courses to 32 courses but that is a systemic adjustment (including General Curriculum Requirements and major requirements). In considering the three scenarios given below, I am thinking specifically about the mechanics of an individual course, which is the elemental constituent of the overall program:

- 1) Increased class time: Having more “seat time” would enable students to have more direct interaction (via lecture) with faculty members, allowing deeper lectures and more guidance. The classroom interaction is valuable, but somewhat artificial (and can easily be skipped by non-attendance). Students must do and

- learn for themselves, and so this scenario is one extreme but probably not the sole answer.
- 2) Increased work load: More assignments, or more in-depth ones, can be expected of the students. This puts extra work into an out-of-class mode, where students must develop their own learning. This is a useful exercise but it has its risks, since unguided work can be inefficient.
  - 3) Combination of 1) and 2): I think that a combination of deeper assignments plus a recitation, for example, could optimally address both aspects outlined above (depth of investigation and expert guidance). The academic challenge is in the hands of the students, who are doing the work of learning, but this is coupled with closer (non-lecture) interaction of the students with faculty members (or TAs) and with their own classmates through the smaller recitation sections.

I think that such a 4-credit course, as a part of a 4x4 curriculum, can really set the stage for achieving the challenge and engagement discussed, as long as that course unfolds in the *appropriate* manner.

**Scenario (Assumes 4x4 adopted):** Though the items given below were individually given as scenarios, I present them here as part of an overall scenario:

- 1) Decrease the time spent on internships and jobs, while incorporating the city's opportunities with academics: The essence is to tame the temptation. The inclusion of the internship experience in the academic sphere will demand more attention from the students.
- 2) Current General Curriculum Requirements decreased and replaced by courses that address core subjects in greater depth: Academic engagement is hampered by placing students in classes of little or no interest. Too many ways to fill general education requirements leads to very different undergraduate experiences. A decrease in the requirements combined with a set of courses in core subjects will create a more universal experience towards a well-rounded education and solid understanding of fundamental subjects.
- 3) Reinvestment of savings from the 5x3 to 4x4 conversion: Faculty members should be given some form of incentive to re-evaluate, restructure, and deepen their courses. Such incentives presumably will increase faculty members' morale. When faculty members are excited about the material they are teaching it translates to the students and helps achieve academic engagement.

**Scenario:**

- 4x4 implemented. Seat-time not increased. Increase in requirements to fulfill a course (a project; an additional paper; more interactive participation via Blackboard, more reading, etc.)
- University initiates a comprehensive curriculum review
- General Curriculum Requirements replaced by a core curriculum with three major components: science/math; humanities; social science/international citizenship.

- Each department or program meets as a group to determine a coherent set of learning outcomes/goals for its majors
- Incentives for excellence in faculty teaching offered
- Faculty buy-in: Regular full-time faculty members given one course reduction every fifth semester or an increase in salary
- Number of courses taught by adjunct faculty members reduced

## Category II

**Scenario (Mixed):** Carry out a complete re-evaluation and revision of the undergraduate curriculum, including both General Curriculum Requirements and requirements for the majors. This can, in theory, be accomplished while retaining the current 5x3 curriculum structure. However, this appears to require a commitment of the faculties that many seem reluctant to make without some form of adequate compensation. Members of the committee have repeatedly talked about the need for incentives for the faculty members if they are asked to do more. An effective revision of the undergraduate curriculum demands significant effort on the part of the faculties, and it will fail without it. Provided that the cost savings realized by the reduced course offerings of a 4x4 curriculum were to be fully reallocated within Academic Affairs (allowing for some combination of increased faculty salaries, reduced teaching loads, reduced class sizes, and new teaching initiatives), adoption of the 4x4 can serve as the catalyst for curriculum revision while making available the resources to provide incentives for the faculties.

**Scenario:** Review curriculum, class size does not change, stay with 5x3 system. Revisit the curricular offerings to make them more challenging so they require a higher level of student effort but not significantly higher. It probably is unrealistic to require substantially more from students in each of their five courses.

**Scenario (Mixed):** Program reviews: Each program should undergo review and redefine its program goals in terms of learning goals and outcomes. The program goals provide the framework for course goals, and individual courses and curricula should be developed within the context of the program's goals. These goals provide the basis for both curricular development and assessment and they should reflect a coherent plan of study. Within the context of program reviews, programs should determine which model – the 4x4, 5x3, or some combination of both that works best to achieve the program goals.

### **Scenario:**

- 5x3 course structure retained
- University initiates a comprehensive curriculum review
- General Curriculum Requirements replaced by a core curriculum with three major components: science/math; humanities; social science/international citizenship.
- Each department or program meets as a group to determine a coherent set of learning outcomes/goals for its majors
- Incentives for excellence in faculty teaching offered

## DRAFT – DRAFT – DRAFT 1

### Goal and Scenarios

**Goal:** At the undergraduate level, GW will increase student engagement and learning through academic challenge and a rigorous intellectual environment that permeates all aspects of student life [See GW’s Strategic Plan for Academic Excellence]. This goal can be realized through a fundamental cultural change that has its foundation in committed faculty members and a curriculum (General Curriculum Requirements as well as within the major) that challenge all students in all courses through active course participation, reading, research, writing, thinking, analyzing, and collaborating. A demanding (rigorous) intellectual environment treats all students as adults who are required to think independently, come to their own conclusions, and communicate their thoughts and conclusions precisely to others.

#### **Category I – Scenario:**

**Scenario:** If one accepts *a priori* that learning and retention of knowledge and skills is enhanced by rigorous, in-depth examination and application of knowledge focused in four rather than five courses during each semester, then one is drawn to the 4x4 or 32-course curriculum model. Conversion to this model will require the faculty members in all academic units to carefully construct outcomes and valid assessment methods at the university, school, and department levels.

A shift to the 4x4 model is expected to release resources to be reallocated to the academic enterprise through faculty incentives, transition costs, and investment in academic programs.

Conversion to a 4x4 model is best accomplished through a carefully managed project executed over an 18-to-24-month period. A critical path with appropriate milestones and time intervals needs to be established. This particular scenario envisions no increase in seat time; indeed, seat time might be reduced. Rather, this scenario incorporates the principles of “course redesign” that seek to promote enhanced learning through carefully developed and explicitly stated learning outcomes, learner-centered pedagogies, and the creative application of technology. In this scenario, many, if not most, courses are likely to fall into the hybrid variety.

It is clear that we must not go to a 4x4 structure before making serious curricular changes. The discussion of the changed curriculum must go to the faculties before any transition to 4x4 is enacted. Though 4x4 makes sense coupled with curricular change, it would be a useless and expensive nuisance without such change.

We see total reconfiguring of the General Curriculum Requirements as a critical first step so that first- and second-year students will have some common courses or, at any rate, courses that are in conversation with each other. Not only do we envision connectivity between courses, we envision integrating internship experiences with the

curriculum. Indeed, with a rationalized GCR system (fewer but deeper requirements) and an enhanced internship approach, a 4x4 curricular structure makes good sense. We want to start students off with courses that require extensive reading/writing/analysis. The expectations of greater time spent would be telegraphed by the fact that each course would represent one quarter of the course load. With luck and craft and skillful rethinking of majors, the same habits/attitudes required by the GCR courses would be carried on into all other courses.

The resource issues that need to be addressed for this scenario are not given here but are available. It is also noted that this scenario could, in theory, be accomplished in a more incremental manner through a rigorous application of the Academic Program Review process.

**Category II – Scenario: [To be determined at the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 2006 meeting of the Committee]**

**DRAFT – DRAFT – DRAFT 2****Goal and Scenarios**

**Goal:** At the undergraduate level, GW will increase student engagement and learning through academic challenge and a rigorous intellectual environment that permeates all aspects of student life [See GW’s Strategic Plan for Academic Excellence]. This goal can be realized through a fundamental cultural change that has its foundation in committed faculty members and a curriculum (general education requirements as well as within the major) that challenge all students in all courses through active course participation, reading, research, writing, critical thinking, analyzing, and collaborating. A demanding (rigorous) intellectual environment treats all students as adults who are required to think independently, come to their own conclusions, and communicate their thoughts and conclusions precisely to others.

**Category I – Scenario:**

**Scenario:** To enhance learning and retention of knowledge through rigorous, in-depth examination and application of knowledge made possible by reducing the number of courses taken each semester, a 4x4 or 32-course curriculum model will be implemented. Conversion to this model will require the faculty members in all academic units to carefully construct outcomes and valid assessment methods at the university, school, and department levels.

A shift to the 4x4 model is expected to release resources to be reallocated to the academic enterprise through faculty incentives, transition costs, and investment in academic programs.

Conversion to a 4x4 model is best accomplished through a carefully managed project executed over a 24-36 month period. A critical path with appropriate milestones and time intervals needs to be established. This particular scenario does not necessarily envision an increase in seat time per course. Rather, this scenario incorporates the principles of “course redesign” that seek to promote enhanced learning through carefully developed and explicitly stated learning outcomes, learner-centered pedagogies, more rigorous assessment of learning, and the creative application of technology.

It is clear that we must not go to a 4x4 structure without a simultaneous commitment to serious curricular content changes. The discussion of the changed curriculum must go to the faculties before any transition to 4x4 is enacted. Though 4x4 makes sense coupled with curricular change, it would be a useless and expensive nuisance without such change.

We see total reconfiguring of the general education requirements as a critical first step so that first- and second-year students will have some common courses or, at any rate, courses that are in conversation with each other. Not only do we envision connectivity between courses, we envision integrating internship experiences with the

curriculum. Indeed, with a restructured general education system and an enhanced internship approach, a 4x4 curricular structure makes good sense. We want to start students off with courses that require extensive reading/writing/analysis. As each course is now one quarter of the academic load, it will require proportionately more effort and attention. With skillful rethinking of majors, the same habits/attitudes required by the general education courses would be carried on into all other courses.

The resource issues that need to be addressed for this scenario are not given here but are available. It is also noted that this scenario could, in theory, be accomplished in a more incremental manner through a rigorous application of the Academic Program Review process.

**Category II – Scenario:**

The goal of increasing academic excellence can be addressed within the existing 5x3 course structure. Each academic Department (program) should meet individually and determine a coherent set of learning outcomes and goals (and assessments) for its courses and degree programs. Within the context of academic program reviews, Departments (programs) should determine if alternate course structures and class times (4x4, reduced class time, blended delivery, etc.) are needed to achieve program goals.

This effort should form the basis of a comprehensive curriculum review which could replace general education requirements with a core curriculum with three major components: science/math; humanities; and social science/international citizenship.

To motivate faculty to undertake this significant curriculum revision effort, to reduce grade inflation, and to strive for teaching excellence, a program of incentives will be developed and offered to faculty.

**FINAL**

1) The 4x4 Committee ratified by a vote of 20-1 our overall "Goal" statement:

At the undergraduate level, GW intends to increase student engagement and learning through academic challenge and a rigorous intellectual environment that permeates all aspects of student life [See GW's Strategic Plan for Academic Excellence]. This goal can best be realized through a fundamental cultural change that has its foundation in committed faculty members and curricula (general education requirements as well as within the major) that challenge all students in all courses through active course participation, reading, research, writing, critical thinking, analyzing, and collaborating. We believe that a rigorous intellectual environment should treat all students as adults who are required to think independently, come to their own conclusions, and communicate their thoughts and conclusions precisely to others.

2) The 4x4 Committee adopted the following Scenario by a vote of 13-8 as their recommendation for achieving the above goal:

To enhance learning and retention through rigorous, in-depth examination and application of knowledge by reducing the number of courses taken each semester, a 4x4 or 32-course curriculum model will be implemented. Conversion to this model will require faculty members in all academic units to revise curricula and carefully construct outcomes and valid assessment methods at the university, school, and department levels.

It is clear that we must not go to a 4x4 structure without a simultaneous commitment by the faculties and administration to serious curricular changes. The discussion of the changed curriculum must go to the faculties before any transition to 4x4 is enacted. Though 4x4 makes sense coupled with curricular change, it would be a useless and expensive nuisance without such change.

We see reconfiguring of the general education requirements as a critical first step so that first- and second-year students will have some common courses or, at any rate, courses that are in conversation with each other. Not only do we envision connectivity among courses, we envision integrating internship experiences with the curriculum. With a restructured general education system and an enhanced internship approach, a 4x4 curricular structure makes good sense. We want to start students off with courses that require extensive reading/writing/analysis. As each course is now one quarter of the academic load, it will require proportionately more effort and attention. With skillful rethinking of majors, the same habits/attitudes required by the general education requirements would be carried on into all other courses.

This particular scenario does not necessarily envision an increase in seat time per course. Rather, this scenario incorporates the principles of "course redesign" that seek to promote enhanced learning through carefully developed and explicitly stated learning outcomes,

learner-centered pedagogies, more rigorous assessment of learning, and the creative application of technology.

A shift to the 4x4 model is expected to release resources to be reallocated to the academic enterprise through faculty incentives, transition costs, and investment in academic programs and associated faculty lines. In particular, it will allow the schools to have greater flexibility when considering issues including the following: reducing reliance on part-time faculty members, adjusting faculty teaching loads, establishing optimal class sizes on a course-by-course basis, and providing incentives for faculty-student collaboration in research projects.

Faculty support is essential for this transformation to achieve its goals. Faculty members will provide resources through their time investment in the major changes called for - both at the departmental and course levels. To be forthcoming, their investment must be expected, recognized, and compensated.

Conversion to a 4x4 model is best accomplished through a carefully managed project executed over a 24-36 month period. A critical path with appropriate milestones and time intervals needs to be established.