PART ONE: OVERVIEW

I) History

The current Liberal Arts and Sciences (henceforth LAS) core curriculum for Fitchburg State University was adopted in 2007. The prior curriculum had been implemented in 1988, and while it was generally seen as "cutting edge" at the time, it was never evaluated or assessed to ascertain whether it was meeting its core objectives. In addition, it was widely seen as being too complex and cumbersome. With 60 required credits (out of 120), there was concern that students were having a difficult time fulfilling all of the requirements in order to graduate in a timely manner, and that they did not have freedom to select courses in areas outside of their major once they had met all of the LAS core requirements.

Due to these concerns, Fitchburg State President Michael P. Riccards initiated the LAS review process by submitting a proposal to the All College Committee for revising the LAS requirements. (ACC Proposal #13, Appendix 1) While President Riccards' proposal was not approved by the ACC, it did prompt campus discussions on the need to re-evaluate the LAS curriculum. In January 2001, Dr. George Bohrer (Communications Media) convened a faculty workshop to discuss the LAS curriculum, and a list of the curriculum's strengths and weaknesses was compiled at this workshop. As a result, a special LA&S Study Group consisting of the following six faculty members was convened by Vice President for Academic Affairs Patricia Spakes in May 2001: Richard Bisk, Eric Budd, John Chetro-Szivos, Patrice Gray, Walter Jeffko, and Daniel Nomishan. This Study group produced an Executive Summary over the course of summer 2001. (Appendix 2) In their Executive Summary, they examined the Goals and Means of the LAS curriculum, explored national trends in General Education, considered the implications of changing teacher licensure requirements for the core curriculum, and made a series of recommendations for future actions to revise the LAS core curriculum.

One of the most significant recommendations of the LA&S Study Group was for the revival and reconfiguration of the then defunct Liberal Arts and Sciences Council (LASC). The LASC had been established with the adoption of the previous curriculum in 1988, but was no longer active as of 2001. As a result of this proposal, the LASC was reconvened in spring 2004, and set to work under its newly elected chair, Dr. Eric Budd, to develop a proposal for revising the LAS core curriculum. The LASC met regularly over the next several years, and also held regular forums for members of the campus community to discuss the LAS curriculum and ideas for change. After an initial proposal met with considerable resistance, the LASC revised their proposal and that revised proposal was adopted in 2007. (Appendix 3)

Throughout the approval process, the LASC repeatedly promised that the new curriculum would be regularly re-evaluated and re-assessed, such that there would not be a repeat of the errors made with the previous curriculum. Thus, as will be discussed in the Assessment section, the LASC has regularly assessed the curriculum to determine whether it was meeting its core goals. In spring 2014, the LASC approached Dr. Eric Budd to serve as the Program Review Coordinator. Over the course of academic year 2014-2015, Dr. Budd worked closely with the

LASC, FSU Assessment Director Dr. Christopher Cratsley, the Director for Institutional Research Anthony Wilcox, and members of the Administration to gather the requisite information and data for this Program Review. Dr. Budd met with almost every academic department to discuss how the LAS curriculum affected their program(s) and students, as well as what they felt were the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. Dr. Budd and the LASC organized similar sessions for faculty on Development Day, held an open forum in the spring for all members of the community to discuss the LAS curriculum, and discussed their initial thoughts about the Review process at the Spring Development Day.

II) Best Practices

The LASC has spent a great deal of time considering what are the best practices surrounding the General Education core curriculum. In developing the curriculum, both the LAS Study Group and the LASC looked at the core curriculum of both Fitchburg State's peer institutions as well as its sister universities in the State of Massachusetts' public universities. The LASC has examined the general trends in Higher Education, with a special emphasis upon the goals and objectives of the LAS core curriculum in order to ensure that its goals and objectives were aligned with those of other institutions of higher learning.

The LASC has worked to ensure that the LAS curriculum goals and objectives align with the Best Practices being promoted on the state and national levels. Specifically, it has looked to the State of Massachusetts' Department of Higher Education (DHE) and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). By the spring of 2011 the DHE had begun to move forward with a series of initiatives related to the Vision Project, including the assessment and improvement of campus and system-wide student learning outcomes. The recommendations of the DHE included aligning system-wide work on learning outcomes with the Association of American Colleges and Universities Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) and using the AAC&U LEAP Valid Assessment of Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics to directly assess artifacts of student work.

From 2011-2015 LA&S Council members were selected to participate in and present at a number of assessment conferences including the New England Educational Assessment Network (NEEAN) summer institutes (2011 and 2012), annual Fall Forums and when appropriate Spring Dialogs in the Disciplines. The DHE received funding from the Davis Foundation in May 2011 for the Advancing Massachusetts Culture of Assessment (AMCOA) project, and with campus support, Massachusetts became an AAC&U LEAP State in 2012. Fitchburg State LASC members regularly participated in AMCOA meetings and conferences, Fitchburg State became an AAC&U LEAP institution in 2011, and has sent teams of LAS faculty members to the AAC&U General Education and Assessment Conference each year from 2012-2015.

Through this professional development, members of the LASC have learned about and in many cases embraced a variety of best-practices in General Education design and assessment. LASC members have seen presentations on the broad continuum of LAS design models from "distribution-based" models like our current one, which require courses in a variety of disciplines

to "integrative models" in which the emphasis is on explicitly linking learning across disciplines. They have examined LEAP ELOs and compared them to the LAS Objectives as ways to provide shared learning outcomes across disciplines in a General Education Curriculum, finding and reporting on a fairly close alignment between our LAS objectives and the LEAP ELOs with some important distinctions. (Appendix 4) The LASC has also examined the LEAP VALUE rubrics as tools to assess student learning outcomes and found that they could be modified and adapted to our institutional needs with some members of the LASC and other Fitchburg State community members both presenting and co-publishing on their use in the areas of Written Communication, Civic Engagement, Information Literacy, and Quantitative Reasoning. (For a bibliography with those articles, please see Appendix 5) By investigating the assessment models used at other institutions, LASC members have generated a series of recommendations for a more thorough LAS course approval process that requires a commitment to ongoing assessment and LAS syllabus guidelines that illustrate the importance of learning outcomes in the curriculum. Finally, LASC members have learned about the benefits of LEAP Principles of Excellence and High Impact Practices (HIPs) such as student-faculty research, learning communities, service learning, and capstone experiences. (Appendix 6)

III) Relationship to University Mission

Fitchburg State University is a small, public university and the Liberal Arts are at the core of its mission and values. In December 2009, Fitchburg State's Board of Trustees adopted its "Core Values, Mission, and Vision." (Appendix 7) Running throughout this document, as well as the University's Strategic Plan for 2015-2020, is a clear commitment to providing a quality Liberal Arts Education at an affordable price. This is seen in the following ways:

- **Core Values**: "Accessibility": Offering equitable access to high quality programs and services.
- **Mission**: Committed to excellence in teaching and learning and blending liberal arts and sciences and professional programs within a small college environment. The mission also emphasizes civic and global responsibility.
- **Vision**: Fitchburg State promises to "prepare students for a global society" and "create a culture of diversity to meet the needs of the region and enhance the personal and academic lives of the university community."

Fitchburg State University's commitment to providing an excellent Liberal Arts education is also evidenced in its recently approved Strategic Plan for 2015-2020. (Appendix 8) This commitment is evidenced in the following ways:

Goal 1. Strengthen Academic Programs

Objective 1A. Prepare students for success in the workforce through a university education, which combines a liberal arts education and professional programs.

Actions 1A:

1A1. Align Liberal Arts and Sciences core curriculum with skills and aptitudes valued in the workforce. These values include meta-cognition, critical and creative thinking, inductive and deductive reasoning, oral and written communication, ethical reasoning, social justice, problem sensitivity, and cross-disciplinary experience.

1A2. Increase collaboration in academic programs through team teaching, learning communities, interdisciplinary course development, and research opportunities and support appropriate high-impact learning experiences, including opportunities in academic and experiential settings.

Objective 1D: Enhance and affirm student, faculty, and staff diversity as central to the Fitchburg State experience. Experiencing diversity expands perspectives, contributes to multicultural competence, and becomes a key element in attracting and retaining students, faculty, and staff.

Actions 1D:

1D2. Identify and support appropriate and ongoing efforts to further develop multi-cultural competencies in students, faculty, and staff.

Goal 2. Promote Student Success by Breaking Down Barriers

Objective 2B: Expand the use of high-impact practices, which break down barriers to student success.

Actions, 2B:

2B1. Develop a freshman year experience proposal to be presented to the AUC in the fall of 2016.

2B2. Bring cohesion to all academic programs by requiring a senior capstone experience, portfolio, or internship to align with workforce values by fall of 2016.

2B3. Increase opportunities for community-based student research, service learning, and community-based learning and develop a central university point of contact for internships under the expanded mission of the Crocker Center for Civic Engagement.

Goal 3. Build a University Community that Embraces Civic and Global Responsibility

Objective 3A: Collaborate and align with local business, industry, educational, extended campus, and cultural partners on community-based projects and internships.

Actions 3A:

3A1. Support educational initiatives that extend and apply civic learning to regional, national and international settings. Stress the role of reflection in experiential learning so

students are aware of and articulate about their knowledge. Promote student development of civic competencies through service or applied learning to address social, public and community concerns.

The LAS curriculum is clearly central to the University's mission, values, and plans for the future. It is worth noting that the University has never developed a mission for the LAS curriculum exclusively, an omission that will be addressed below in the "Weaknesses" section. Nonetheless, the structure of the LAS curriculum and the learning outcomes supported by this structure have the potential to align well with the University's mission and the new strategic plan in two key areas:

- Blending liberal arts and sciences along with professional programs through a curriculum that focuses on interdisciplinary education, communication skills, both oral and written, and problem solving skills such as problem sensitivity, critical and creative thinking, and deductive and inductive reasoning.
- Fostering Civic and Global Responsibility through service and applied learning with a focus on reflection and metacognition in experiential learning, social justice, ethical reasoning, and multicultural sensitivity.

IV) Program Structure

Liberal Arts and Sciences Core Outline

Curricular Clusters Core (36 credits)

A) Science, Math and Technology: 4 courses (Minimum 12 credits)

a) 1 math course
b) b) 1 lab science course
c) 1 health/fitness related course—currently those courses approved by the Exercise and Sports Science department
d) 1 elective

B) Citizenships and the World: 3 courses (Minimum 9 credits)

a) 1 history course
b) 1 human behavior course
c) 1 elective

C) The Arts: 5 courses (Minimum 15 credits)

a) 1 art or music course
b) 1 literature course
c) Writing I and II
d) 1 elective

Global Diversity: Two of the courses taken within the three clusters must have a Global Diversity designation. These courses provide a context for understanding the political, economic, cultural, and historical events or experiences of other countries, including those that are non-Western. (Western means Europe—including Russia—and North America.) At least one of the two courses must address the relationship of two or more global regions.

Advanced Options

In addition to the 36-credit core, students must select from three LA&S options.

Option A: 6 credits in a foreign language *and* 6 credits of LA&S coursework at or above the 2000 level.

Option B: 12 credits (with a minimum of six at or above the 2000 level) in a single discipline outside of the student's first major.

Option C: 12 credit unique curriculum based on the student's interests, needs or goals and with advisor assistance. The curriculum, with a statement of rationale, must be approved by the advisor, department chair and the appropriate dean and then filed with the registrar. The curriculum must be submitted before the student has completed 60 credits. No more than one course within this option may be completed before the curriculum has been approved.

PART TWO: Faculty

Beginning in the winter of 2011, Fitchburg State University has made a concerted effort to use regular January and May faculty Development Days as a tool for fostering dialogs about improving our Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum. This work has gone through three phases. In the first phase from 2011 until January 2013, the LASC has focused on engaging faculty in discussions around our existing learning outcomes, the ways in which we assess these learning outcomes, and the implications of our data for teaching and learning. In the seond phase from May 2013-2014 the LASC began to engage faculty with considering how reading, writing, critical analysis and logical thinking related to our existing learning outcomes, and discussing ways to improve these outcomes for students. In the third phase of this work from May 2014 – January 2015, the LASC has sought specific feedback from the campus community on our exsting LAS outcomes, curriculum and potential future directions. For further discussion of how the LASC has engaged the faculty in a discussion of the LAS curriculum, see the report from Fitchburg State's Assessment Director Dr. Christopher Cratsley. (Appendix 9)

The faculty development days and other professional development activities surrounding the LAS curriculum have all been oriented towards the full time faculty. Yet, the reality is that many LAS courses are taught by adjuncts. As a result, the LASC examined the highest enrolled LAS courses in each cluster from 2006-2015 in order to get a sense of what percentage of the various sections were being offered by adjuncts. That percentage was then compared with the

overall percentage of classes taught by adjuncts ineach of the LAS departments. Below are a few of the findings, but for the entire "Report on Faculty Teaching Liberal Arts and Sciences Courses" please see Appendix 10.

- In some cases there is not a sufficient number of full time faculty available to teach all of the required sections .because the faculty need to offer other classes.
- Even when there is a large number of faculty emmbers available to teach a given class, in some cases demand for those classes is still so great as to require the use of adjuncts.
- Overall, the structure of the LAS curriculum seems to have created an over-reliance on adjunct faculty, particularly in the following disciplines: Art, Biology, English Studies, Exercise and Sport Sciences, Philosophy, and Sociology.

PART THREE: CURRICULUM

I) Objectives

The LAS core curriculum has five main objectives: Aesthetic Appreciation, Communication, Problem Solving and Synthesis, Ethical Reasoning, and Citizenship. According to the Curriculum, "These objectives lay out what we believe are the abilities all well-educated individuals should have in this time and place. They are written in language describing actions rather than general concepts in order to make them more accessible." Specifically, the Core Curriculum seeks to ensure that all Fitchburg State students achieve the following objectives:

- *Aesthetic Appreciation*: Students will examine various forms of artistic and literary works, understand the contexts from which they emerge and be able to articulate and defend their meanings and values.
- *Communication*: Students will speak, read, write, and listen to create and understand meanings using a variety of media. They will recognize how to participate in or lead groups to accomplish goals.
- *Problem Solving and Synthesizing*: Students will think critically and synthesize ideas within and across disciplines. They will fuse experience, training and research in to considered judgment, then working individually or with others, form problem-solving strategies and evaluate their effectiveness. Among these strategies, students will analyze and interpret data as a means to evaluate arguments and make informed choices.
- *Ethical Reasoning*: Students will recognize the ethical issues involved in human actions and be able to formulate a set of principles and virtues which can be brought to bear in personal and public decision making.
- *Citizenship*: Students will articulate the relationships among local, national and global concerns, interests and needs. They will recognize possibilities and opportunities to enact positive change on an individual or group level.

Within these specific curriculum objectives, there are also learning objectives that the LASC has identified. These learning objectives were identified by the LASC over the

years through its assessment efforts. As the LASC developed and fine-tuned its rubrics, these learning objectives were adopted. They are the following:

A) *Aesthetic Appreciation*:

- The students will demonstrate understanding of the different characteristics of the texts or artworks from various cultural backgrounds from antiquity to the present. They will discuss these texts or artworks within their historical, cultural, and aesthetic contexts. They will identify where, when, how, and by whom a text or an artwork was created.
- The students will analyze different texts or artworks in terms of their historical or cultural context, form, or meaning. They will express and justify their critical judgments in writing and in speech. Finally, the students will make academic arguments using reasons and evidence appropriate to their field of study in writing as well as speech.
- The students will recognize and analyze the visual aspects of an artwork, with regard to such aspects as its use of color, line, shape, texture, or pattern.
- The students will create works based upon established techniques, standards, and/or conventions.
- The students will express their own response to a particular artwork in a manner that is thoughtful, informed, and nuanced. The students will demonstrate an appreciation of beauty, and of the significance of aesthetics as a fundamental characteristic or mode of expression of the human experience.

B) CITIZENSHIP

- •Students will identify justice and injustice in such realms as the political, social, and economic arenas and discuss ways to promote justice.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of our political system and identify various means by which individuals may participate in our society as a constitutional democracy.
- Students will show an understanding of how American diversity best flourishes when it also promotes the common good of America as a unified community.
- Students will exhibit an understanding and/or participation in the ecological health of the earth and the good of its diverse species.

C) COMMUNICATION

• Students will engage critically and constructively in the exchange of ideas.
• Students will express thoughts orally and in writing with clarity and precision.
• Students will integrate knowledge from different scholarly sources.
• Students will exhibit a facility with using a variety of rhetorical strategies in writing and speaking.
• Students will employ a variety of media to express meaning clearly and creatively.
• Students will listen to others in order to understand purpose and meaning.
• Students will recognize how to participate in/or lead groups to accomplish goals.

D) ETHICAL REASONING

- Students will identify ethical issues and differentiate between ethical and non-ethical issues.
- Students will intelligently discuss values, principles and virtues as a part of a discussion of ethics.
- Students will articulate and rationally defend a position on an ethical issue.
- Students will explain how they would resolve a personal dilemma based on their personal values and principles.
- Students will apply their understandings of values and principles to the ethical dilemmas faced within their field(s).
- Students will apply their understanding of values and principles to a discussion of a broad, social ethical dilemma.
- Students will recognize and assess faulty ethical standards based on flawed or limiting reasoning.

E) PROBLEM SOLVING

- Students will demonstrate a proactive sense of responsibility to use problem-solving for individual, civic, and social choices.
- Students will have knowledge of or experience with inquiry practices of disciplines that explore the natural, social, and cultural realms.
- Students will identify problems, carry' out analyses, and interpret data in a cohesive manner.
- Students will assess various inquiry methods and determine the validity of their conclusions and significance for practical application.
- Students will identify limitations of various inquiry methods and generate alternative solutions.
- Students will use collaborative problem-solving skills in a variety of settings.
- Students will be respectful listeners and ask questions, the answers to which sometimes may generate new questions.

F) SYNTHESIS

- Students will recognize, develop, defend and criticize arguments and other persuasive appeals.
- Students will explain how they integrate data and observations into knowledge
- Students will analyze information from multiple sources and/or disciplines, when appropriate using an intercultural perspective, and synthesize that information into a coherent resolution.
- Students will combine creative and critical processes to arrive at solutions that are "outside the box."
- Students will integrate classroom based knowledge with observations of the world and with life experiences.
- Students will monitor their own learning and identify areas for further growth.

II) Description of Curriculum:

The LASC has examined the transcripts of FSU students who graduated from 2005-2014 to see how the new curriculum has affected enrollments in LAS courses. Basically, there were some "winners" and some "losers" but overall there were not major changes to the courses students are taking for their LAS curriculum. While some courses such as *Introduction* to *Speech Communication* or *Global Issues* did experience a drop in enrollments, others such as *Art Appreciation* saw a dramatic increase. Some Departments or Majors have been burdened with huge enrollments because all students need to take a certain course or are more likely to take a certain course. For example, all FSU students have to take *Health and Fitness, Writing I and Writing II* and there are only three courses to select from to meet the Human Behavior requirement.

One of the three courses for the Human Behavior requirement *Introduction to Sociology*, along with *Commonwealth of the Arts* represent the only two courses not explicitly required for all students that are still routinely taken by over half the students on campus. These two cases potentially illustrate how the design of the LAS curriculum has encouraged students to take certain courses through the benefits of "double dipping." Both courses satisfy a specific requirement of one of the clusters, with *Commonwealth of the Arts* satisfying the Art or Music Designation within the Arts cluster and *Introduction to Sociology* satisfying the Human Behavior designation within the Citizenship and the World cluster. However, each of these courses can simultaneously be used to meet the Global Diversity requirement, making them far preferable to other courses in their cluster such as *Global Issues* in the CTW cluster and *Introduction to Speech Communication* in the Arts cluster that do not satisfy as wide a range of requirements. For further discussion of how the new curriculum has affected course offerings, please see an "Analysis of the Courses Students Take as Part of the LA&S Curriculum." (Appendix 11)

A major goal of the new LAS curriculum was to provide students with more opportunities to explore the different disciplines within the Liberal Arts and Sciences. While reducing the number of required credits in LAS from 60 down to 48 certainly gives students more freedom to study different topics, it is a limited freedom as other considerations (degree requirements of their majors, pressures from outside accrediting agencies, or the desire to meet 2 requirements with 1 course, etc.) constrain the actual number of courses from which students are selecting. Below, some of the major curricular issues for each cluster, as well as the Advanced Options A-C, and the Global Diversity requirement will be discussed:

Cluster/Option	**Requirements:**	**Comments:**
Science, Math & Technology Cluster	a) 1 math course b) 1 lab science course c) 1 health/fitness related course—currently those courses	• Students have limited freedom in this cluster--- all students take Health & Fitness, most non-SMT students take *Life Sciences* for their LAB, and most majors dictate what

	approved by the Exercise and Sports Science department d) 1 elective	Math class students need to take. • Even the elective is often dictated by the majors.
Citizenship & the World Cluster	a) 1 history course b) 1 human behavior course c) 1 elective	• There are limited options for the Human Behavior course- only General Psychology, Human Growth & Development, or Intro to Sociology are available. • Students choose from 1 of 4 History classes (US History 1&2 or World Civilization 1 & 2 as World Civilization 3 no longer exists.) • The goals of this cluster never mention Human Behavior so it is unclear why students have to take a course in Human Behavior to meet this cluster's requirements.
The Arts Cluster	a) 1 art or music course b) 1 literature course c) Writing I and II d) 1 elective	• More than ½ of all FSU students take *Commonwealth of the Arts* because it also fulfills the Global Diversity requirement in the cluster and is offered every semester. • There are limited options for fulfilling the Art or Music requirement, but

		more options for the Literature one. • There has been a decline in the number of students taking speech, which is concerning since the "Speaking & Listening" requirement was left to the individual majors to determine how their students met it.
Options A,B & C	**Option A**: 6 credits in a foreign language *and* 6 credits of LA&S coursework at or above the 2000 level. **Option B**: 12 credits (with a minimum of six at or above the 2000 level) in a single discipline outside of the student's first major. **Option C**: 12 credit unique curriculum based on the student's interests, needs or goals and with advisor assistance. The curriculum, with a statement of rationale, must be approved by the advisor, department chair and the appropriate dean and then filed with the registrar. The curriculum must be submitted before the student has completed 60 credits. No more than one course within this option may be completed before the curriculum has been approved.	• There has been a decline in the number of students doing Option A, which indicates that Option A's goal of having more students study a foreign language has not been met. • Option B's goal of increasing the number of students pursuing a Minor has been successful, with the percentage of FSU students graduating with a minor almost doubling from 20.82% in 2005 to 39.46% in 2014. • An increasing number of students are selecting Option C, but that is because many majors have created a group of classes for students to take as an Option C in order to fulfill their

		degree requirements. That was not the original intent of Option C.
Global Diversity	Two of the courses taken within the three clusters must have a Global Diversity designation. These courses provide a context for understanding the political, economic, cultural, and historical events or experiences of other countries, including those that are non-Western. (Western means Europe—including Russia—and North America.) At least one of the two courses must address the relationship of two or more global regions.	• There currently is no course with Global Diversity designation in the SMT Cluster. • The previous LAS curriculum required 2 Multicultural classes, and this requirement seems to be the successor to that requirement but the rationale for the requirement, and the learning objectives behind it are never clearly specified.

III) Relationship of Courses to Curriculum Objectives

The LAS core curriculum has the following main objectives: aesthetic appreciation, citizenship, communication, ethical reasoning, as well as problem solving and synthesis. While some of those objectives might be more closely associated with a certain one of the LAS clusters (The Arts, Citizenship and the World, or Science/Math/Technology) the objectives were designed to cut across the clusters. In other words, while a course designed to enhance the students' aesthetic appreciation is likely to be found in "The Arts" cluster, it might be under "Citizenship in the World" instead due to its other course objectives.

Since a course can only have one cluster designation, the LASC has developed a system for screening courses proposed for LAS designation to see whether they meet the core curriculum's objectives, and to which cluster they should be assigned. Please see the Cluster Approval Form (Appendix 12.) In Part Four there will be several recommendations on ways to strengthen this approval process, specifically to ensure that the courses are meeting the curriculum's objectives.

An examination of select course syllabi from high enrollment LAS courses in each of the course clusters was conducted to explore the potential overlap between courses, clusters and student learning outcomes. Seven faculty from fields related to those being examined assessed the syllabi for the representation of learning outcomes using definitions from the LAS

curriculum. When possible at least two different syllabi from different instructors were used to conduct the analysis of an individual course. Nonetheless, this analysis cannot accurately capture the learning outcomes represented by any individual course. Because the learning outcomes may not be accurately represented by an individual course syllabus, the course syllabi sampled may not represent the majority of syllabi for such high enrollment multi-section courses, and the interpretation of the language of the syllabus may not match the intention of the instructor, this analysis can only serve as a general indication of the types of courses that might potentially support particular learning outcomes.

Taking into account the limitations of the analysis, there appear to be some relevant groupings of courses within clusters that support common learning outcomes, along with a few examples of courses within clusters that don't align with the learning outcomes represented by most other courses in the cluster. A few highlights from the study are provided below, but for the complete report please see the "Syllabus Analysis of Learning Outcomes in High Enrollment LA&S Courses." (Appendix 13)

a) The Arts Cluster
   - Literature classes as well as courses in Art or Music do support the learning objectives of Aesthetic Appreciation particularly through critical analysis of a work of art or literature.
   - The Writing 1 & 2 classes do not necessarily address Aesthetic Appreciation.

b) Citizenship and the World Cluster
   - Courses offered by the Economics, History and Political Sciences Dept. involved the ability to understand and interpret current events, but didn't necessarily address civic involvement.
   - The courses offered by the Behavioral Sciences Dept. did not focus on Citizenship, and emphasized problem solving more.

c) Science, Math & Technology Cluster
   - Some classes focus more on problem solving through inquiry and analysis while others emphasize problem solving through constructing and analyzing logical arguments to generate a solution.

IV) Outcomes Assessment

Data on the effectiveness of the LAS curriculum comes from two primary sources: a) the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which is administered on college campuses throughout the US, and b) the work of the LASC. Fitchburg State has administered NSSE to freshmen and sophomores in 2004, 2006, 2009 and 2012, so the latter two administrations occurred under the new curriculum. Given that the courses in the LAS curriculum have not changed dramatically, historic patterns of differences in student experiences at Fitchburg State relative to other institutions from 2004-2012 may also provide insight into student

learning. Some of the data from NSSE is incorporated below. For a report by Dr. Christopher Cratsley that summarizes the NSSE data see Appendix 14.

On the NSSE, Fitchburg State University students have responded similarly to students from other institutions when asked the extent to which the institution has contributed to their knowledge, skills and personal development in acquiring a broad, general education. However, in some cases when asked questions related to individual learning outcomes, Fitchburg State University students have consistently responded less favorably than students from other institutions. While the NSSE does not ask students to separately evaluate the contributions of their major courses versus their general education courses, freshmen in particular take a relatively large proportion of LAS courses so their responses in particular may give some indication of the learning occurring through the LAS curriculum. However, given that these findings are only based on student perception rather than any direct measure of student learning, they must be explored in the context of direct assessments of student learning.

As soon as the LAS core curriculum was officially adopted, the LASC turned its attention to the issue of Assessment. In summer 2008, a special sub-committee of the LASC worked to develop rubrics for each of the five curriculum objectives, and then applied those rubrics to a group of assignments from LAS courses. Since then, each spring/summer, members of the LASC have gathered assignments from LAS courses and assessed them based on the rubrics, which have been revised repeatedly. (For the Rubrics, see Appendix 15). When the initial rubrics were found to be too general, members of the LASC worked with an Assessment Consultant, Linda Suskie, to fine-tune the rubrics. They have also benefitted greatly by having the University's Assessment Director, Dr. Christopher Cratsley, as an active member of the LASC. An on-going challenge has been gathering a sufficient number of documents to assess, due to the fact that the process has been entirely voluntary.

Below is a summary of the most recent assessment of the LAS curriculum with regards to achieving the core curriculum's central objectives using insights from both the NSSE data and direct assessment of student artifacts. The complete assessment report can be found in Appendix 16, along with some of the past assessment findings.

Aesthetic Appreciation:

Beginning in spring 2009 Aesthetic Appreciation was assessed with a rubric that contained 2 criteria: Aesthetic Analysis and Contextual Analysis. In spring 2009 100 English papers were assessed with this rubric. No artifacts were assessed from fall 2009, but the rubric was used again in spring 2010 for 15 Art History research papers and fall 2010 for 10 text analysis papers from an American Literature course.

Starting in the fall of 2011 Fitchburg State University made a minor change to the Aesthetic Appreciation rubric. Artifacts of student work could now be scored on one additional criteria related to composition and/or performance. This criterion was added to allow for the assessment of students' original artistic work. We have data from fall 2011, spring 2012, and fall 2012. The artifacts range from *History of Architecture* research essays,

to *World Liter*ature Art Museum field trip assignments, and *Asian Cinema* analyses. Aesthetic Expression artifacts were collected in spring and fall 2013 as well as spring 2014. However, assessors have not finished scoring these artifacts yet.

There were not substantial changes in the rubric from 2009-2013, so it should be possible to draw some conclusions from the data across multiple assessments. However, the analyses suggest no consistent pattern of weakness in either analysis or art in context relative to the other category. The only consistent pattern was that in each case that the revised rubric called for composition/performance, the scorers determined the artifacts could not be assessed in this category.

Overall, it is hard to use the data to make any suggestions about improving student learning. This may in fact represent a weakness of the rubric. We should explore whether the rubric captures all the criteria we are looking for in the area of aesthetic appreciation and whether the language of the rubric properly describes different levels of competency in a way that will allow us to reveal consistent patterns of student strengths and weaknesses. In addition, it is possible that we could get more informative data by having more standardized assignments and collecting larger sample sizes of student work. Finally, we must determine whether composition/performance is an important criterion we would like to gather data on since all of our assessments so far have failed to be assessable for this criterion. There are no questions on NSSE that address Aesthetic Appreciation so our direct assessments are particularly important.

Citizenship:

Beginning in spring 2009 Citizenship was assessed with a rubric that contained 4 criteria: Social Science Concepts, Social Science Research, Self and Society and Social Engagement. In spring 2009 18 political science and 30 psychology papers were assessed with this rubric. No artifacts were assessed from fall 2009 or spring 2010. While there may have been no artifacts collected in fall 2009, in spring 2010 assessors tried to evaluate *General Psychology* papers, but determined they could not be assessed for Citizenship. Perhaps in response to this failure, the four rubric categories were revised for fall 2010 in which 7 American Studies papers were assessed for theoretical concepts, research-based evidence, influences on behavior and institution's abilities.

Starting in the fall of 2011 Fitchburg State University revamped the Citizenship rubric. Artifacts of student work were now scored on criteria related to explanation of event, evidence, student's position, diversity of communities and cultures, and connections to civic engagement. We have data from fall 2011, spring 2012, fall 2012, and spring 2013. Three of these four assessments were all conducted on the same type of assignment, political science memos. No appropriate papers for citizenship were collected in fall 2013, and spring and fall 2014 assessment has not been completed yet.

While there were substantial changes in the rubric from 2009-2013, it is still possible to draw some conclusions from the data. The analyses suggest a pattern of weakness in using evidence across a range of artifacts even when scored with different rubrics. In addition, in each case that a rubric called for evaluating engagement with

social or civic issues, the scorers determined the artifacts could not be assessed in this category. Once the rubric was revised to include assessment of the student's position and of statements about diversity of cultures and communities additional patterns emerged. Student artifacts were consistently scored very negatively in the area of student's position and across two different types of artifacts scorers tended to judge that the work could not be evaluated for students' writing about the diversity of cultures and communities.

NSSE results reinforce concerns about criteria of Citizenship related to student's taking a position, engaging with social or civic issues and understanding diversity. Fitchburg State University students were significantly less likely than their peers at other institutions to examine the strengths and weakness of their own views, trying to better understand someone else's views, or learning something that changed the way they understood an issue or concept. Freshmen and Seniors from Fitchburg State often reported being less likely to participate in community-based projects like service learning, or community service and volunteer work than students from other institutions. Finally, Fitchburg State University freshmen in particular reported a lower contribution relative to students from other institutions of their education contributing to understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Overall, the data suggests that we can do more to foster critical student skills and dispositions in the area of citizenship, both by addressing areas of perceived skill weakness and by trying to structure opportunities for students to demonstrate their attitudes and engagement with civic and social issues. While every year of direct analysis of student work involved small sample sizes, the overall patterns in data suggest that if we value the skills of forming and stating a position on issues related to citizenship and using evidence to support those positions, then we can do more to help our students build these skills. On the other hand, if we value our students demonstrating awareness of issues related to diversity and of ways to engage with social and civic issues, then we need to make sure we have assignments in our courses that address these outcomes.

Communication:

While the Communication objective of the LAS curriculum includes reading, oral communication, and group interactions, the LASC has only attempted to assess Written Communication. Beginning in spring 2010 Written Communication was assessed with a rubric containing 4 different criteria: controlling idea, organization and development, standards of evidence, and mechanics. Faculty were asked to rate student work as proficient, sufficient or deficient for each criterion on the rubric. In spring and fall of 2010 small samples of student work were collected and scored from one course each semester.

In the spring of 2011 Fitchburg State University revamped the Written Communication rubric, separating out organization and development into two separate criteria and adding an additional criterion related to academic discourse. The descriptive language for each criterion at each level of proficiency was revised drawing in part from the AAC&U LEAP VALUE rubric for written communication. In the fall of 2011 and spring of

2012 the revised rubric was used to assess artifacts of student work from one course each semester.

For the assessment occurring in the fall of 2012 Fitchburg State University revised the rubric further adding a criterion on documentation of sources to help scorers distinguish between weaknesses in the manner in which students were using sources to support their arguments, and the ways in which students were properly or improperly citing those sources. Artifacts of student work were collected from one course each semester in the fall of 2012, spring of 2013 and fall of 2013.

Across all years of assessment the manner in which students used sources in their papers remained one of the greatest areas of weakness. Once academic discourse was added as a criterion in the spring of 2011 it was also revealed to be a relative source of weakness in student writing. The separation of documentation of sources as a criterion from sources and evidence allowed scorers to reveal that in many cases the greatest weakness was in the way sources were documented rather than the way they were used to support an argument. However, one assessment of artifacts from a 4000 level Exercise and Sports Science course suggested that this pattern may be reversed once students become more familiar with disciplinary conventions. As expected students showed greater overall proficiency in upper level courses and honors courses, a finding that mirrors what we observed in a separate study comparing first semester freshmen and second semester sophomore written work using the Fitchburg State rubric as well as other rubrics.

NSSE results provide some evidence to reinforce concerns in particular about students' ability to evaluate and use evidence. While results varied from year to year, there were 3 years in which either freshmen or seniors reported that their coursework was less likely to emphasize making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods than their peers at other institutions. Furthermore, Seniors in every year they were assessed were less likely to report working on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources. NSSE data also raises concerns about the frequency with which students make class presentations and prepare multiple drafts of a paper at Fitchburg State with the former being reported as occurring less frequently for freshmen at Fitchburg State than other institutions in the two most recent survey years, and the latter consistently occurring less frequently for both Fitchburg State freshmen and seniors. Furthermore in the last 3 years of NSSE assessment either freshmen or seniors from Fitchburg State indicated less contribution of their education to speaking clearly and effectively than students from other institutions.

These findings suggest the importance of assessing student writing in both introductory general education coursework as well as in upper level disciplinary coursework to get a better sense of what should be emphasized in the curriculum. The data suggests that students could benefit from an increased emphasis on the documentation of sources and the modes of academic discourse in introductory LAS coursework, and while they show improvements in the documentation of sources at the advanced level, the use of sources and evidence and academic discourse continue to be relative areas of weakness that need to be reinforced in advanced courses such as those designated for the junior/senior writing requirement. Finally, given that the

Communication objective of the LAS curriculum is meant to encompass reading and oral communication, LAS coursework might do more to emphasize these skills particularly through class presentations for freshmen.

Ethical Reasoning:

Beginning in spring 2009 Ethical Reasoning was assessed with a rubric that contained 3 criteria: Position Statement, Rationale Development and Fairness toward Opposition. In spring 2009 18 philosophy papers were assessed with this rubric. There appears to have been a break from spring 2009 to Fall 10, perhaps due to a lack of sufficient student artifacts. However, in the fall of 2010 a large number of artifacts were collected with one subset coming from a Fitchburg State course taught traditionally, while the others came from online courses.

Starting in the fall of 2011 Fitchburg State University revised the Ethical Reasoning rubric to add more categories. Artifacts of student work were now scored on criteria related to moral reasoning, statement of position, ethical issue recognition, application of ethical perspectives, development of rationale, ethical self-awareness and evaluation of different ethical perspectives. We have data from fall 2011 and fall 2012. No appropriate papers for ethical reasoning assessment were collected in spring 2012, fall 2013, and spring 2014. Assessment has not been completed yet for the fall 2014 papers.

Based on the changes in the rubric and variations in the courses it is hard to draw any general conclusions about the area of ethical reasoning. While the analyses with the initial rubric suggest a pattern of weakness in representing opposing positions, the data from the online courses contradict this. However, that data may not be representative of Fitchburg State students and was derived from a single scorer rather than the paired scoring model we normally use. However the wide variation in the data generated by the new rubric when used to assess two different philosophy papers suggests that some combination of rubric revision and scorer training may be necessary in the area of ethical reasoning to produce useful results.

NSSE results do not suggest any consistent difference between Fitchburg State University students and students from other institutions in the extent to which they report their education has contributed to them developing a personal code of values and ethics. However, at Fitchburg State as at the other institutions, students in general report much lower levels of this outcome than others like writing, speaking, thinking critically, and analyzing quantitative problems. Therefore, the issues at Fitchburg State that influence our ability to assess this outcome through student work may be reflective of a common problem of emphasis on ethical reasoning in higher education.

Overall, the data suggests more about the curriculum and the process of assessment than it does about the students themselves. Small sample sizes in most years and gaps of years when appropriate artifacts could not be collected for ethical reasoning suggest that if we hope to evaluate student ethical reasoning in courses, a more comprehensive approach needs to be taken to insure that students are asked to engage in meaningful ethical reasoning assignments across many courses and that we collect larger samples of student work for assessment purposes.

Problem Solving and Synthesis:

Beginning in 2009 Problem Solving in Math and Science was assessed with a rubric that contained 13 different criteria, and asked faculty to rate student work as proficient, sufficient or deficient for each criterion. In spring 2009 and 2010 as well as fall of 2010, exam questions from 1000 level math and science courses and one 2000 level science course were assessed using this rubric.

In the spring of 2011 Fitchburg State University revamped the Problem Solving rubric, creating two separate rubrics, each containing some criteria from the original rubric, leaving off others and providing descriptive language for each criterion at each level of proficiency drawn in part from the AAC&U LEAP VALUE rubrics. Artifacts of student work from Mathematics were now scored on a "Problem Solving through Quantitative Literacy rubric with only 6 criteria. The second rubric, Problem Solving through Inquiry and Data Analysis, was designed for use with artifacts from science courses with 7 different criteria. These rubrics were used to generate data from fall 2011, spring 2012, fall 2012, spring 2013, and fall 2013. Artifacts from mathematics courses continued to be drawn from exams or quizzes in 1000 level courses. On the other hand, artifacts from science courses included a number of lab reports and student projects from 1000 level courses and one 2000 level course.

The changes to the rubric were driven by a combination of the data being generated and the priorities identified by faculty members. The initial data clearly showed that math exam questions and science exam questions tended to address different criteria on the initial rubric suggesting the need for two different rubrics. As the new rubrics were developed the rubric for math continued to focus on correct and complete calculations as well as appropriate use of formulas, which had been consistently assessed in math artifacts. Because these had not been consistently assessed in the science artifacts they were removed in favor of criteria on research topic selection, integrating outside sources, and analyzing pros and cons of an argument. However, both rubrics retained criteria related to creating figures, tables or statistics from data, explaining patterns in the data, using the data to support arguments and applying the content to new situations.

Analysis of the data from the new rubrics reveals that there continues to be variation for math assessments in terms of which criteria can be assessed and how students are scored as performing on criteria across assessments. This may be caused in part by the ongoing reliance on exam questions for the math assessments. On the other hand, particularly when lab reports are used in the sciences, there is greater consistency in the range of criteria that can be assessed and there is consistent data suggesting students struggle more with describing patterns and supporting arguments with numerical data than they do with representing the data as figures, tables or statistics. To the extent that faculty continue to value the criteria as laid out in the rubrics, there appears to be a need to focus on student projects including lab reports as a means to both teach students these skills and assess their progress in these skills, and to provide an increased emphasis in our courses on describing patterns in data and supporting arguments with data.

NSSE data suggest no consistent differences between Fitchburg State students and students from other institutions in the extent to which they report a contribution of the

institution to their skills in analyzing quantitative problems. While NSSE does not have questions that speak directly to students skills of describing patterns in data and supporting arguments with data, as noted above in the context of written communication, in three of the four survey years, either freshmen or seniors from Fitchburg State reported significantly less emphasis in their coursework on making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data, and assessing the soundness of their conclusions. Greater emphasis on examining the uses of data by others in the Fitchburg State University curriculum could help support student efforts to describe patterns in data and use data to support arguments.

Closing Thoughts:

The LASC has exhibited a strong commitment to Outcomes Assessment. They have developed their rubrics and then fine-tuned them as those rubrics were found to be lacking in certain areas. One challenge has been accessing a sufficient number of artifacts to assess, as well as ensuring consistency in the assessment process. However, the primary issue is one of accountability. Courses receive LAS designation but there isn't any follow through to ensure that those courses are meeting the goals and objectives of the LAS curriculum. In addition, certain curriculum goals (i.e. Jr/Sr Writing, Ethical Reasoning, and Speaking and Listening) were delegated to the different majors, but again there has been no follow through to ensure that these goals are being met.

PART FOUR: STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Below, th**e** strengths and weaknesses of the LAS curriculum will be discussed, with recommendations made for ways to address those weaknesses. Following the recommendations is a "Plan for Change" in which a series of concrete steps is proposed for potentially putting those recommendations into action. The identified weaknesses, along with the recommendations and "Plan for Change," are the direct result of all of the data compiled, Dr. Budd's discussions with the various Departments, the open forums held to discuss the LAS curriculum, as well as all of the hard work by the LASC and the Assessment Director over the years.

A) Strengths:

1. By reducing the number of required credits from 60 down to 48 (36 in the clusters plus 12 in Options A,B, or C) the new curriculum provides the students with a lot more freedom to explore other fields beyond their major.

2. The new curriculum is much less complex and cumbersome than its predecessor.

3. An increasing number of students are doing Minors because the reduction in LAS required credits gives them more freedom, and Option B with its 4 required classes facilitates their ability to complete a Minor.

4. The revival of the LASC has created a strong body on campus for promoting LAS.

5. The LASC has exhibited a strong commitment to Outcomes Assessment, and has worked hard to develop and continually revise rubrics for assessing the core curriculum. In addition, it has worked hard to share its findings so that the curriculum can be improved.

6. The LAS's goals and objectives are well aligned with the goals of other institutions of higher learning key goals, as well as those of accrediting agencies and employers.

7. The LAS goals and objectives are mostly aligned with the curriculum's requirements.

B) **Weaknesses:**

1. The goals and objectives of the curriculum are not perfectly aligned with its requirements. Notably, "Ethical Reasoning" is a stated goal of the curriculum, but there is no clear requirement in this area. Additionally, "Global Diversity" is not one of the state goals and objectives, yet students have to take two courses with "Global Diversity" designation.

Recommendation:	Rationale:
An understanding of global diversity is a key component of a Liberal Arts education, but the current curriculum fails to adequately explain its significance. Among the learning objectives listed under "Citizenship" should be greater attention to the importance of global citizenship and the need to appreciate global diversity. "Ethical Reasoning" is also the hallmark of a Liberal Arts education. Each major should be required to identify a course within the major or the LAS curriculum that its students will take in order to fulfill that requirement.	In this Age of Globalization, it is imperative for students to have an understanding of other peoples and nations. Requiring students to take two classes with "Global Diversity" designation aligns with the curriculum's learning objectives, but there needs to be specific global diversity learning outcomes articulated in the curriculum. While "Ethical Reasoning" is a very important skill, to add on an additional course requirement to the LAS curriculum will reverse the progress made in reducing the number of LAS credits required for graduation. Also, some majors already have so many other requirements that they couldn't accommodate an additional LAS requirement. Many majors already have a course within their curriculum that addresses ethical issues, so this would not be an onerous requirement.

2. Additional curriculum goals such as "Information Literacy" and "Civic Engagement" have been recognized as important objectives for the LAS curriculum. In addition, the goal of enhancing reading skills received short shrift in the curriculum.

Recommendations:	Rationale:
These are important goals and should be formally added to the LAS curriculum's goals and objectives. There are two potential courses of action: a) These learning objectives could be addressed easily in a First Year Experience, especially one that incorporated Learning Communities. Or, b) These objectives, along with "Ethical Reasoning" should be the responsibility of the individual majors. The curriculum had already assigned responsibility to the majors to identify a class that would fulfill their Jr/Sr Writing, Speech, and Computer Literacy requirements. In addition, the LASC should be charged with contacting each major to see how it is having its students fulfill these requirements, Finally, the "Jr/Sr Writing" requirement should be strengthened to "Advanced Writing and Research." **Recommendation:** Either approach, or a hybrid where some of the objectives (such as Information Literacy) are emphasized in the First Year Experience while others are left to the departments.	All of these objectives are important, but if the LAS curriculum is required to ensure that students attain each of them the curriculum would become too complex and cumbersome like its predecessor. Several of these objectives could be achieved in a major's capstone. However, there needs to be greater accountability because while the LAS curriculum stated that these objectives would be left to the different majors, there was no follow thorough to ensure that actually happened. Finally, changing "Jr/Sr Writing" to "Advanced Writing and Research" would ensure that students graduate with strong reading, writing and research skills, which currently is not always the case.

3. While the new LAS curriculum is much less complex than its predecessor, there remain areas of confusion. For example, the Global Diversity requirement (2 classes in 2 different clusters, at least one of which must address a non-western nation or region) is confusing. Options A, B, or C also can be confusing.

Recommendations:	Rationale:
When the new LAS curriculum went into effect, the LASC held a series of information sessions for faculty and students about the new LAS requirements, but that was only for the	Students can be delayed from graduating due to misunderstandings over the LAS requirements. If students and faculty have a greater understanding of the intricacies of the curriculum, they

1st year. The LASC should develop an online presentation that clearly explains all of the requirements, and the rationale behind them. Another option is for the LASC to consider rewriting the curriculum requirements to clarify the main sources of confusion (e.g., global diversity). The adoption of DegreeWorks may also assist in clarifying curriculum requirements.	will be better able to navigate through it.

4. Most FSU students do not fully understand the rationale behind the LAS curriculum's goals and objectives, as well as the rationale behind the course requirements.

Recommendations:	Rationale:
• The LASC should prepare a presentation for all students and advisors explaining the goals and objectives of the curriculum. • During Orientation, there should be a talk on the aims of a Liberal Arts Education. • All courses that receive LAS designation should have to include on their syllabus a section that relates the course goals and objectives with the goals and objectives of the LAS curriculum. • The LASC should develop a mission and vision for the LAS curriculum just as there is a mission and vision for the University.	Faculty often assume that students understand what a Liberal Arts education is, and why it is important. This is often not the case, such that students lack a clear understanding of why they are taking different courses, and what the overall objectives are of those required classes. By requiring all LAS designated courses to include a section of their syllabi that shows the connection between the course goals and the LAS curriculum goals it will not only help students to make those connections, but it will also enable the LASC to ensure that courses that received LAS designation are in fact accomplishing what they set out to do. Finally, the absence of a mission and vision for LAS is notable, and would help ensure that students and faculty understand the rationale behind the LAS curriculum, and how its mission and vision connects to that of the University.

5. The LAS core curriculum lacks coherence in that there is nothing that ties together the LAS courses. Students randomly select courses from a list of LAS-designated classes but there is often no clear connection between the classes chosen.

Recommendations:	Rationale:
Several options have been proposed to address this issue. Overall, the LASC should discuss ways to improve the curriculum structure while giving careful consideration to the advantages and potential consequences of the options below: a. Organizing the curriculum around the goals and objectives rather than disciplinary clusters. The advantage of this change would be much greater clarity as to why the students are taking specific classes. However, the logistics of this change may be problematic, and could result in unintended consequences, such as a student never taking a course in History or Literature, if not carefully structured. b. Tying all LAS courses together with a theme. This option would be a challenge logistically, and may be problematic as the theme would need to stand the test of time. c. Enhance interdisciplinary offerings in LAS. To accomplish this, there needs to be an institutional commitment to Learning Communities and team teaching within the LAS curriculum. These connections can be both formal (i.e., Learning Communities and team teaching) and informal (2 LAS classes that address common themes could schedule their class meetings in the same block so that they could periodically bring their classes together for discussion.) d. Offer LAS capstone courses. In the future, the LASC should consider whether there should be a capstone class for LAS that requires students to make connections across the curriculum. This could be a capstone class that cognate majors developed in tandem for their students.	• Due to the extensive work and other commitments of FSU students, it is probably inevitable that they will pick and choose courses to meet their scheduling needs, so there needs to be a greater effort to help students identify course connections. • In its Strategic Plan, the University has committed itself to team teaching, stating that all students should have a team taught course before they graduate. Fostering formal and informal connections across the curriculum will enrich the LAS curriculum by promoting its inter-disciplinary nature, the hallmark of a liberal arts education. • A capstone for LAS could help students describe connections across the curriculum. This could be challenging to implement due to the fact some majors are already over-loaded with course requirements, and because FSU students tend to take their LAS required classes at different times in their college careers.

Regardless of changes in the structure or final wording of our objectives, the LASC should require all LAS designated classes to clearly state how the course objectives relate to the LAS curriculum objectives. There should also be better communication to students and faculty advisors regarding the goals of the curriculum.	

6. The LAS curriculum calls for the creation of Learning Communities and a First Year Experience, but to date there has been no progress in this area.

Recommendation:	**Rationale:**
FSU should develop a First Year Experience that incorporates Learning Communities where 2-3 courses are linked together thematically.	Learning Communities have been shown to be highly effective at not only helping students make connections between the classes they take, but also at helping students feel that they are part of a community, which thereby facilitates retention. Analysis of effective practices at sister and peer institutions consistently shows the importance of both Learning Communities and a First Year Experience for enhancing student learning and retention. FSU's recent strategic plan calls for the creation of a First Year experience. While there have been repeated calls for Learning Communities and a Freshman Experience at FSU, nothing has been done yet. This requires a strong commitment from the FSU administration.

7) Advanced Option B has led to an increase in the number of students taking a Minor, but many students graduate without a Minor. FSU offers a lot of different Minors, but many of these Minors struggle with low enrollments.

Recommendations:	Rationale:
The University needs to make a stronger commitment to the different Minors. Students often don't know about the different Minors available, and there isn't anyone on campus charged with promoting these Minors. FSU should develop a marketing plan for the Minors, and resources should be allocated towards the Minors to help them enhance awareness of the different options available. The LASC should also discuss the feasibility of requiring a minor of all students. **NB:** For data on the number of FSU students taking Minors, please see Appendix 17.	In reducing the number of required LAS credits, the LASC hoped to encourage students to explore other disciplines. When students apply for jobs or to graduate school, having a Minor can make them more marketable. In the past, there hasn't been a strong institutional commitment to Minors, so these Minors have tended to be created by faculty but have then languished as faculty time and energy get diverted elsewhere.

8) Very few FSU students study a foreign language. Option A involves taking 2 classes in a foreign language and 2 advanced LAS classes. The hope was that this would encourage more students to study a foreign language, but that hasn't come to fruition.

Recommendation:	Rationale:
When the LASC drafted the curriculum, there was considerable discussion about the need for more FSU students to study a foreign language. The LASC reluctantly backed away from requiring a foreign language because logistically FSU lacks sufficient language faculty to handle such a requirement. While this is currently still an area of weakness, technological changes have created the possibility of students taking language classes from sister institutions, thereby enhancing course offerings. This is an area that the LASC should discuss further. It is unlikely that students in all majors could fit a language requirement into their credit load, so while it is unlikely that we could adopt a formal language requirement, the possibility should be opened up for discussion within the LASC and the campus community.	In this Age of Globalization, knowledge of a foreign language is essential for global citizens. Many faculty support the idea of a language requirement, and advances in technology could create new opportunities for language instruction for our students.

NB: For data on the number of FSU students doing Option A, please see Appendix 17.	

9) The Advanced Option C has not worked out as planned. The goal was to provide students with the opportunity to create their own mini-concentration. Instead, a number of majors have used Option C as a way for their students to fulfill all of their requirements by prescribing that all of their students take a pre-determined set of classes. This is the case because these majors have accrediting agencies that place additional requirements on their students.

Recommendations:	**Rationale:**
An Option D should be considered where Option C remains as originally intended, but Option D is when a major suggests a group of courses for its students. For example, a student majoring in Political Science could be given a list of proposed courses from such programs as History, Economics, English Studies, Humanities, Sociology, etc. **Please Note**: The courses selected for Option D should continue to be LAS classes. In other words, a major should not be able to recommend 4 classes in a professional major.	Option D could help students achieve their academic and professional goals by allowing them to pursue a "mini-concentration" in an area relevant to their interests. In addition, by developing these groupings of classes, it would also help the students make connections across the LAS curriculum (above, #7) These classes should all be LAS-designated classes because if they weren't, then students would be graduating with only 36 credits in LAS. When the LASC dropped the number of required LAS classes from 60 to48 we felt that 48 was a reasonable number, but 36 would be too few.

10) LAS requirements fall heavily on certain departments, overwhelming them and affecting their ability to offer advanced electives for their majors. For example, the "Human Behavior" requirement in the "Citizenship and the World" cluster can only be met by 1 of 3 classes: Introduction to Sociology, General Psychology, or Human Growth and Development. Similarly, all students have to take "Health and Fitness" which seriously impacts the Exercise and Sports Sciences Department.

Recommendations:	**Rationale**:
The LASC should revisit the learning goals tied to the various clusters to ensure that specific course requirements match our learning outcomes. To address pressure placed on certain	There should be a wider range of options for the students to select from in fulfilling the various requirements. Regarding the "Health and Fitness" requirement, there had been discussion

departments, additional courses that could fulfill these requirements should be developed. For example, there could be a course offered by Biology on "Nutrition", or a class on "Stress Reduction" offered by Psychological Sciences that achieved the same goals as Health and Fitness. Additional courses in Human Behavior should be available, or other options considered altogether..	of dropping the requirement completely, but at a time of heightened obesity in American society, this was rejected. However, there should be other ways to fulfill this requirement, consistent with stated learning outcomes.

11) The faculty in Psychological Sciences have never really felt that their courses belonged in the "Citizenship and the World "cluster. The "Human Behavior" requirement within that cluster has always seemed like an addendum, put into the cluster because it didn't fit anywhere else.

Recommendation:	**Rationale:**
Effective fall 2015, Psychological Sciences is now an independent department, separated from Behavioral Sciences. Two possible courses of action: a) Revise the description of the "Citizenship and the World" cluster so that is clearer why courses in Psychological Sciences help to fulfill the cluster's goals and objectives. Specifically, the cluster's learning objectives should be revised. Or, b) Relabel courses in Psychological Sciences with SMT designation instead. This would mean that only Intro to Sociology would meet the Human Behavior requirement which is problematic. Instead, that requirement could be changed to a course on "The American Experience," where students would select from courses in American Studies, History, Political Science, and Sociology. Recommendation: **b**	This issue has been the subject of discussion since the adoption of the curriculum. Changes in Psychological Sciences warrant a change in how their courses are designated by LAS. Faculty in Psychological Sciences will have to be aware of the fact that their course enrollments in these introductory classes could decline if their classes are re-designated as SMT, but the change makes sense based upon their approach to the discipline. If that occurs, there should be a discussion of changing the "Human Behavior" requirement to "The "American Experience" not only because Intro to Sociology could not accommodate all of the students needing a Human Behavior class, but also for the reasons discussed below (#12).

12) Students can graduate from Fitchburg State without any understanding of their own nation's history, politics, or society. While two of the learning objectives of the LAS curriculum's "Citizenship" goals directly address the United States, the students are not required to take any course that specifically focuses upon the US.

Recommendations:	Rationale:
a) The LAS should consider requiring a course on "The American Experience." This course would be a specially designated course from any of the following fields: American Studies, History, Political Science, and Sociology.	We have a strong, "Global Diversity" requirement so that strength should be matched with an understanding of American History, Political Economy, and Society. This would align well with the learning objectives of the "Citizenship and the World" Cluster.

13) Some students continue to have a difficult time graduating in 4 years because the LAS classes they need for graduation aren't available or conflict with courses they need for their major.

Recommendations:	Rationale:
There needs to be greater coordination of 4 Year Plans and LAS course offerings to ensure that the courses needed are being offered regularly. In addition, there should be greater coordination between majors where students are required to take certain classes in each other's major. The University's adoption of DegreeWorks might address this issue, but the different departments need to coordinate their offerings better as well.	Not Applicable

14) The curriculum goal "Problem Solving and Synthesis" encompasses multiple goals and learning objectives. On the one hand, it is treated as a single goal yet the LASC has two separate rubrics—one for Problem Solving and one for Synthesis. The Health and Fitness requirement also seems like it has been added to the SMT cluster because it didn't fit anywhere else.

Recommendation:	Rationale:
The LASC should consider reframing the SMT cluster as well as the	Reframing the goals as Scientific Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning

curriculum goal of "Problem Solving and Synthesis." Alternative goals could be Scientific Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning. In the SMT cluster, students could be required to take a course that emphasized Scientific Reasoning, a course that focused more on Quantitative Reasoning, an elective, as well as one that focused upon Health Sciences (Health and Fitness or one of the alternatives proposed above in #11)	recognizes the importance of these skills for students in the 21st century. American students lag behind those in other countries, so this reframing strengthens FSU's commitment to ensuring its graduates have the skills necessary to succeed. This reframing also makes sense if courses in Psychological Sciences are moved from the Citizenship and the World Cluster to this one. (#12 above)

15) While the University has recognized the importance of assessing the LAS curriculum, it needs to make a stronger institutional commitment to Outcomes Assessment. The LASC and the Assessment Director have done an exceptional job prioritizing assessment, but have not received enough institutional support for their efforts.

Recommendations:	**Rationale:**
FSU should provide greater institutional support to the LASC's assessment activities and the work of its Assessment Director. Work on assessment by faculty should be considered in promotion/tenure decisions.	The LASC has often worked over the summer on assessment without any additional support or compensation. At a number of other universities, work on assessment is rewarded with stipends, and is considered as Professional Development when faculty are up for tenure/promotion. To be successful, faculty "buy in" is essential, so faculty involvement needs to be recognized and supported accordingly.

16) The LASC is not as effective as it might be. Since its members change annually, it can be difficult to maintain consistency. The revival of the LASC was a positive development with the new curriculum, but it needs to take on an even greater role in the University.

Recommendations:	**Rationale:**
• The LASC should pursue becoming an All University Committee and thus play a role in approving classes that apply for LAS designation.	There needs to be greater accountability in LAS. Currently, faculty members get LAS designation for their courses by filling out a basic form and checking off a few boxes. There is no follow through, so the LASC has no way of

• After a class receives LAS designation, it should be held accountable to ensure that it is achieving the LAS goals. To do so, the LASC should require that all LAS designated courses include on their syllabi a statement of how the course objectives meet the goals of the LAS curriculum (#4 above.) In addition, the LASC should hold periodic meetings with faculty whose courses have received LAS designation for meeting specific goals. In other words, a meeting of all faculty who teach classes that focus upon "Citizenship" etc. should be held. Those faculty should be strongly encouraged to share coursework the LASC can use for Outcomes Assessment. The LASC could focus on one curriculum goal per year, holding meetings for faculty in that area and then in the spring assessing the coursework. • Membership on the LASC, including the role of Chair, should become a 2-year commitment, with some members rotating off each year.	knowing if the courses are achieving the curriculum goals they said they would.

C) **Plan for Change:**

1. Program Content and Organization
    a. Insure better alignment between LAS objectives, learning outcomes important for the students' personal and professional success, and course offerings within the LAS Curriculum. To do so, the LASC will revisit these objective and as necessary revise the objectives, learning outcomes and assessment rubrics.
        i. *Aesthetic Appreciation*: Attention will be paid to the ways in which these courses meet the Aesthetic Appreciation objective and related learning outcomes, including Critical and Creative Thinking and Multicultural Competency.
        ii. *Citizenship*: The LASC will explore how the curriculum should address learning outcomes related to Civic Engagement, Critical Thinking, Global

Diversity, Multicultural Competency, Ethical Reasoning, and Social Justice. Courses currently holding the Human Behavior designation will be examined to determine if they are more appropriate for meeting the Problem Solving objective and related learning outcomes.

iii. *Communication*: The LASC will explore how to insure common expectations for Written Communication and Information Literacy across different courses including the Junior/Senior Writing requirement, as well as for Oral Communication across LAS courses including the Speaking and Listening requirement. Finally, greater clarity and emphasis will be placed on Reading as a shared learning outcome across the LAS curriculum.

iv. *Ethical Reasoning*: The LASC will reach out to each academic program to determine how ethical reasoning is currently being taught in those programs, and to explore ways that each program could potentially declare how they meet an ethical reasoning requirement. In addition, the LASC will explore other opportunities to support the ethical reasoning outcome across the curriculum including through the process of interdisciplinary course development.

v. *Problem Solving*: The LASC will examine how the curriculum should address learning outcomes related to Critical Thinking, Deductive and Inductive Reasoning, Ethical Reasoning, Skills for Life-long learning such as Metacognition, Quantitative Reasoning, and Scientific Reasoning. Courses meeting the Human Behavior and Health and Fitness requirement will be examined to determine what learning outcomes they may potentially meet within the Problem Solving objective.

vi. *Additional goals:* The LASC will discuss additional objectives, such as information literacy, critical thinking, civic engagement, and articulating goals for the global diversity requirement.

b. The LAS program should make a conscious commitment to enhancing interdisciplinary learning.

i. Create new interdisciplinary course offerings in the LAS curriculum: The LASC will bring together faculty from across the LAS disciplines to explore opportunities for interdisciplinary course development and to establish a framework for the ongoing development of interdisciplinary courses supporting the LAS objectives. Special consideration will be given to courses that utilize team teaching and/or learning communities not only to support interdisciplinary learning but also to address the heavy load placed on certain programs to support the LAS course requirements and the resulting heavy dependence on adjunct faculty. In addition, priority will be given to exploring ways in which these courses can help support learning outcomes that are otherwise underrepresented in the LAS curriculum such as Civic Engagement, Ethical Reasoning, and Information

Literacy. Finally, the working groups will examine how these courses could become part of a first year experience as well as the possibility of sequencing these courses so that some represent a sophomore or even capstone LAS experience.

ii. Encourage the utilization of the LAS curriculum to help students select and complete minors. The LASC will reach out to academic programs to both examine the ways in which required LAS coursework could provide an entry point into those program's minors as well as the ways in which LAS courses required outside of those majors could lead to an appropriate minor. Particular attention will be given to discussing with programs whether they are recommending that all of their students take a specific set of introductory and advanced LAS courses that they then apply to Option C in the LAS curriculum and whether those courses should be formalized as a new option D for their majors, and/or whether there are ways that these requirements they are placing on their students could align with an interdisciplinary minor. These discussions will include an examination of whether it seems feasible to require all students to complete a minor in the place of the existing options A, B and C.

iii. Explore opportunities for increasing the enrollment of students in language coursework. The LASC should actively explore opportunities for increasing enrollment in foreign language courses. This will include examining the possibility of including a foreign language course in a learning community with another LAS course, providing interdisciplinary team-taught courses that integrate language instruction with instruction in another discipline, and examining the extent to which individual programs would be interested in requiring language as a component of a student's new Option D in the LAS curriculum or as part of new interdisciplinary minors supported through the requirements of the LAS curriculum.

2. Department Organization (Staffing, Committees)
    a. The LASC should be given greater influence in the process of approving proposals with direct impact on the LAS curriculum.
        i. The LASC will explore the possibility of becoming an official subcommittee of the All University Committee so that proposals with direct impact on the LAS curriculum are sent to the LASC for review and the results of that review are forwarded to the All University Committee.
        ii. The LASC will insure that all of its approval forms provide instructions for contacting the chair of the LASC and consulting with the LASC on the proposal being put forward.
    b. The LASC should insure greater continuity in its membership in order to more effectively oversee long-term improvements to the curriculum.

i. The LASC will work with the faculty union to determine if membership on the LASC can become a 2-year commitment, with some members rotating off each year.
ii. The LASC will consider adopting a policy in which LASC chairs commit to 2-year appointments in that role.

3. Procedures, Policies
    a. The LASC should better communicate the benefits of a Liberal Arts Education to faculty and students at Fitchburg State.
        i. The LASC should develop a mission and vision for the LAS curriculum just as there is a mission and vision for the University.
        ii. The LASC should prepare a presentation for all students and advisors explaining the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the curriculum, and this presentation should be available online. In addition, during Orientation, there should be a talk on the aims of a Liberal Arts Education.
        iii. All courses that receive LAS designation should have to include on their syllabus a section that relates the course goals and objectives with the goals and objectives of the LAS curriculum. The LASC will provide syllabus templates and sample language to assist in this process.
        iv. The University needs to make a stronger commitment to the different Minors. Students often don't know about the different Minors available, and there isn't anyone on campus charged with promoting these Minors. As it develops its materials to promote the LAS Curriculum, the LASC should work with the University to help develop a marketing plan for the Minors, and resources should be allocated towards the departments offering Minors to help them enhance awareness of the different options available.
    b. The LASC should establish policies that insure all LAS courses help support the objectives of the LA&S curriculum.
        i. In order to receive LAS designation, a course should clearly illustrate how it meets at least one of the required LAS objectives. The LASC will revise the course approval process for LAS course designations. These revisions will focus on trying to insure that a proposed LAS course clearly identifies the appropriate objective and related learning outcomes, provides information on how those outcomes are being assessed, and explains the teaching strategies used to support those learning outcomes.
        ii. After a class receives LAS designation, it should be held accountable to ensure that it is achieving the LAS goals. To do so, the LASC will hold periodic meetings with faculty whose courses have received LAS designation for meeting specific objectives and learning outcomes. In other words, a meeting of all faculty who teach classes that focus upon "Citizenship" should be held. Those faculty would be strongly encouraged to share coursework the LASC can use for Outcomes Assessment. The

LASC could focus on one curriculum goal per year or per semester, holding meetings for faculty in that area and then assessing the coursework.

4. Resources
    a. FSU should provide greater institutional support to the LASC's assessment activities and the work of its Assessment Director.
        i. There should continue to be institutional support for release time for one or more faculty to engage in the process of assessing LAS learning outcomes. This work is on top of their requirements to conduct assessment within their program, and beyond the scope of membership on any other AUC committee.
        ii. Work on LAS assessment should be clearly identified as an important contribution to decisions on promotion and tenure. In order to insure this, continued support must be provided for travel to and presentations at regional and national general education and assessment conferences so that faculty can integrate this work into their professional development plans.