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Trends in Undergraduate General Education in the U.S., the Texas Core Curriculum, and Communication Course Requirements

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In October 2011, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board revised Texas Core Curriculum (TCC) rules impacting all public higher education institutions in Texas. The new rules were implemented in the fall semester of 2014. In this study, we review the history of undergraduate general education requirements in the United States and recent changes to the TCC. Then to determine how recent changes reflect historical trends in general education and affect the course offerings of departments of English and communication, we use descriptive statistics to examine courses included under the TCC Communication Foundational Component Area of 37 state universities and 53 community colleges. Findings indicate the number of required English and speech communication courses decreased both at community colleges (-11.5%) and universities (-15.9%), signaling a shift toward providing students greater choice in course selection which could impact academic programs in the years to come.

Keywords: undergraduate general education, Texas Core Curriculum, Communication Foundational Component Area

For centuries, institutions of higher education in the United States have taken various approaches to establishing and implementing their general education curricula, the series of courses that all undergraduate students must complete regardless of their major or concentration. While the specific objectives and requirements for a general education curriculum are unique to each institution, the underlying purpose is similar: to ensure that every undergraduate student is introduced to a broad range of knowledge, skills, and intellectual approaches, which provide a foundation for more advanced coursework and help prepare the student to become a responsible, productive member of society. Texas is one of the many states that recently revised their general education core curriculum: the Texas Core Curriculum (TCC), which was first implemented in 1987. Since that time, every student earning a baccalaureate degree from any Texas public college or university has been required to complete the TCC. After a multi-year review of the TCC, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)[1] approved and implemented the revised TCC beginning in the fall semester of 2014 (THECB, 2015b). The courses included in the TCC fall under nine component areas: eight Foundational Component Areas (communication; mathematics; life and physical science; language, philosophy, and culture; creative arts; American history; government/political science; and social and behavioral sciences), and one institutional Component Area Option (THECB, 2012). Each Foundational Component Area (FCA) has a set number of required hours and core objectives that all courses offered under that FCA must meet. The changes to the TCC affected and will continue to affect which courses are included in the core curriculum at each state college and university, which in turn can affect the academic programs that offer those courses.

[1] The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is a planning body created in 1965 (Connally, 1965) to "advise the Legislature on higher education and to coordinate designed services statewide" (Select Committee on Higher Education, 1987, p. 8).

In this study, we—an interdisciplinary research team of English and communication faculty and, at the time of data collection, undergraduate students—review the history of undergraduate general education requirements in the United States and the social, economic, and political forces that have influenced changes to undergraduate enrollment and curricula. We then summarize recent changes to the core curriculum in Texas. Next, in an effort to determine and illustrate the impact changes to the core have on the curricula and course offerings of academic programs, we analyze in detail changes to one specific area of the TCC, the Communication FCA, at 37 state universities and 53 community colleges. The reason for restricting the analysis to this area of the TCC is twofold: (a) to manage the size of the corpus, we selected one component area, and (b) we chose Communication as the courses included under this FCA are the ones with which we are most familiar (i.e., English and communication). Narrow in scope, the study offers a replicable framework for researchers interested in reproducing or extending the study to the other component areas of the TCC.

General Education in the United States: Models, Forces, Agents of Change

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) define general education as follows:

> [T]hat part of a liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing essential intellectual, civic, and practical capacities. General education can take many forms, and increasingly includes introductory, advanced, and integrative forms of learning. (AAC&U, para. 9)

From the 1600s when Harvard (the oldest institution of higher education in the United States) was established to the present decade in Texas, institutions have taken various approaches to implementing an undergraduate general education. These approaches or models include a unified curriculum based on a study of the classics with no distinction between specialized and general education courses, an elective system in which students may select their courses and individualize their program of study, and distribution structures in which students have some choice but are required to take courses in specific subject areas (e.g., humanities, sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and fine arts). In their study of 292 U.S. four-year colleges and universities, both public and private, over a 25-year period (1975–2000), Brint, Proctor, Murphy, Turk-Bicakci, & Hanneman (2009) found general education requirements comprised a significant portion, approximately 30%, of the undergraduate curricula (p. 605). Consequently, changes to general education requirements (i.e., the addition or subtraction of required courses) can have an impact on academic programs, the courses they offer, and the ability to retain and/or hire faculty in those programs. For example, if a change to the core results in fewer communication courses being required, then enrollment in communication courses may also decrease. If enrollment in communication courses decreases, then fewer faculty will be needed to teach those courses. Conversely, if more communication courses are included in the core, then enrollment may increase and signal a need to hire additional faculty.

To place our study of the recent changes to the TCC into a broader context, we now provide a brief historical review of general education in America. The varied rationales and consequences of previous decisions related to general education requirements can help us understand possible consequences of current decisions and provide insight into future considerations.

Undergraduate Education: 1636 to Early-1800s

The roots of undergraduate curriculum requirements in the United States can be traced to Harvard College. Founded in 1636, Harvard educated young men from privileged backgrounds who were preparing for leadership roles in the church, law, or medicine. Until the mid-1800s, Harvard

students were required to take a single curriculum—a unified curriculum with no distinction between specialized and general education courses. In his study of the history of coherence in general education, Boning (2007) noted that it wasn't until the 1820–1830s that the "concept of 'general education' as an entity distinguished from specialized study began to appear" (p. 2). During this time, new universities were founded, many of which were secular, and the institutions began to introduce options to the traditional curriculum's emphasis on a classical education, options that included providing students more choice in course selection. These early efforts for reform were met with resistance: the Yale Report of 1828 condemned the move away from the classics and is credited with halting similar curricular changes for several decades. This resistance to change, however, was relatively short lived: later in the century, interest in general education reform resurfaced, often with Harvard taking a lead role, and so began a series of reforms to undergraduate education that continue to the present, "a history that can best be described as a swinging pendulum" (Boning, 2007, p. 1) between the opposite poles of a unified curriculum and an elective system.

More Students, More Choice: 1800s–1900

From the eighteenth century into the first decades of the nineteenth century, the United States was transformed by the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. As states transitioned from agrarian to industrial economies dominated by new technologies and manufacturing processes, there was an increased need for occupational training and renewed interest in educational reform. Justin Smith Morrill, a Republican Congressman from Vermont, saw a need for education in agriculture and the mechanical arts and sponsored legislation to fund the establishment of public colleges and universities that would "promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life" (Transcript of Morrill Act, 1862, para. 4). The Morrill Land-Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 had a major impact on higher education, particularly the size and heterogeneity of the student population. The first act in 1862 funded the creation of colleges in each state that offered an agriculture and mechanical arts curriculum. The second act in 1890 required institutions to provide African Americans access to higher education by allowing them to enroll either in existing institutions or in land-grant institutions designated for African Americans.

Texas citizens benefited from these and other legislative acts. Following the Civil War, Texas reentered the Union in 1870 and became eligible for a Morrill Land Grant, the funds from which were used to establish what are now Texas A&M University, the state's first public institution of higher education, and Prairie View A&M University, a historically black university (Cardozier, n.d.). In the same year, the Texas Legislature mandated that all children aged six to eighteen years old attend school, which led to the establishment of eight "normal schools" to prepare teachers for the expanding school system. Later renamed teachers colleges, these institutions, now universities, exist today, for example, University of North Texas and Stephen F. Austin State University (Cardozier, n.d.). In another act, the Texas Legislature in 1901 established the Girls Industrial College, now Texas Woman's University, a school that "had then and has now a dual mission: to provide a liberal education and to prepare young women 'for the practical industries of the age' with a specialized education" (Texas Woman's University, n.d., para. 1). Over the course of several decades, Texas increased both the number and diversity of educational opportunities available to its citizens.

During this time, private schools, too, were reexamining the educational opportunities available to their students. In 1869, Harvard instituted an elective system, which allowed students to choose their sequence of courses. Many universities followed Harvard's lead, and by the end of the 1800s, the number of prescribed courses had dropped (as had interest in general education), and the number of electives increased. As a result, faculty taught fewer required courses and had greater op-

portunities to pursue their own research. Consequently, faculty specialization and the range of courses offered increased (Wehlburg, 2010, p. 4).

Increased Unity and Structure: 1900–1950

Increased access to higher education for a more heterogeneous student population, coupled with providing students more choice in their curricula, while all important, came with repercussions. Students were admitted to institutions with different levels of academic preparation, and with fewer requirements that they complete a common set of courses, they could graduate in like circumstances—with varying levels of preparation and capability (Wehlburg, 2010, p. 5). In the early 1900s, concern that students were receiving a fragmented education helped propel the preferred model of general education back toward a more unified or coherent curriculum. In 1909, Harvard's new president, Abbot Lawrence Lowell, immediately called for an end to free electives and implemented a distribution structure that included taking courses in four subject areas: the biological sciences, physical sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. While not all institutions were ready to completely eliminate the elective system and the connections they believed *were* inherent in such a curriculum, during the 1920s and 1930s, many institutions experimented with various approaches to providing unity in the curriculum, particularly through distribution requirements, in which students had some choice in course selection but were held to institutional requirements, such as interdisciplinary survey courses, senior seminars, or a great books curriculum.[2]

Interest in general education reform again waned as Americans struggled with a devastated economy and high unemployment during the Great Depression. In Texas, college students no longer could afford tuition, faculty salaries were cut, and the Texas Legislature in 1932 considered closing or merging many of the teachers colleges. Fortunately, Texas colleges and universities received support from Roosevelt's New Deal Programs, particularly the National Youth Administration (NYA), which provided college students grants in exchange for work. Similar to Federal Work-Study jobs today, the NYA grants made it possible for thousands of Texans to attend college (Cardozier, n.d.). During both World Wars, Texas universities and colleges were used to train military personnel for officer and other training, and following WWII, Texas, like all other states, experienced a huge growth in enrollment of veterans as a result of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill.

Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas, the site of this study, provides a good example of the development of colleges in Texas. Created in 1922 and first named Wichita Falls Junior College, it was the second municipal junior college in Texas. During World War II, the establishment of Sheppard Field (now Sheppard Air Force Base) a few miles north of Wichita Falls contributed to the college's student population, and in 1946, the college, then named Hardin Junior College, added a senior college division, and altered its name to Hardin College, before being renamed Midwestern University in 1950 (Midwestern State University).

Following World War II, interest in general education reform resurfaced with the publication of Harvard's *General Education in a Free Society* (1945). The report, commonly referred to as the Redbook, examined general education for secondary and collegiate students and argued for a more *coherent* general education for students, that is, a shared curriculum that provided more commonality in the education students received. The authors argued that in a free society, both general and specialized education were necessary and that general education should compose one-third of the undergraduate curriculum. They also proposed a core curriculum for Harvard, which was not ap-

[2] For rationale and description of the great books curriculum, see the "General Education" chapter in Hutchins' (1936) *The Higher Learning in America.*

proved; nevertheless, the report and its recommendations were influential in the shaping of undergraduate degree programs—in their shifting toward similar structured distribution systems—at other institutions in the years to follow (Boning, 2007, pp. 8–9).

Increased Diversity, Voice, and Electives: 1960s–1970s

In the 1950s and 1960s, college enrollment surged as young people entered college. When the postwar baby boomer generation began entering college in the 1960s, college enrollment rose by 120% (U. S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 66). Public colleges expanded dramatically during this time to meet the demand. To address the growth, the Texas Legislature took over several two-year colleges and private universities. It was during this time (1961) that Midwestern University became a part of the Texas Colleges and Universities System and the junior college division was dissolved.

As student enrollment increased, so did the diversity of the student population and their demands for change in higher education. Several events contributed to these shifts. The first was Dixon v. Alabama (1961), a federal court case that affirmed students' constitutional right to due procedural process and ended the in loco parentis relationship between institutions and their students. The second was the Higher Education Act of 1965, legislation that provided financial assistance to students which, in turn, increased the enrollment of minorities and other underrepresented student populations. The outcome of the case and legislation was a more diverse, vocal student population, many of whom questioned the rationale for and relevance of courses included in general education distribution requirements. Many believed the curriculum didn't include the perspectives of women and minorities and/or began to demand a curriculum that they believed was more pertinent to their vocational objectives. Institutions responded to such concerns, and between 1967–1974, "nearly three-fourths of institutions reduced their general education requirements" and increased the number of electives (Boning, 2007, p.10). Propelled by the increasing demands of a diverse student population, the general education pendulum once again swung back toward elective systems.

Renewed Focus on Requirements and Prescription: 1980s–2000

As expansion (the increasing number of students attending college made possible by government policies and support) and diversification continued to impact higher education, calls for general education reform resurfaced in the late 1970s, with three reports garnering national attention (Gaff, 2015). In 1977, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published *Missions of the College Curriculum* in which they described general education as a "disaster area," one that no longer provided students a uniform, liberal education, and that this had contributed to a devaluation of the undergraduate degree (Wehlburg, 2010, p. 7). In the same year, Ernest Boyer, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, and his assistant, Martin Kaplan, published *Educating for Survival* (1977) arguing for and suggesting a common core of study in higher education. The third report came in 1978, in which Harvard College's Task Force on the Core Curriculum again recommended a core curriculum for its undergraduate students.

A common theme in the criticism of general education during this period was the belief that "cultural literacy" was being sacrificed as institutions scrambled to meet the individual needs and demands of a growing, increasingly diverse student population (Brint et al., 2009, p. 623). Cultural literacy focuses "on the background knowledge necessary for functional literacy and effective national communication" (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1988, p. xi). That is, we need to go beyond the surface meanings of words and understand the context as well in order to understand what someone is saying, to understand what we are reading, and to write well (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1988, p. 3). In

addition, critics believed the curriculum was incoherent and advocated for greater prescription, and powerful external agencies and organizations joined the growing chorus for reform (e.g., Association of American Colleges and Universities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Exxon Foundation, and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education [Brint et al., 2009, p. 638]).

Once again, these reports and calls for reform had an impact on higher education: during the 1980s, approximately 80 to 90% of the American Council on Education member institutions reviewed and/or revised their undergraduate curricula (Gaff, 1999, p. 1). In 1980, Midwestern State University became one of the first public institutions in Texas to establish a core curriculum, and in 1987 the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board established a core curriculum for all state universities and community colleges. The pendulum had swung again. In their study of the general education requirements in U.S. four-year colleges and universities from 1975 to 2000, Brint et al. (2009) document the increase in requirements and prescription during this time period (p. 611). Interestingly, the expansion and diversity of the student population—a primary motivator for an increase in electives in the 1960s and 1970s—became a reason in support of increased requirements and prescription in the decade that followed.

For centuries, institutions of higher learning have grappled with the question of how to best prepare college students to be productive members of society. Over the years in response to social, economic, and political forces and to changes in the student population, universities and colleges have adjusted the models of undergraduate general education, swinging back and forth between the opposite poles of prescription and choice. But at the start of the new century, another powerful storm was brewing on the horizon: the funding of higher education and student debt. The increasing number of students who were borrowing money to finance their education would change the focus of many national debates on undergraduate education reform from critiques of various curriculum models to discussions of how best to quantify the value of an increasingly expensive undergraduate education.

Undergraduate Education: The 21st Century

Financing. In recent decades, a new concern has entered into the debate of undergraduate education: how to pay for it. During this time, the way in which undergraduate education is being financed has changed considerably, a factor that has led institutions and external agents to examine not only the various models of undergraduate education, but also the "value" of the education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, from 1970 to 1983, nationwide undergraduate enrollment increased 47%, and through 2010, increased another 37%. Despite stalled enrollment between 2010–2015, over the 15-year period of 2000–2015, total enrollment increased by 30% (from 13.2 million to 17.0 million) and is projected to increase 14% (to 19.3 million students) by 2026 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). As student enrollment increased, public funding for higher education decreased, a reduction that has been offset with increases in tuition. While studies differ on the extent of these funding changes over the years, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2014) reported that from 2003–2012, state funding for all public colleges decreased by 12% overall while median tuition rose 55%—resulting in a perfect financial storm and a massive increase in student loans.

In the twenty-first century, students are graduating from college with unprecedented financial burden, from 28.6% of their annual earnings in 1990, to 74.3% in 2015 (Nasiripour & Forster, 2017). In 2016, student debt totaled $1.3 trillion, up 170% from a decade earlier (Chakrabarti, Haughwout, Lee, Scally, & van der Klaauw, 2017). Mounting student debt, the majority of which is held or guaranteed by the U.S. Department of Education, has led to additional pressures from ex-

ternal agents on institutions of higher education to not only review the approaches taken with the undergraduate curriculum but also to demonstrate the value of the increasingly expensive education that students receive.

Accountability and value-added. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, institutional leaders and faculty also responded to calls for greater accountability for student performance. In 2006, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings and the Commission on the Future of Higher Education published the results of a year-long study on the condition and future of postsecondary education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*. The controversial report called for systematic changes at colleges and universities in several areas, including increased accountability and transparency at institutions. In their final report, the Secretary's Commission argued that student achievement needed to be quantified, measured on a "value-added" basis (p. 4), and that the results needed to be made public. That is, institutions were being asked to demonstrate educational value by measuring students' ability and preparation when they entered the institution and comparing those numbers against their ability and achievement when they left (Braskamp, 2006).

Once again, institutions responded to calls for reform, and accountability and the assessing of general education outcomes became a priority. Hart Research Associates published a series of reports on the trends, practices, and assessment of undergraduate education based on surveys (conducted in 2008 and 2015) of the chief academic officers (or designated representatives) at AAC&U member institutions (Hart 2016, January 16; 2016, February 17). In comparing the findings of the two surveys, Hart reported 55% of AAC&U member institutions indicated that general education became more of a priority over the past five years (2016, January 19, p. 10). In 2015, 85% of member institutions reported they had a common set of learning outcomes that applied to all undergraduate students, up from 78% in 2008 (Hart, 2016, February 17, p. 3), and 87% assessed learning outcomes across the curriculum, up from 72% in 2008 (p. 5). In addition, Hart reported in 2015, 76% of member institutions had clear general education learning outcomes, up from 63% in 2008 (2016, Jan. 19, p. 11), and 67% assess cumulative learning outcomes in general education across multiple courses, up from 52% in 2008 (Hart 2016, February 17, p. 6). While these findings indicate an increased priority placed on assessing general education, linking learning outcomes to "value added" can be daunting.

The Spellings' Commission recommended the use of assessment instruments for measuring student learning, including the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), which measures the growth of student learning taking place in colleges, and the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress, now called the ETS Proficiency Profile, which is used to assess general education outcomes. For example, in 2013, the Texas Senate introduced, but did not vote on, a bill (SB 436) to require public colleges and universities to administer the CLA to all students during their freshman and senior years (Birdwell, 2013). While not a requirement, in 2016-2017, the CLA (now CLA+) was used in Texas by 6 higher education institutions and has been used in Texas by an additional 35 institutions, both public and private (Council for Aid to Education, 2016–2017).

Arum and Roksa (2011) also used the CLA in a study in collaboration with the Council for Aid to Education, the company that developed the CLA, to examine the factors associated with learning in higher education. The longitudinal study included 2,322 undergraduate students at 24 institutions across the United States. Their findings, published in *Academically Adrift* (2011) and a follow-up report (Arum, Roksa, & Cho, 2011), indicate college students' improvement in learning fundamental academic skills was limited. While several have pointed to methodological weaknesses in Arum and Roksa's study (e.g., Astin, 2011; Haswell, 2012), their findings reveal the complexities associated with general education reform, that is, once a model of general education has been chosen, trying to quantify its effectiveness for increased learning or educational gain is tricky at best, a prob-

lem recognized in academia. For example, Pennsylvania State University Faculty Senate (2014), in a report on the institution's examination of its general education, concluded, "Little systematic data exists that support increased learning or educational gains based on one model of General Education as opposed to another" (para. 13).

The Complexities of Education Reform

The above abbreviated history of general education in the United States is in itself general in nature, an attempt to understand the social, economic, and political contexts within which institutions of higher educations have worked to address the needs of an expanding and diverse undergraduate student population. The review does not do justice to the views of the many agents, both internal and external to academia, who participate in the seemingly endless process of educational reform, nor can it. Rather, we attempt to provide a summary of the preferred models of general education over the centuries and to examine forces and agents contributing to those changes—not to evaluate the validity of the reasons supporting changes, nor to discount other voices important to general education reform, especially those of faculty and students, groups to which the authors belong. Rather, the authors recognize the complexity of higher education reform and its importance, to society, students, and faculty, and believe it important to examine change in its greater context before examining more granular change at the state level, the topic of the next section of this study.

Modifying the Texas Core Curriculum

When the Texas Core Curriculum (TCC) first was established in 1987, it was defined as "the curriculum in liberal arts, humanities, and sciences [,] and political, social, and cultural history that all undergraduate students of an institution of higher education are required to complete before receiving an academic undergraduate degree" (Texas Education Code [TEC] Section 61.821, as quoted in Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015a). Since that time, all students earning a baccalaureate degree from a Texas public college or university have been required to complete the TCC. Prior to this time, state institutions had undergraduate requirements but they could vary. As noted earlier, prior to the first TCC, Midwestern State University (MSU) had an institutional core curriculum that consisted of 49–54 credit hours, as cited in the 1980–1981 catalog, and then 52–57 credit hours, as cited in the 1985–1986 catalog. In 1997, the legislation that provided for the first TCC was repealed, primarily to address concerns about lower-division course transfers among Texas public higher education institutions, and a new 42-hour *minimum* core was implemented in 1999. The core consisted of six basic intellectual competencies (reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking, and computer literacy) and six component areas (communication; mathematics; natural sciences; humanities and visual and preforming arts; social and behavioral sciences; and an institutionally designated option). Again, there were differences between institutions. Looking at MSU, one sees what appears to be a trend toward decreasing the required hours in the core curriculum: the 1998–2000 catalog shows a core curriculum of 52–58 hours, which decreased in the 2000–2002 catalog to 48 hours, and in 2012–2014 to 47 hours. However, while the number of hours listed under the core curriculum decreased, the changes to actual requirements were minimal. For example, a previously required computer course was replaced with a proficiency test, and several science and foreign language courses were calculated in the overall credit hour totals as three-hour credits even if they were four-hour credit courses.

In response to national attention on the state of undergraduate education, as discussed earlier (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), the THECB in 2006 established the Undergraduate Education Advisory Committee (UEAC) to review the TCC and determine if revision was needed. The

UEAC (2011) concluded that improvements to the TCC were necessary to reduce its complexity make it more transferable, and the committee recommended a new much abbreviated purpose statement:

> Through the Core Curriculum, students will gain a foundation of knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world; develop principles of personal and social responsibility for living in a diverse world; and advance intellectual and practical skills that are essential for all learning. (p. 2)

The UEAC recommended replacing the six basic intellectual competencies (reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking, and computer literacy) and their accompanying exemplary educational objectives with six defined core curriculum objectives (critical thinking skills, communication skills, empirical and quantitative skills, teamwork, social responsibility, and personal responsibility). In addition, they recommended changing the six component areas (communication; mathematics; natural sciences; humanities and visual and preforming arts; social and behavioral sciences; and an institutionally designated option) to eight foundational component areas (communication; mathematics; life and physical science; language, philosophy and culture; creative arts; American history; government/political science; and social and behavioral sciences), and one institutional component area option (THECB, 2012). The THECB accepted their recommendations, including a 42-hour *maximum* core curriculum, and implemented the revised core in the fall semester of 2014 (THECB, 2015b).

The revisions in the TCC affected and will continue to affect which courses are included in the core curriculum as the THECB allows each institution to submit an annual request for changes to its core curriculum. The authors of the study include faculty members in the Department of English and the Department of Mass Communication who have an inherent interest in changes that could impact our departments' course offerings in the coming years. Our shared interest is the basis for our study of the Communication general education requirements at 37 state universities and 53 community colleges in Texas prior to and following the implementation of the new TCC. Consequently, in the following sections, we restrict our discussion to the Communication core curriculum.

At MSU, the changes to the TCC necessitated a reduction in the University's core curriculum credit hours from 47 to 42. One of the consequences of this change was a reduction in required Communication credit hours, from nine to six hours. Previously, students were required to complete six-hours credit in first-year English composition and three hours selected from a list of three speech courses. Under the new TCC, MSU students are required to take a specific three-hour English course (Academic Research & Writing) and then select an additional three-hour course from a list of courses from various disciplines that meet the Communication FCA objectives. The THECB revised the objectives of the Communication FCA and all courses included under this component area "must follow the definitions of the FCA completely and must involve all literacy skills, oral, aural, written, and visual, as enumerated in the definition" (THECB, 2014, p. 3) (see Appendix, Table A1 for a comparison of Communication Core objectives prior to and following 2014). In what follows, we examine how the changes to the TCC Communication FCA have initially impacted public institutions across Texas.

Data Collection Procedures

The research team consisted of two faculty members, one from the Department of English and one from the Department of Mass Communication, and two undergraduate students, one an English major and one a mass communication major. Students' participation in the research project was supported by the Enhancing Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (EURECA) pro-

gram at Midwestern State University, which encourages undergraduate students to participate in research in an interdisciplinary environment (Midwestern State University, 2016).
At the start of spring 2014, we collected and compiled TCC information from The Texas General Education Core Web Center (a site hosted by Texas State University San Marcos) (n.d.), the THECB Spring 2014 CBM004 Class Report, and online catalogs from each state university and community college. Using these sources, two researchers separately documented the following for each institution:

- institution name;
- catalog year;
- core categories of (a) 010 Communication (English, rhetoric & composition) and (b) 011 Communication (composition, speech, modern language communication skills);
- semester credit hours;
- required course number and name; and
- optional course number and name.

We consulted university and college catalogs to rectify any discrepancies between sources. Then we compared the two sets of data, rectified any differences in results, and created final spreadsheets for 37 state universities and 53 state community colleges.

At the end of the spring semester of 2014, we applied for and received a second EURECA grant, which made it possible to conduct the second phase of the study. In fall 2014, we collected data on the new TCC and Communication FCA requirements for each state university and community college, using information published on the Texas General Education Core Curriculum WebCenter (a new site administered by the THECB) (THECB, 2015c), and again consulted university and college catalogs to rectify any discrepancies and address any questions.

After data were collected, researchers independently categorized each documented communication course as either specific-required (SR) or choice-required (CR), the latter indicating that the students are given several courses from which to choose. We compared results, identified and analyzed cases where we had categorized the courses differently, discussed rationale, and came to an agreement for the most accurate categorization, thus further developing categorization rules. When a category was not apparent from the course title, course descriptions in undergraduate catalogs and the Texas Common Course Numbering System (n.d.) were consulted. Our taxonomy applies strategies followed for analysis in *The Empirical Curriculum: Changes in Postsecondary Course-Taking, 1972–2000* (Adelman, 2004) (see Table 1 for the final taxonomy).

Table 1
Texas University and Community College Required Communication Course Taxonomy

Code	Criteria
ENGL I SR	Specific first semester English course, required
ENGL II SR	Specific second semester English course, required
ENGL CR	Choice of English courses, required
SPCH Pub Spk SR	Specific public speaking course, required
SPCH Intro SR	Specific introduction to speech communication course, required
SPCH CR	Choice of speech courses, required
ENGL/SPCH CR	Choice of English and/or speech courses, required
ENGL/SPCH/THEA	Choice of English, speech, and/or theatre courses (oral base),

(Table 1 cont.)

CR	required
SPCH/THEA CR	Choice of speech and/or theatre courses (oral base), required

Limitations of the study include its scope: we examined only one area of the TCC, Communication FCA. However, at MSU this area of the core curriculum sustained the largest loss in credit hours (three hours).[3] Another limitation is that we provide only an initial, first-year examination of changes to the TCC. Because the THECB allows institutions to request changes to their core curriculum once each year, changes to the core are ongoing. However, the data collected provide a needed snapshot of Communication core requirements prior to and immediately following the implementation of the new TCC, data with which to compare changes over a longer period of time. Finally, our study does not address the important issue of whether or not the new TCC increases learning, that is, whether it adds value.

Findings

When the new TCC was implemented in the fall of 2014, many institutions saw a decrease in the number of required core curriculum credit hours. Prior to the change, the core curriculum at Texas universities and community colleges ranged from 42 to 48 hours (The Texas General Education Core Web Center, n.d.). The new TCC set the maximum credit hours at 42. This decrease signals a shift from the trend identified by Brint et al. (2009) during 1975–2000 in which general education requirements at U.S. four-year colleges and universities increased by slightly more than five credit hours (p. 626). In the section that follows we examine changes to the Communication FCA, changes that could impact departments of English and communication. The primary finding is a decrease in the overall number of required English and speech communication courses both at community colleges (-11.5%) and universities (-15.9%).

At the community college level, the total number of English specific- and choice-required courses decreased (-11.3%). There was a notable decrease in the number of specific-required, second-semester English courses (-36.8%), which was offset by an increase in choice-required English courses (40.0%). Community colleges also saw a significant decrease in the total number of specific- and choice-required speech courses (-23.8%) and a decrease in choice-required speech courses (-25.6%). Another notable increase at the community college level was in interdisciplinary choice-required courses (i.e., a choice of courses is given from a list that includes English and speech).

At the university level, the total number of English specific- and choice-required courses also decreased (-14.7%), as did the specific-required, second-semester English courses (-11.5%); however, in contrast to the increase in choice-required English courses at community colleges (40.0%), universities had a significant decrease in the number of choice-required English courses (-57.1%). Universities also saw a significant decrease in the number of specific-required or choice-required speech courses (-53.8%) and a decrease in choice-required speech courses (-60.0%). At the university level, similar to community colleges, we also observed an increase in interdisciplinary choice-required courses (i.e., a choice of courses is given from a list that includes English, speech, and/or theatre courses) (see Table 3 for a comparison of communication courses in the TCC before and after the fall 2014 implementation at both the course and department level).

[3] A three-credit-hour loss under Humanities was partially offset by a new three-hour institutional requirement under Cultural and Global Understanding.

Table 2
Comparison of Communication Courses in Core Curriculum Before and After Fall 2014 Core Curriculum Implementation

Community Colleges (N=53)					
Required Courses *specific-required (SR) & choice-required (CR)*	**2013–2014 Core**	**2014–2015 Core**	**# Change**	**% Change**	**% Change by Dept.**
ENGL I SR	53	49	-4	-7.5	
ENGL II SR	38	24	-14	-36.8	} -11.3
ENGL CR	15	21	6	40.0	
SPCH Pub Spk SR	3	3	0	0.0	} -23.8
SPCH CR	39	29	-10	-25.6	
ENGL/SPCH CR	0	5	5	n/a	
TOTAL	**148**	**131**	**-17**	**-11.5**	
State Universities (N=37)					
Required Courses *specific-required (SR) & choice-required (CR)*	**2013–2014 Core**	**2014–2015 Core**	**# Change**	**% Change**	**% Change by Dept.**
ENGL I SR	35	32	-3	-8.6	
ENGL II SR	26	23	-3	-11.5	} -14.7
ENGL CR	7	3	-4	-57.1	
SPCH Pub Spk SR	1	2	1	100.0	
SPCH Intro SR	2	0	-2	-100.0	} -53.8%
SPCH CR	10	4	-6	-60.0	
ENGL/SPCH CR	0	3	3	n/a	
ENGL/SPCH/THEA CR	0	2	2	n/a	
SPCH/THEA CR	1	0	-1	-100.0	
TOTAL	**82**	**69**	**-13**	**-15.9**	

Finally, our findings indicate that the Communication FCA general education pendulum is swinging back in the direction of increased choice. Again, these findings are in contrast to those of Brint et al. (2009) who found general education requirements had become more prescriptive from 1975 to 2000, with increases in required courses for English composition (+14.7%) and speech/communications (+11.0%) (p. 628).

Discussion and Recommendations for Future Research

At U.S. colleges and universities, both public and private, general education requirements comprise a significant component of students' undergraduate education (Brint et al., 2009). Consequently, changes to general education requirements can have an impact on academic programs. The earlier program administrators can identify shifts or trends in the curriculum, the sooner they can plan for any needed changes in their curriculum and/or staffing. Our findings indicate a decrease in the overall number of required English and speech communication courses both at Texas community colleges and universities. Future research is needed to see if these decreases continue. As noted

earlier, higher education institutions may request revisions to their core curricula once a year. During the first year of TCC implementation, many institutions scrambled to meet the new requirements and understand the course submission process. In the years following the TCC implementation, more courses have been submitted to the THECB for approval and many have been added to the core curriculum. For example, under the new TCC, MSU has a two course (six-credit hours) Communication FCA requirement: as previously explained, the first three hours is a specific-required English course, and the second three hours is a choice-required course which students select from a list of interdisciplinary courses. In fall 2014, the university was in transition to the new core, and students had two courses from which to choose under the choice-required category. For fall 2017, the list under this category had grown to seven. Consequently, a follow-up study is planned for 2020 to reexamine any additional changes to the Communication FCA.

Future research also is needed on the Component Area Option (CAO) and on which courses students actually are taking. The COA (also six-credit hours) provides institutions some leeway to incorporate institutional requirements (i.e., a particular focus area such as Inquiry and Creativity) or include specific degree requirements in the core curriculum. Again, using MSU as an example, in the fall of 2014 under the COA, no English courses were offered, but in fall 2017 an English course had been added, one that could be taken under the Communication FCA or the CAO. The point here is that if we are going to examine in depth the place of English and communication courses in the TCC, going forward we need to analyze both the Communication FCA and the CAO. Additionally, while our findings illustrate the number of specific- and choice-required English and speech courses included in the TCC, past and present, not clear is which courses are taken (i.e., more popular) when students are offered a choice. CBM004 Class Report analysis could shed light on what courses students actually take, not just what courses are offered and included in the TCC.

As noted, our findings indicate that the Communication FCA general education pendulum is swinging back toward increased choice. Historical trends indicate that when faculty were able to teach fewer required courses, they had greater opportunities to pursue their own research and, as a consequence, faculty specialization and the range of courses offered increased (Boning, 2007; Wehlburg, 2010). Additional research is needed to determine if increased options available under the TCC can be tied to increased faculty specialization.

Finally, our findings do not address the issue of whether or not the new TCC increases learning, i.e., adds value, a major of topic of discussion in the last decade. Because general education assessment is recognized to be complex (Arum, Roksa, & Cho, 2011; Astin, 2011; Braskamp, 2006; Haswell, 2012; Pennsylvania State University Faculty Senate, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2006), it is beyond the scope of this study and a subject worthy of its own research and write-up.

Conclusion

Much national attention has been directed toward evaluating the quality of undergraduate general education in the United States (e.g., Arum & Roksa, 2011; Arum, Roksa, & Cho, 2011; Bloom, 1987; Boyer Commission, 1977, 1998; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1977; Harvard Task Force, 1978, as cited in Gaff, 2015; Harvard University, 1945; THECB Undergraduate Education Advisory Committee, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). As the student population has expanded and became more diversified, institutions have repeatedly responded by adjusting their undergraduate general education requirements. And while institutions and stakeholders (i.e., faulty, students, and institutional partners) agree that undergraduate students need to acquire certain knowledge and intellectual capacities, over the years there has been less consensus on the preferred model for general education. Consequently, for centuries, the preferred model has swung between the opposite poles of prescription and choice. In addition to the complex

challenge of providing students the best education possible, institutions now face the difficult task of quantifying the education students receive on a value-added basis. Each of these issues (which model to adopt, which curricula provide the most value) is important, as is the more granular-level issue of what courses are included in the general education core curriculum and if and how changes to these courses can impact academic programs. Our objectives in this study were to review the history of undergraduate general education requirements in the United States; the social, economic, and political forces that have influenced changes to the undergraduate curricula; and recent changes to the core curriculum in Texas, specifically the changes to the Communication FCA. Our hope is that the information will be of use to others interested in examining how changes taking place in the TCC reflect historical trends and, importantly, will provide a foundation for future research on the ongoing changes to the communication curricula.

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Appendix A

Communication Core Curriculum Objectives

Prior to 2014	**2014 and forward**
"COMMUNICATION (composition, speech, modern language) The objective of a communication component of a core curriculum is to enable the student to communicate effectively in clear and correct prose in a style appropriate to the subject, occasion, and audience." (THECB, Rev. 1999, p. 5)	"COMMUNICATION Courses in this category focus on developing and expressing ideas clearly, fostering understanding, and the potential for effecting change. Courses involve the command of oral, aural, written, and visual skills that enable people to exchange messages appropriate to the subject, occasion, and audience." (UEAC, 2011, p. 13)
"Exemplary Educational Objectives 1. To understand and demonstrate writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation. 2. To understand the importance of specifying audience and purpose and to select appropriate communication choices. 3. To understand and appropriately apply modes of expression, i.e., descriptive, expositive, narrative, scientific, and self-expressive, in written, visual, and oral communication. 4. To participate effectively in groups with emphasis on listening, critical and reflective thinking, and responding. 5. To understand and apply basic principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency in the development of exposition and argument. 6. To develop the ability to research and write a documented paper and/or to give an oral presentation." (THECB, Rev. 1999, p. 5)	"The Core Objectives of critical thinking skills, communication skills, teamwork, and personal responsibility are addressed by each course in this component area." (UEAC, 2011, p. 13) 1. "Critical thinking skills - to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis" 2. "Communication skills - to include effective written, oral, and visual communication" 3. "Teamwork - to include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal" 4. "Personal responsibility - to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making" (UEAC, 2011, p. 12)