



Dear President Steger and Provost McNamee,

10 December 2007

We write as the University Committee on the Curriculum for Liberal Education (UCCLE) with a sense of urgency about the impact of impending budget cuts on the viability of the Curriculum for Liberal Education (CLE). We recommend in the strongest possible way that preserving the availability of courses in the curriculum should be a top priority as cuts are distributed.

We appreciate the university's support of the CLE in the past, including the appointment in 2004-05 of the Core Curriculum Ad Hoc Steering Committee and support for that committee's recommendations. We are working to implement the recommendations to transform the concept of the core from a series of disparate requirements in seven areas to the concept of a coherent sequence of courses built around a theme or issue and designed to increase the students' ability to make connections among disciplinary areas. These concepts are consistent with the university's strategic plan for increasing undergraduate research and international experiences.

We are concerned that the Virginia Tech plan to "reduce personnel costs" by "increasing class sizes, offering fewer courses, and decreasing efforts in instruction" (Governor's FY 2008 Budget Reduction Plan, <http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/2008BudgetReductionPlan10-01-2007.pdf>, p. 11) threatens the whole concept of the CLE. The impact of personnel reduction will be felt most strongly in CLE courses as departments appropriately prioritize their courses for majors and graduate students over CLE courses. What should be a strength of Virginia Tech (its CLE) could become its vulnerability.

Departments that offer CLE courses confirm that they cannot meet current demand. Classes have been filled to capacity, yet there are still not enough seats. With fewer courses, large numbers of students will find classes unavailable. Increasing class size is not in the best interest of students nor of the university. Virginia Tech is nearly at the bottom of the 25 SCHEV peers, as measured by class sizes of fewer than 20 students. The "under-20" classification is a significant criterion in the ranking of colleges and universities.

We write as advocates of students and parents, whose primary concerns are whether courses are available and whether the teaching is good, especially when tuition increases annually. Our students and their parents reasonably want a return on the investment of higher tuition dollars. We write as advocates of faculty, who believe in quality liberal education as a means of social and individual transformation and of a thriving economy and nation.

We regret that reducing the quality of instruction is the top means of budget cuts in the Virginia Tech reduction plan. The UCCLC requests that you affirm support for the CLE in the budget reduction process and guide administrators to protect the quality programming in the CLE.

Yours very sincerely,

The members of the University Curriculum Committee on Liberal Education

(Phil Radtke (chair), Kathryn Albright, Jim Collier, Ron Daniel, Clare Dannenburg, Monique Dufour, Kelly Fennessy, David Ford, Virginia Fowler, Leon Geyer, Lisa McNair, Carolyn Meier, Marlene Preston, Donna Cassell Ratcliffe, Susanna Rinehart, Esti Sheinberg, Joseph Sirgy, Ray Van Dyke, Bruce Vogelaar, Alex Weaver, and Cindy Wood)

cc: James A. Hyatt, Executive Vice President and Chief Operation Officer
M. Dwight Shelton, Vice President for Budget and Financial Management

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