

Resolution 2013-17. On Affirming the Core Competencies of Critical Thinking and Written Communication as Fundamental Requirements for Successful Mastery in All Academic Disciplines.

The Faculty Council resolves:

In the exercise of the power of the General Faculty to determine the educational policies of the University¹, the Faculty Council of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill affirms the recommendation of the UNC Strategic Directions General Education Council that *Critical Thinking* and *Written Communication* are core competencies that are fundamental to successful mastery in all academic disciplines.

The Faculty Council further resolves that, in furtherance of the power of the General Faculty to prescribe the requirements for admissions, programs of study, and the award of academic degrees², it is the prerogative of the Faculty to develop and administer assessment instruments intended to measure student achievement in the context of the basic educational policies of the University and the special competencies of the faculties of particular colleges and schools.

Submitted by the Faculty Executive Committee

Comment:

In February 2013 the UNC Board of Governors adopted *Our Time, Our Future: The UNC Compact with North Carolina*, a system-wide strategic plan for 2013-2018.³

Our Time Our Future has five major “goals,” the second of which is “Strengthening Academic Quality” (see pp. 37-53). Below are a few verbatim quotes about that goal, taken from page 37 of the document.

- “With structural changes already affecting all of higher education, UNC is committed to maintaining the highest academic quality and taking a leadership role in assessing student learning.”

¹ *Faculty Code of University Government* § 2-8(a)(1)

² Op. cit. § 2-8(a)(2)

³ The University of North Carolina, *Our Time Our Future: The UNC Compact with North Carolina, Strategic Directors, 2013-2018* (The University of North Carolina, February 8, 2013),

http://www.northcarolina.edu/strategic_direction/STRATEGIC_DIRECTIONS_2013-2018.pdf. For other related materials, see “UNC Strategic Directions Initiative,”

http://www.northcarolina.edu/strategic_direction/Overview.htm.

- “Students and policymakers are increasingly interested in a common assessment of learning outcomes. Given the complexity and diversity of knowledge taught at our universities, developing a shared method of assessment is difficult.”
- [We will] “Establish core competencies for general education courses across the UNC system to allow for easier transfer of credits among campuses and from the Community College System.”
- [We will] “Develop enhanced assessments of student learning across UNC campuses.”

In April 2013, President Tom Ross appointed three system-wide committees (each including a mix of faculty and administrators) to work on implementation of the UNC strategic plan. One of these is the “General Education Council,” (GEC) on which two UNC-CH faculty members, Abigail Panter (Psychology) and Valerie Pruvost (Romance Languages and Literatures), are serving.

The GEC has been charged with “undertaking a comprehensive review of existing general education architecture and recommending a limited set of student learning outcomes appropriate to all UNC institutions.” They are also charged with exploring “qualitative and quantitative methodologies appropriate to assessing these outcomes, and will make its first set of recommendations to President Ross by January 2014.”⁴

The General Education Council divided into several subcommittees to conduct its work. GEC’s subcommittee on “core competencies” surveyed faculty on all 17 campuses in September inviting faculty input on which competencies they would prioritize. Their survey was circulated to Chapel Hill faculty on September 17th and 24th by the Provost’s Office and the Office of Faculty Governance. 285 faculty members on this campus responded.⁵

This survey overwhelmingly identified “critical thinking” and “written communication” as the two most important core competencies faculty felt should be emphasized.

In summaries of its work to date submitted to the UNC Faculty Assembly in October 2013, the GEC notes that it is trying to “reconcile” the directive about assessment with expert advice on what the nature of useful and substantive assessments should include.⁶

⁴ Joan Lorden and Erin McNelis, “UNC System General Education Council Update,” September 5, 2013, <https://provost.unc.edu/announcements/unc-system-general-education-council-update/>.

⁵ The complete survey results may be found at: “Survey Results: Core Competencies, UNC General Education Council,” September 26, 2013, http://www.northcarolina.edu/fa_meetings/index.php?pg=dl&id=s15434&format=pdf&inline=1.

⁶ The two summaries are: “Attachment 2: Background Information for Core Competencies Discussion, October 25, 2013 Faculty Assembly Meeting,” October 25, 2013, http://www.northcarolina.edu/fa_meetings/index.php?pg=dl&id=s15438&format=pdf&inline=1; and “General

At the October 25, 2013 Faculty Assembly Meeting, the GEC's "core competencies" subcommittee officially presented these two competencies to the UNC Faculty Assembly.⁷ Faculty Assembly Resolution 2013-11 endorsing these competencies was approved.⁸

The GEC explains on the final page of its recommendations that "Finally, on a purely practical note, the subcommittee believes that adopting two system-wide competencies will result in a much more manageable assessment task than would the adoption of a longer list of competencies. As is mandated in the charge of the GEC, system-wide assessment of these core competencies will be necessary. The subcommittee is confident that identifying and implementing assessment strategies for a core of two strong and clearly important competencies, while not trivial, is a task that our campuses can achieve."⁹

In order to reinforce the notion that these two competencies are widely supported by faculty across the system, Faculty Assembly now requests that campus faculty senates endorse these two competencies in advance of the GEC delivering its full report to President Ross and the Board of Governors in January 2014.

Education Council (GEC) Overview of Work to Date and Future Work," October 25, 2013, http://www.northcarolina.edu/fa_meetings/index.php?pg=dl&id=s15447&format=pdf&inline=1. The "reconcile" term is taken from the section of the "General Education Council (GEC) Overview" entitled "Food for Thought Regarding the Two Shared Core General Education Competencies." These documents were both presented at the October 25, 2013 Faculty Assembly meeting.

⁷ "System-wide Core Competencies: Recommendations to the General Education Council from the Subcommittee on Core Competencies," October 17, 2013, http://www.northcarolina.edu/fa_meetings/index.php?pg=dl&id=s15428&format=pdf&inline=1.

⁸ "Resolution 2013-11 On System-wide Core Competencies, Approved by the UNC Faculty Assembly, October 25, 2013," October 25, 2013, http://www.northcarolina.edu/fa_resolutions/index.php?pg=dl&id=s15508&format=pdf&inline=1.

⁹ "System-wide Core Competencies: Recommendations," October 17, 2013, p. 3.