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Core Curriculum in Texas: Introduction and Background

The first legislative initiative to define "core curriculum" was House Bill 2183, passed in 1987 by the 70th Texas Legislature. That bill provided for the adoption and evaluation of general education core curricula by Texas public colleges and universities to ensure quality in undergraduate higher education. Senate Bill (SB)148 was passed by the 75th Texas Legislature in January 1997, and repeals all earlier legislation concerning either lower-division transfer or core curriculum. This statute continues the state-level focus on facilitating the transfer of lower-division course credit among public colleges and universities throughout the state. One of its provisions allows the transfer student to use a successfully completed group of lower-division core curriculum courses and/or a successfully completed group of lower division "field of study" courses to substitute for similar groups of courses at the college or university to which they transfer.

SB 148 also requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to adopt rules that include "a statement of the content, component areas, and objectives of the core curriculum," which each institution is to fulfill by its own selection of specific courses. The bill stipulates that the core curriculum adopted by the Coordinating Board is to be implemented with courses totaling 42 semester credit hours (unless an individual institution has requested and received approval from the Coordinating Board to have a core curriculum of other than 42 semester credit hours), and that a completed 42-semester-credit-hour core curriculum shall transfer as a block and substitute for a 42-semester-credit-hour lower-division core curriculum at any public institution of higher education in Texas. The block transfer of lower-division "field of study" courses is also provided for in this legislation, although specific numbers of credit hours in a particular academic field are not specified.

The statute allows the Coordinating Board to convene advisory committees to recommend the content, component areas, and objectives of the core curriculum to the board, and to offer other assistance in the implementation of the law. The Core Curriculum Advisory Committee began its work on November 20-21, 1997. Scheduled meetings of this advisory committee, names and contact information of the committee members, and the minutes of that committee are available on-line at the THECB web site. All meetings comply with the Open Meetings Act. Field of Study Advisory Committees will be convened in mid-1998. Those committees will be announced on-line when a schedule becomes available.

The Core Curriculum Advisory Committee has 24 members who were appointed after an exhaustive process in which institutional presidents and chancellors and systems officials were invited to submit nominations for membership. The committee membership represents two-

year and four-year institutions and is balanced for gender, academic discipline, and region. As specified in the law, a majority of the members hold faculty appointments, but admissions, advising, registrar, and undergraduate general education administrative staff are also represented among the committee membership. Members serve a two-year term.

Four subcommittees have been appointed to facilitate the workload of this committee. Those subcommittees are: (1) Subcommittee on Transfer Dispute Resolution Policy; (2) Subcommittee on Coordinating Board Criteria and Procedures for Evaluating requests for a Core of Other Than 42 Semester Credit Hours; (3) Subcommittee on Institutional Evaluation of Core Curricula: Criteria and Procedures; and (4) Subcommittee on Board Evaluation of Institutional Transfer Practices: Criteria and Procedures. Other subcommittees may be appointed as further committee assignments develop.

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