

**SUBSTITUTE RESOLUTION REGARDING RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE
REPORT OF THE JOINT ADMINISTRATION/FACULTY TASK FORCE ON A
POSSIBLE FOUR-COURSE, FOUR-CREDIT UNDERGRADUATE
CURRICULAR STRUCTURE (06/5)**

WHEREAS, The George Washington University established a joint administration/faculty Task Force (the Task Force) under the leadership of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs in April 2005 to examine once again the desirability and feasibility of introducing a four-course, four-credit undergraduate curricular structure, and

WHEREAS, The Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate, in accordance with the Faculty Code, established a Special Committee of the Faculty Senate to receive and evaluate the report of the Task Force and to make comments and recommendations to the Faculty Senate, and

WHEREAS, the report of the Special Committee is attached hereto as Appendix A, and

WHEREAS, The faculty is committed to a comprehensive review and improvement of curriculum, and

WHEREAS, Resolution (03/4) adopted by the Faculty Senate concluded that a 4X4 curriculum would greatly diminish the opportunities for breadth and number of required and elective courses students could take, and

WHEREAS, The Task Force claimed that the proposed 4X4 curricular structure would facilitate academic excellence but did not provide persuasive evidence to support that claim, and

WHEREAS, Transition to a 4x4 curriculum would significantly disrupt the operation of the University's educational activities and would require the expenditure of enormous faculty resources for the next several years, and

WHEREAS, The Special Committee believes that a major curricular review should be undertaken, beginning in the fall of 2007, as a collaborative effort between the faculty and the incoming administration of President-elect Steven Knapp, and

WHEREAS, Exit surveys of graduating seniors have been cited as primary evidence of poor intellectual challenge and intellectual engagement, but such surveys are generally regarded as producing results of limited validity and recent surveys have actually revealed a modest improving trend under the University's existing curriculum, and

WHEREAS, Recent tabulations of undergraduate student course evaluations indicate students find that current courses are difficult and do provide a “great deal of significant high quality learning,” and

WHEREAS, The Task Force report assumes that students who are not currently challenged will have their learning increased with decreased “seat time” and that substantial cost savings will result from the implementation of a 4X4 curriculum, and

WHEREAS, The academic literature shows that increased learning and favorable educational outcomes increase with higher amounts of “seat time,” and accordingly, educational outcomes could not reasonably be expected to improve under a 4X4 curriculum that reduces the number of required classroom hours per semester, and

WHEREAS, The Faculty Senate therefore believes that the Task Force’s proposed 4X4 “scenario,” which could lead to a potential reduction of up to 20% in the amount of required classroom hours per semester, is not consistent with the University’s stated aspirations for academic excellence, and

WHEREAS, Models presented in the Task Force report used to predict cost savings are simplistic and rely on unrealistic expectations, while reasonable alternative assumptions lead to predictions that costs could actually increase under a 4X4 curriculum, unless a 4X4 curriculum is simply used to inflate academic credit hours by reducing required classroom hours and faculty positions; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE FACULTY SENATE OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

That the Faculty Senate recommends to the faculties of the Schools that the 4X4 curriculum model “scenario” as described in the report of the Task Force should not be adopted at this time, because that “scenario” has not been adequately justified and would prematurely commit the University to a curricular model with major potential flaws, before the faculties of the several Schools have been given a reasonable opportunity to undertake a comprehensive review of their respective curricula and to determine the desirability of fundamental changes to those curricula, and

That the Faculty Senate urges the faculties of the several Schools, beginning in the Fall of 2007, to undertake a comprehensive curriculum review in their Schools in collaboration with the incoming administration of President-elect Steven Knapp, and to establish metrics informed by

scholarly literature on the learning process that are reasonably designed to achieve the University's stated aspirations for academic excellence.

**Special Committee on the 4X4 Curriculum Report
February 16, 2007**

Adopted, as amended, February 16, 2007

APPENDIX A

**The George Washington University
Faculty Senate
Special Committee on the Joint Administration/Faculty Task Force on 4x4
Curriculum Structure Report**

Report to the Faculty Senate

February 16, 2007

The Special Committee has had three meetings this semester as follows: January 30, February 6 and February 13.

The subcommittees as previously reported in the interim report of the Committee presented their findings at the first of these two meetings. A resolution from the Committee for the Faculty Senate was prepared at the third. In brief, the presentations of the subcommittees follows:

Subcommittee I: Academic Motivation for Change to a 4*4 Curriculum.

The premise that a change in curriculum to the 4x 4 will increase the student perception of their level of academic challenge/engagement remains unproven. In 2003 the conclusion of a Study Group appointed by the President to study the risks and opportunities of moving from a 5 course to a 4 course semester are as valid in 2007 as in 2003 when the Academic Issues Subcommittee of the Study Group stated there is “little if any empirical research on the connection between a 4x4 or 3x5 and academic engagement, and it is therefore unclear whether a 4x4 system would be a solution to the problems it is meant to solve”. (The report of the Educational Policy Committee and the resolution 03/4 of the Faculty Senate are in line with this). The only significant additional piece of data collected by the GW Task Force in the recent study is a comparison of opinions from faculty and others from schools with a 4x4 or some permutation thereof and the original premise is not borne out.

The Report of the Academic Excellence Strategic Committee in 2002 expressed concern over lack of academic challenge and over the low proportion of student time spent studying. This Committee made many suggestions for change that might reverse their concerns. Among these were changes that spanned recruiting/admissions, orientation, changes that could be made in the freshman, middle, and senior years as well as changes in faculty and campus culture and changes in the existing curriculum that fall short of converting to a 4x4. All of these suggestions have merit and would probably be easier and less costly to implement than a total curricular change. This Committee recommended the establishment of an Academic Excellence Oversight Committee to Oversee and assess the changes recommended by the Committee. This does not appear to have been carried out.

Exit surveys of graduating seniors have been cited as a primary evidence of poor intellectual challenge and intellectual engagement. In 2002 the question about academic challenge was added to the survey and in 2005 the question about intellectual engagement was added (a short track record). These scores are revealing a modest improvement in trend (no statistical evaluation given) over this time. In 2003, 2004, and 2006, respectively, 57%, 62%, and 66% of the sample responded that intellectual challenge was high/somewhat high in the major and in 2004 and 2006, 30% and 33% of the sample responded that intellectual challenge was high/somewhat high in the introductory courses. Similarly, in 2006, 77% of the sample responded that the level of engagement in the major was somewhat/very high and 46% responded that the level of engagement was somewhat/very high in the introductory courses. While these values are lower than desirable, it is interesting to note that over this same time period, 85-86% of the sample is satisfied with the quality of their education, 82-89% is satisfied with GW, and 80-88% of the sample is satisfied with the courses in their major while 69-74% of the sample is satisfied with the introductory courses. To the extent that the survey data is relied upon to stimulate curricular change, one might conclude that the larger problem lies with the introductory courses and that these should be given some attention.

If there was indisputable evidence that a change to a 4x4 curriculum would lead to a significant financial saving that would go into academics without the curricular change detracting in the least from the academic experience, this would be a valid reason, in our opinion, to undertake the curricular change. Such evidence does not seem to exist. It would seem that a study within the Schools of their existing curriculum and how it might be improved is very much in order.

Subcommittee II: Specific Issues Related to 4x4 Implementation.

The Joint Administration Task Force (4x4 Task Force) identified several issues that the Committee investigated: accreditation, transfer students, double majors, 5 year undergraduate programs, study abroad programs, impact on graduate programs and seat time.

The accreditation issue does not appear to present difficulties to all programs. For example, it has been reported that it does in the GW Law School but it does not for GSEHD. A member of the Board of Examiners for NCATE did mention that it was unusual in graduate programs; he had not seen a 4x4 in any visits he had made on behalf of NCATE.

Transfer students all must have their transcripts reviewed and the admissions personnel in each college must then translate all courses into credits to fit the proposed new curricular structure. This is more complicated when translated by semester into a different format. It is time consuming as it cannot be uniformly done, but must be reviewed by personnel individually. This would be labor intensive.

Students with double majors present a significant concern for the proposed new curricular structure. Course requirements would need review and revision. It would present a new set of challenges and would require greater clarity about the impact beyond what the Committee could find. However, study abroad programs do not appear to have as many implications other than the obvious one - semesters are easier to arrange students programs and travel within the traditional structure. Additional data is needed to respond to this issue. This would include the needs of international students as well. No adequate study of the implication of the 4X4 on international students with regard to their needs, their attendance patterns and expectations has been carried out.

Contact hours, referred to as “seat time” is also a major concern. Current scheduling practices are already creating “seat time” challenges. The new time bands used by GW to alleviate the classroom space issues have already reduced the class contact hours. However, the principal concerns expressed by faculty were marketing and recruitment, particularly for graduate programs. The compressed time frame would significantly impact the recruitment process.

Report of Subcommittee III: Financial Motivation for Change to a 4x4 Curriculum

The Joint Administration Task Force (4x4 Task Force) Report claims that switching from the current 5x3 to a 4x4 curriculum structure would reduce instructional costs significantly. Scenarios evaluated in Appendix D of the 4x4 Task Force Report forecast cost savings ranging from 5 to 15 million dollars per year. These forecasts are produced by the assumption that 350 fewer courses/sections would be offered saving both labor and classroom rental costs. We note that among the “market basket schools” that GW is usually compared with, only 4 of the 15 schools have “some kind” of a 4x4 curriculum structure. Some of the others have already considered and rejected adopting a 4x4 curriculum.

Understanding the Basis for Forecasting of Cost Savings

The forecast of cost savings is based on a forecast of a 20% reduction in classroom teaching time per student, from 12.5 hours per week to 10 hours per week with no change in class size. This would necessitate a 20% reduction in the requirements for graduation from the current 40 courses to 32 courses. With no change in the number of courses taught by each faculty member, cost savings would arise due to a smaller wage bill for faculty and some reduction in classroom rental costs. (The 4x4 Task Force Report claims, without proof, that this reduction in classroom time would have a positive effect on student learning. This contention stands in contrast with literature on educational outcomes where there is evidence of a significant positive product of classroom time.¹ Furthermore, the 4x4 Task Force Report forecasts ignore the fact that, at some universities the 4x4 provides the same or even more than the 12.5 hours of classroom time as is currently provided in the 5x3) It appears that the 4x4 Task Force failed to produce a forecast of cost savings that would accompany a shift from 5x3 to the type of 4x4 in which classroom teaching time would not be reduced. Our expectation is that there would be no cost savings in this case.

Accordingly, our brief examination of the economics indicates that switching to a 4x4 with no reduction in classroom time (call this a 4x4-12.5 classroom hours) would result in a significant cost increase. The arguments supporting this position will be apparent upon reading the remainder of this report. Therefore, the only question remaining is the forecasts of cost savings for changing from a 5x3-12.5 to a 4x4-10.0 – i.e. for the case in which classroom time is decreased by 20%. (No attempt will be made to compensate for the fall in educational output associated with a 20% decline in classroom time.)

¹ See for example, Robert A. Fitzgerald, “College Quality and the Earnings of Recent College Graduates,” National Center for Educational Statistics, Research and Development Report, August, 2000. Also note that American Bar Association standards for accreditation include requirements for seat time per credit hour. See also the summary of effects on school performance generally in Erid Hanushek, “Assessing the Effects of School Resources on Student Performance: An Update,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Summer 1997.

Important Factors Not Considered in the Forecast of Cost Savings

The forecast of cost savings offered by the 4x4 Task Force Report omits a number of factors that could alter the conclusions substantially. A number of the most obvious of these omissions are enumerated below. Given the short time provided for the Committee's work, this list should not be regarded as complete.

1. The most significant cost savings to be realized for a 4x4 implementation is in the reduction of full-time active status faculty needs. Indeed, if a 20% reduction in full-time faculty is made to correspond to the 20% reduction in course offerings, a substantial savings will be realized. On the other hand if the 20% reduction in faculty needs comes from a reduction in the vast number of part-time faculty the University employs – described as a desirable objective - there will be a cost increase because of the larger percentage of full-time faculty needed to staff the surviving courses. This decision is critical to understanding and estimating the financial impact of a 4x4 implementation.

2. The 4x4 Task Force Report notes that implementation costs associated with transforming a 5x3 into a 4x4 would be significant. Given that these costs would be experienced “up front” they could be more consequential than any future cost savings. Indeed, the “bottom line” effect of the switch should be based on discounting the early transition costs and any future cost savings to a present value.

3. The 4x4 Task Force Report forecast is based on the assumption that, under a 5x3 each student takes 5 courses per semester and under a 4x4 each student takes 4 courses per semester. However, students are far more likely and able to depart from the standard of 4 courses under a 4x4 than under a 5x3 curriculum. Indeed, if anything, the 5x3 invites students to take fewer courses per semester while the 4x4 encourages students to take more than 4 courses per semester. If students responded to the 4x4 by taking an extra course, it would become a 5x4 and the number of total courses taken by students will not be reduced much. Under these circumstances the forecasted cost savings would fall substantially.

4. If students adjust course loads as noted above, and the requirement for graduation is 32 courses, and additional course credit can result from advanced placement or summer sessions, many students may routinely graduate in 6 or 7 semesters rather than 8 as is now the norm. In addition to obvious effects on the “class tradition” associated with the 8 semester norm, this will impose significant additional costs due to the cost of recruiting new students to fill enrollment.

5. The 4x4 Task Force Report focuses on engagement of students and expenditure per student as problems – the former to be increased and the latter decreased. Based on an informal analysis of higher education, we suspect that educational engagement of students and expenditure per pupil are positively related! The 4x4 Task Force Report never considers the possibility that the low level of instructional expenditure per student at GW is the impediment to greater student learning and satisfaction! We believe that a comparative analysis of instructional expenditures per pupil at GW and market basket schools would confirm the hypothesis that GW expenditures are currently too low rather than too high. Accordingly, we

recommend that, going forward, a comparative cost analysis of GW and market basket schools be performed on cost data which separates expenditure by instructional expense (i.e. faculty salaries by full time-part time), educational support, libraries, academic plant, general and administrative, categories so that future planning can focus on cost savings in areas where current expenditures per pupil are inconsistent with the competition.

Conclusions

Based on the above considerations, we conclude that switching from a 5x3 to a 4x4 with reduced classroom time could result in either net cost savings, no significant change in net costs, or net cost increases for the institution depending on implementation decisions and the relative effects of the items noted above and not considered in the 4x4 Task Force Report. Given that the effect on learning from a reduction in classroom time is considered to be negative by most faculty (note that this proposal is not suggested for the School of Law because accreditation there is based on the assumption that learning is positively related to classroom time), it is curious that there is any support for such a change.

Respectfully submitted, Robert J. Harrington

Members of the Committee: Professors Abravanel, Biles, Cherian, Gallo, Kahn, Tickin, West, Yezer & Harrington (Chair)