

*Draft—for comment*

**Some Thoughts about the Undergraduate Curriculum:  
Is It Time to Review and Revise?**

October 17, 2000

*It is up to us, as educators, to show our students the beauty and interest of a life that is open to the whole world<sup>1</sup>*

The fundamental responsibility of our undergraduate curriculum is to prepare our students to think critically and act responsibly in an increasingly complex world. As we prepare a new strategic plan for FIU, it may be timely to examine our curriculum. There are two major challenges and several significant opportunities related to undergraduate studies that we should consider:

**Challenge 1:** Given our commitment to access as an urban institution and the structure of higher learning in Florida, we have considerable numbers of undergraduates who enter FIU from the community colleges or as transfer students from other universities. These students bring many important attributes to the University community and contribute to its diversity. However, they also bring very uneven core academic preparation to the institution.

We have been far more attentive to the educational preparation of our Freshmen (FTICS) than to other significant segments of our undergraduate student community. I believe that we have the obligation to question this disjuncture. *How can we ensure that all undergraduate students—including those entering FIU at different levels of preparation and from different entry points—acquire the basic competencies that we mandate for our FTICs?*

**Challenge 2:** We have invested considerable attention and energy to the crafting of our undergraduate core curriculum during the last decade. This core is largely oriented to students who are privileged enough to begin their higher education at Florida International University as Freshmen. We are concerned about the relevance of their formal education in a context of accelerating change: the rapid diffusion of technology; the reality of diversity; and the emergence of a boundaryless world resulting from globalization. *Have these changes engendered meaningful discussion by faculty about our current approach to liberal education and the implications for critical thinking skills?*

Related questions need to be posed:

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<sup>1</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, **Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education** (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 84.

- Is there a burden /responsibility/opportunity imposed by who we are and where we are? Who we are: national, public, urban, research, diverse with an explicit international mandate. Where we are: a major global city that is a communication and transportation cross-roads increasingly connected to the service economy through advanced information technology.
- To enhance our students' critical thinking skills, is it enough that we are diverse? Or do we have the obligation to expect that our classroom pedagogies will take better advantage of this diversity in a context of heightened attention to learning vs. teaching.
- Given our commitment to liberal education, have we invested enough thought in the full range of living/learning options that could be part of a student's education at FIU? Residential and non-residential learning communities are nascent but seem to be thriving. We have experienced a boomlet in study-abroad. Service-learning and workplace internships are in demand, both among students as well as the community. The linkage of undergraduate students to the research enterprise has emerged as a major challenge at many institution. In some parts of the country, institutions have developed innovations in their curricula to allow students to focus on Western and non-Western Great Books.

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