

Liberal arts system too liberal with requirements



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Liberal arts curricula aim to provide a "well-rounded" education for students, but UNC Asheville's never-ending list of core requirements distorts this concept.

There are too many required courses at UNCA, and statistics hint the overload of requirements might explain why the school has such a low graduation rate. Well-rounded universities should not implement policies that often force students to stay in school for more than four years.

Suppose that a career-minded family wants to send Johnny to college. Johnny's a smart kid. Heck, he may even get into Stanford, and maybe has enough Advanced Placement credits to eliminate a few required classes. Mom and Dad are not comfortable spending a five-digit tuition fee, so they go with UNCA, an affordable and local alternative.

The family probably made a great decision. UNCA is an underrated intellectual community that offers a great deal of academic competition.

Unless Johnny carefully plans the next four years of his life, he will probably not graduate on time.

In order to graduate, Johnny must complete roughly 65 required credit hours. This figure varies from student to student, give or take a few credit hours, since a few courses may satisfy multiple requirements.

Here is a list of classes that all UNCA students must complete to be eligible for graduation: 12 hours of humanities, four hours from HUM 414 or LS 479, nine hours of writing intensives, four hours of a laboratory science, nine cluster hours, two health and wellness hours, four math hours, six foreign language hours, six hours of information literacy courses, three hours in a diversity intensive, LANG 120 and LS 179. Most majors require about 40 credit hours.

It is alarming that most of students' class time is beyond their control. Thanks to this long list of silly requirements, students have little time to pursue their own interests without a great deal of pressure. In this sense, UNCA is more like a high school, and this image damages UNCA's ability to generate careers.

There comes a time when a 19 to 22-year-old student needs to apply their specialty to the real world rather than some vague notion of a "liberal arts community."

Some of these classes are more practical than others in terms of a liberal arts mission. Some of them are completely unreasonable.

After more than 10 years of math training in high school, math requirements have no place in a liberal arts atmosphere, especially when there's already a quantitative intensive.

It is safe to assume if a selective college like UNCA accepts a student, he or she probably got at least as far as precalculus in grade school. Except now, students can take "Nature of Mathematics," a lower-level class that is a waste of four precious credit hours.

Six foreign language hours are also unreasonable to constitute a well-rounded education. Most undergrads probably took foreign language courses for several years, starting in first grade.

Students come from a variety of regions, and their high school educations differ. It is bogus to assume they all should take a diversity-intensive class, when there are already 19 required hours in the liberal studies and humanities departments.

The 2001 College Portrait of Undergraduate Education reported that 36 percent of first-time, full-time UNCA students graduate in four years. A quarter of students remain at UNCA for additional semesters.

This indicates the majority of UNCA

students will encounter frustrating schedule conflicts that contribute to one's inability to graduate, no matter how much they excel in their field of study.

The problem lies not within the administration's intentions, but in its interpretation of "well-rounded." It is not a bad thing to expose young people to a vast pool of topics. After a couple of years in college, officials need to allow students to find their own way and focus on obtaining a specialty.

UNCA aims to "expand enrollment of full-time students by 30 percent and increase the physical capacity to teach, house and educate them within the next 10 years," according to UNCA's Phase One Response.

It is time for officials to rethink this plan. Cutting some of the requirements could easily improve the graduation rate. Students shouldn't miss out on a lot of great classes because they're too busy monitoring their graduation checklist.

If more students graduated on time, there would be more room for incoming students. If there is more room, then there will be more students paying tuition, which will allow for more teachers and classrooms. Surely someone in the administrative offices can sympathize with students on this issue and eliminate at least a few courses from the core curriculum.

Finally, sex education goes beyond abstinence

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Sex education in North Carolina just legally changed for the better, but the economy might force that change to wait. The problem is that teenagers won't wait, and the result is an economical and social disadvantage for women statewide.

Teenagers in the United States have sex. Realizing this, legislators in North Carolina recently passed a bill changing statewide sex education standards. Now sex education won't just be about abstinence.

There are questions about where to cut money in the state budget, though, and these new changes are one of the bits of spending that might get cut. Despite the cuts, the new law requires that sex education "teaches

about the effectiveness and safety of all FDA-approved contraceptive methods in preventing pregnancy," according to the General Assembly.

It cost the state \$324 million in 2006, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, to pay for the 14,701 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 who got pregnant.

Compare that cost to North Carolina's sex education efforts. This year the federal government supplied \$1.13 million of our abstinence-only spending efforts, according to a letter sent in March to state superintendents from the Department of Public Instruction.

That's under the now-expired "Title V" federal abstinence-only funding scheme, which President Obama let lapse. We didn't quite match it. We never have.

For a more local perspective,

Buncombe County has records 60 unintended teenage pregnancies for every 1,000 girls in that age range. Last year, the estimate was 419 teenage pregnancies, 130 of which were repeats, which are two pregnancies before ages 19.

That's 130 girls in Buncombe County last year who got pregnant twice before even getting within a year of the legal drinking age. It's an estimate, but it's still shocking. It simply should not happen.

Two unintended pregnancies in the span of four years indicates that perhaps these young women are uneducated in proper birth control methods.

This can and should be fixed.

On a per-pregnancy basis, based on the above numbers, every teen pregnancy costs the state just a little more than \$22,000. It would take

more than 100 pregnancies worth of money to pay for the state sex education budgeting.

If Buncombe County had 319 teenage pregnancies in a year instead of 419, we could pay for the state's entire outlay. If Buncombe County stopped not the first, but only the second unwanted pregnancy for teenagers in this county alone, it would recoup more money than is spent on sex education statewide.

Nationally, teen pregnancy costs more than \$7 billion each year. A rough estimate puts annual teenage pregnancies at 750,000. Nationally, North Carolina is around average, just a little bit better maybe, in raw teen-pregnancy rates.

Not only is this not something we should try to be average in, it's not