



Liberal Arts and Sciences Program Changes Undergraduate Program Review Data 2015

Summary:

The two most substantive changes to the LA&S curriculum in the last program revision involved reducing the number of required credits from 60 to 48 by removing 4 required courses within clusters, and trying to create more structure to the 4 LA&S electives students took by creating 3 choices that might encourage either one year of language or completion of a minor. ACC proposal # 32 from 2006 stated that the old LA&S limited “students ability to explore areas beyond their major” and “graduation for more than a few students has been delayed.” The 3 elective options were designed to facilitate the exploration beyond the major in a structured way by allowing students to choose between pursuing foreign language courses (option A), pursuing focused study in one area outside of their major that could lead to a minor (option B), or designing their own curriculum with their advisor to meet their needs (option C). Examining the extent to which students have been selecting options A, B or C over the past 5 years, there has been a rapid increase in the percentage selecting option C (Table 1). The majority of students still select option B in spite of the numbers dropping, while option A is now by far the least utilized option. As a result there has been no positive change in the percentage of students taking foreign languages, but there has been an increase in the percentage of students declaring minors (Table 2). Reducing the number of overall credits in the LA&S could have contributed to not only the ability of students to complete a minor, but also to improvements in the credits beyond 120 students are earning for their degree (Table 3), and the 4 and 6 year graduation rates (Table 4). This data suggests there may have been a benefit to students in terms of reducing delays to graduation through the reduction in the LA&S credits, and that this reduction coupled with option B created to encourage focused study in a second LA&S discipline may be achieving its goal of increasing the number of minors. However, option A has not achieved its goal of increasing foreign language participation and if the trend continues for increased selection of option C, with decreased selection of option B, the improvements in students declaring minors could potentially be short-lived.

Data Analysis

One stated goal of the new curriculum outlined in the proposal was “that students have more freedom to explore areas of interest or need, thus facilitating their attaining academic and professional objectives.” To this end LA&S credits were reduced by 12, while the following options were created to guide exploration:

- Option A: 6 credits in a single foreign language, and 6 credits from a single discipline outside of the student’s first major, at the 2000 level or above of LA&S courses (either from a recognized LA&S discipline or LA&S designated courses from a discipline that is not recognized as LA&S).
- Option B: 12 credits (with a minimum of 6 credits at the 2000 level or above) in a single recognized LA&S discipline outside of the student’s first major, or 12 credits towards a LA&S minor (with a minimum of 6 credits at the 2000 level or above).

- Option C: Designed curriculum submitted by the completion of 60 credits. The student, working with an advisor, develops a unique curriculum based on his or her interests, needs, and/or goals. The curriculum, with a statement of its rationale, must be approved by the advisor, the department chair, and the appropriate dean, and then filed with the registrar. The curriculum must include a minimum of 12 credits, at least 6 of which must be at the 2000 level or above. These 12 credits must be LA&S courses (either from a recognized LA&S discipline or LA&S designated courses from a discipline that is not recognized as LA&S), and no more than one of the courses may be from the student's first major.

Academic records of all undergraduate students enrolled in the falls of 2010- 2014 were evaluated to determine what percentage of them had declared their LA&S option and of those that had declared their LA&S option, what percentage had selected each option (Table 1). It should be noted that these are not distinct cohorts, as the same student counted in one year, will be counted again in the subsequent year if they are enrolled once again at the institution. Many of the students are underclassmen and are unlikely to have declared their LA&S option for that reason. However, the overall low percentage of students who have declared their LA&S option, suggests that even as students progress into their Junior year, they are unlikely to have selected. There is no restriction on when a student must declare options A or B, so it seems likely that most students wait until they are preparing for graduation to declare which option they have selected. However, option C requires that students submit a designed curriculum by the completion of 60 credits. There has been a sizeable increase in the percentage of students declaring Option C from 2010-2014, but there has been no corresponding increase in the percentage of students who have declared their LA&S option as might be expected since those students must declare earlier than those selecting options A or C. This suggests that the institution may not be strictly enforcing the requirement to declare option C by the completion of 60 credits.

**Table 1: Liberal Arts and Sciences Option
Matriculated Undergraduate Students - Fall Semester**

Year	Total Students	Declared LA&S Option	Option A	Option B	Option C
2014	4,130	11.38%	11.70%	62.98%	25.32%
2013	4,146	13.63%	13.10%	69.38%	17.52%
2012	4,058	15.06%	10.47%	77.74%	11.78%
2011	4,105	12.45%	12.33%	78.28%	9.39%
2010	4,135	9.60%	14.36%	77.08%	8.56%

The increase in students declaring option C and corresponding decrease in students declaring option A suggests that the goals of this option is not being met as well as may have been intended. The initial ACC proposal suggests that these options should come up for review in 3 years and “at that time it should be determined whether some foreign language study should be a requirement for all students.” The goal of option A was clearly to increase student participation in the languages, and the decrease in selection of option A suggests this has not occurred. Analysis of the percentage of students graduating having completed a language course supports this conclusion as the percentage of students graduating having completed the most popular language course, Spanish for Beginners I, has dropped over the past 10 years from 20%-11% of students. This decrease has been offset by students enrolling in new language offerings such as

Italian, but with only 3% of our students graduating having taken Italian in 2014, the overall participation in the languages does not appear to have increased. The flat levels of participation in the languages can also be seen in the percentage of students completing a Bachelor of Arts degree, which requires 2 years of language. From 2005-2014 we have maintained only 1-2% of students graduating with a BA (Table 2). Furthermore, NSSE data reveals that 34% or fewer of seniors reported completing or planning to complete foreign language coursework in 2004, 2006, 2009 and 2012, a figure that was significantly lower than our National comparison group. This self-reported figure may represent an overestimate as in 2013 and 2014 the actual percentage of students graduating with at least one language course was 25% and 29% respectively.

Option B appears to have had a more substantial impact on student’s curricula than option A. The ACC proposal language for option B indicates “this would almost be a minor in another field and would encourage students to complete a minor as they would need only two or more classes in most cases.” The goal of option B was in part to encourage students to complete a minor, and option B continues to be completed by the majority of students, suggesting it may be helping to achieve this goal. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the percentage of students graduating with a minor has increased from 2005-2014 (Table 2). Nonetheless, the recent drop in percentage of students selecting option B, and increase in students selecting option C raises the possibility that the gains in students declaring minors may be lost over time if this trend continues.

Prior to the implementation of the new LA&S, students were required to take 12 credits of LA&S electives beyond those required within the LA&S clusters. While the new LA&S reduced the number of credits specified in clusters by 12, it also offered some potential guidance in the ways students selected the 12 credits that weren’t restricted by clusters. The stated intention was “to insure that students used the increased flexibility of this curriculum in a productive, academic fashion. It is unclear the extent to which the increase in students selecting Option C reflects student preference, restrictions imposed by major requirements, or increased awareness about and advocacy for this option by advisors. However, it appears students are tending to be more likely to opt for a system more like the old LA&S in which the 12 credits are used for any LA&S courses, rather than using the flexibility to pursue languages or a minor. Given that so many of these students may be declaring their choice of options late in their academic career, the LA&S council will need to consider whether this trend supports the broader goal of helping students achieve their academic and professional objectives through the LA&S or whether it represents students selecting courses and the related option as a matter of convenience rather than to meet academic and professional goals.

Table 2: Graduates: Bachelor of Arts and Minor

Academic Year	Total	BA: N	BA: %	Minor: N	Minor: %
2005	485	11	2.27	101	20.82
2006	558	9	1.61	82	14.70
2007	618	13	2.10	113	18.28
2008	624	15	2.40	117	18.75
2009	636	7	1.10	125	19.65
2010	695	9	1.29	164	25.60
2011	694	9	1.30	230	23.14
2012	802	20	2.49	281	35.04
2013	817	14	1.71	328	40.15
2014	849	19	2.24	335	39.46

The overall reduction in credits required by the LA&S was part of an effort to address the fact that the old requirements were “complex, numerous and generally cumbersome.” These requirements were seen as limiting a student’s ability to graduate in a timely fashion. Academic records of all students graduating in the years 2005 to 2014 were examined to determine the average number of credits students had earned at graduation (Table 3). Students pursuing multiple degrees were excluded from the analysis. From 2005 – 2014 there has been a fairly steady decrease in the average credits at graduation. While the change has only amounted to 2.27 credits, such a shift is meaningful, given that no student can graduate with less than 120 credits, skewing the distribution above 120. Furthermore, an analysis of 4 and 6 year graduation rates for first-time full-time freshmen cohorts entering in 1997-2009 reveal increases, particularly for those cohorts that began in 2007 for 6 year rates and 2008 and 2009 for 4 year rates, all coming just after the implementation of the new LA&S. While there are many other factors that contribute to credits at graduation and graduation rate, the evidence suggests that the reduction in credits in the LA&S curriculum could be making it easier for students to graduate on time.

Table 3: Average Earned Credits at Graduation
Undergraduate Students

Academic Year	Credits at Graduation
2014	126.21
2013	126.99
2012	126.40
2011	127.63
2010	127.13
2009	127.93
2008	128.29
2007	128.17
2006	128.54
2005	128.48

Table 4: Four-year and Six-year Graduation Rates
(First-time, full-time freshmen)

Fall Entry Term	4 year Rate	6 Year Rate
1997	21.3%	41.4%
1998	15.5%	41.4%
1999	20.9%	48.3%
2000	26.6%	47.5%
2001	22.4%	44.2%
2002	23.5%	45.7%
2003	24.4%	52.0%
2004	21.5%	46.0%
2005	20.9%	43.2%
2006	23.6%	46.0%
2007	20.9%	50.4%
2008	29.9%	-
2009	27.4%	-