

**AN ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING:**

**THE DAVIDSON CURRICULUM AND CALENDAR**

Educational Policy Committee

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June 1987

## Preface.

Davidson College seeks a new environment for learning that will support its primary mission: undergraduate liberal arts education. Our goals are: to maintain and enhance a core curriculum of common learning required of all students that can shape lives of service and citizenship; to encourage deeper forms of learning outside the classroom that guide students from dependence to autonomy in their education; and to provide a structure of excellence in the curriculum and calendar that increases the time available for the kind of learning that is retained because it is learned on one's own with faculty guidance.

This draft of a proposed Davidson College curriculum and calendar forms part of an ongoing, and seemingly never ending, process of review and revision dating back to 1979. At that time the 1968 "Blue Sky" curriculum and present "trimester" calendar underwent review by the Faculty, which reaffirmed the three-term calendar "for the indefinite future." A 1981 proposed core curriculum failed to pass because of its implication for the calendar; in 1983 a semester calendar proposal failed to pass in its greatly amended form because of its many implications for the curriculum. Here we attempt to deal with both curriculum and calendar as an integrated whole intended to implement the goals of Davidson College as articulated in its Statement of Purpose and Strategic Plan of 1985-1986.

The college Statement of Purpose emphasizes that Davidson is a college of liberal arts where the faculty need "the time and opportunity for creative scholarship which is fundamental to the best teaching," where students should be taught to "think clearly and accurately, to make relevant and valid judgments, to discriminate among values, and to communicate freely with others in the realm of ideas."

The Strategic Plan named as a "highest priority issue" the review of the present calendar and curriculum, with special attention to teaching load, sabbatical policy, and the teaching environment. It urged a "comprehensive review of the total curriculum," including strengthening the challenge of the junior and senior year, a reassessment of graduation requirements, and increased opportunities for independent study and research at the undergraduate level.

We believe that the present curriculum and calendar, having served the college reasonably well for two decades, must now be significantly changed if we are to have the kind of learning environment we profess in our many statements of purpose.

The Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty therefore recommends an early semester 15-week calendar and core curriculum designed to meet many of the objections to previous reform efforts. Our purpose is to provide greater coherence to the curriculum for every student, greater independence for juniors and seniors, greater time for writing, research, and thinking between classes and over the course of a term, and more time for faculty development. Some of the details of the proposal are not new to Davidson College; others represent significant departures. The committee hopes that its proposal will receive the widest possible scrutiny and comment, since only an open process of discussion and debate will bring about the changes we believe will improve the already excellent academic program of Davidson College.

A questionnaire circulated to the Faculty in March 1987 revealed a significant majority in favor of an early semester calendar, the "course is a course" rule, and a reduced teaching load appropriate to a four-course student load. A plurality favored a 32-course graduation requirement. On this basis we have amended the draft report submitted to the faculty in March to reflect better the views of the faculty on these issues.

This report is recommended to the faculty for action and approval at its earliest convenience. The EPC has approved it by a vote of 8 to 0, with one abstention, although individuals do not agree on each and every point. We believe that the faculty has had ample opportunity for debate, discussion, and amendment of the major points in this report, many of them familiar from past years. We recommend its adoption.

Robert C. Williams, Chairman

Note: The resolution to adopt this report was passed by the Davidson College faculty at its meeting of May 5, 1987.

## Introduction.

We believe that curriculum and calendar considerations are only part of the structure of a Davidson education and should be governed by a number of assumptions: first, that the best education requires significant time between and during classes in order to foster thinking, reading, and writing by the student; second, that undergraduate education should provide a progression from a general education core curriculum defined by the faculty to a growing autonomy and independence on the part of the student which will enhance self-sustained and life-long learning; third, that making connections across disciplinary boundaries to understand complex problems of our time is as important as pursuing an apprenticeship in a particular discipline and forms the basis for a life of service in the world; fourth, that the purpose of a liberal arts education is not to train specialists but to educate generalists, men and women who as citizens and leaders can provide valuable service in any area; fifth, that the curriculum and calendar are at the heart of a Davidson education only as structure and that the ultimate key to excellence lies in the people who make up the Davidson community. The Davidson College faculty affirms a commitment to excellence in teaching as its highest priority.

In the proposed Davidson curriculum, a student's program consists of three approximately equal areas of study: (1) a core curriculum designed to encourage a broad and well rounded education; (2) major fields of study organized as departments under the faculty in which competence in a single area is developed; (3) elective courses that encourage intellectual exploration and diversity and may be grouped as concentrations or minor fields. Students are expected to move from the core curriculum during the freshman and sophomore years to the increasing autonomy of the major and elective concentrations in the junior and senior years.

We believe that the core curriculum should be designed to develop the following abilities:

Value Judgment --the ability to detect and analyze one's own values and those of others, to make rationally moral choices and judgments, and to appreciate Judaeo-Christian and non-western religious traditions.

Historical Understanding -- the ability to think historically, to understand and analyze texts and traditions of the past, and to achieve a perspective on the present by a critical understanding of the past.

Literary Criticism -- the ability to read literature closely, in English and a foreign language, and to analyze content and meaning.

Critical Thinking--the ability to distinguish between valid and invalid inferences in ordinary language, to detect and assess assumptions, to model and evaluate arguments.

Written Communication -- the ability to write clear and well reasoned prose.

Artistic Expression -- the ability to perform and create artistically, to appreciate and understand artistic expression.

Empirical Analysis -- the ability to analyze the political, psychological, economic, and social forces at work in historical and contemporary societies.

Intercultural Awareness -- the ability to understand a foreign culture through its own language, history, politics, social organization and economics

Quantitative Reasoning -- the ability to pose and solve quantitative problems and to frame questions in quantitative terms.

Scientific Methods -- the ability to appreciate science and its experimental and analytical methods through direct laboratory work involving framing and testing hypotheses against empirical data.

Davidson students pursue a course of study that is both rigorous and flexible, enabling them to develop increasing autonomy as they move from the core curriculum to more advanced work in the major and the independence of a senior project, electives, and senior seminars.

### **I. Common Learning and the Core Curriculum.**

We believe that every Davidson student should be required to undertake the introductory study of many subjects essential to a liberally educated person. Therefore, we propose a core curriculum of common learning defined by the abilities outlined above. The core curriculum articulates the education this faculty believes every student must have in common. It consists of selected courses within departments that introduce students broadly to a particular discipline and are specifically intended for all students.

Davidson offers a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree. In each semester, a normal student load is either four courses or five courses. Exception to this can be granted by the Curriculum Requirements Committee on written petition, when the normal course load provides undue hardship, and the proposed course load is deemed appropriate for the individual.

1. Complete satisfactorily 34 courses with a grade point average of 2.0 or higher, at least 17 courses in residence, including the final 8 courses during the senior year, and at least 10 courses in intermediate and advanced courses (numbered 200 or above). For this computation, only the most recent grade will be used for repeated courses.
  2. Before beginning the sophomore year, satisfy the English Composition requirement as established by the Faculty.
  3. Before beginning the junior year, satisfy the Physical Education requirements of the College.
  4. Complete successfully by the start of the senior year a regular (non-self-instructional) foreign language course or its equivalent by transfer at the 200-level (third semester) or above, or pass a proficiency examination as determined by the chairman of the appropriate foreign language department to meet Davidson College requirements.
  5. Before beginning the senior year, complete satisfactorily 10 different courses in the core curriculum (normally 100- or 200-level courses) identified as follows:
    - A. One course in literature, English or foreign.
    - B. One course in Art, Music, or Theatre and Speech.
    - C. One course in History.
    - D. Two courses in Religion and Philosophy, at least one in Religion.
    - E. Three courses in Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics; at least one in Mathematics and one laboratory science.
    - F. Two courses in Social Science (Anthropology/Sociology, Economics, Political Science, or Psychology)
- Note:** Completion of the six-course Humanities Program satisfies the requirements for English Composition and the four courses in A, C, and D. Not all courses satisfy core requirements; see the academic regulations and catalogue headnotes for information or consult the appropriate chairman or adviser.
6. Complete satisfactorily at least one course designated as a "nonwestern" course (NW).
  7. Complete all requirements for a major field of study, including an average of 2.00 on all the courses in the major, and achieve a grade of B or better in two courses in the major. To complete a major, students must successfully complete at least 10 courses in the major department,

5 of which must be at the 300 or 400 level; normally majors should require no more than 12 courses in the major department.

The following departments and programs offer majors:

Anthropology/Soc.	Economics	Mathematics	Psychology
Art	English	Music	Religion
Biology	French	Philosophy	Spanish
Chemistry	German	Physics	Theatre & Speech
Classical Studies	History	Pol. Sci.	Premedicine

Interdisciplinary majors may be arranged through the Center for Special Studies.

## II. Freedom to Learn: The Junior and Senior Year.

The Educational Policy Committee recommends the following measures as means to strengthen the junior and senior year experience at Davidson College, providing greater autonomy, independence, and responsibility for students:

### 1. Course Numbering.

To encourage student course work of progressive sophistication and to indicate the differences in level of individual courses in all fields, courses should be numbered as follows:

100-199: Basic, introductory.

200-299: Intermediate, general.

300-399: Advanced.

400-499: Specialized in the major or integrated and interdisciplinary at the advanced level; intended for seniors.

### 2. Senior Seminars in the Major.

To strengthen the senior year experience, each major department will normally offer a capstone seminar in the major primarily for seniors. Major seminars provide opportunities for intellectual discourse among students as well as between students and professors. They also seek to help students view the major as more than a collection of specialized and essentially discrete courses and to organize their fields with greater coherence. Such seminars prepare students for continuous and autonomous learning upon graduation. They may often serve as the basis for a Senior Thesis or Project.

### 3. Interdisciplinary Senior Seminars.

Interdisciplinary senior seminars provide an advanced classroom context in which students can speak both for and from their disciplines in addressing methodological, historical, and contemporary issues. Topics and instructors may vary from year to year. These seminars utilize research, writing, and oral reports to provide an advanced context in which interdisciplinary perspectives can enhance our understanding of issues that do not fit within any single discipline or department.

### 4. Honors.

Juniors and Seniors are encouraged to consider an Honors program of study. Students with a minimum 3.2 grade point average are eligible for consideration for honors by their department as early as the spring term of the Sophomore year, but no later than the fall term of the Senior year. Students should consult their major departmental listing in the catalog and their major adviser for details.

### 5. The Senior Thesis or Project.

All seniors should consider a Senior Thesis or Project to foster initiative and independence in learning as the culminating academic experience of a Davidson College education. The Senior Thesis or Project normally consists of a major piece of research, writing, composition, or performance completed under faculty supervision and evaluation during the senior year. These may be part of a program of independent work begun in the junior year or even earlier. The purpose of such projects is to encourage independent research and writing in a discipline or across disciplinary boundaries, whether or not a student plans to pursue a career related to that work.

### 6. Concentrations.

To encourage students as juniors and seniors to make connections between individual courses and disciplines, students have the option of concentrations beyond the regular major field of study. Concentrations consist of clusters of 4-6 courses in an area that supplements or complements the major field of study and are certified on the student's transcript. They provide an integrated and interdisciplinary program of study which must be approved by the faculty coordinator of the concentration during the first semester of the junior year. At least 2 courses must be at the 300 or 400-level. Examples of such concentrations might well be Humanities, Medical Humanities, Comparative Literature, South Asian Studies, International Studies, Computer Science, and Technological Studies.

### 7. Independent Study.

To encourage student independence and autonomy, students should engage in significant independent work at the junior and senior level. Sophomores may take a maximum of 1 course of independent study, juniors 2 courses, and seniors 2 courses. All independent studies must include a written contract

between faculty and student, approved by the chairman, and a final written product graded by the faculty.

#### 8. Assessment.

Departments are encouraged to assess the relative educational progress of all senior majors in comparison with their entering level of achievement and with national norms. Comprehensive examinations in the major, external examiners, and GRE examinations provide examples of what might be done.

### III. The Structure of Excellence: Calendar and Credit.

#### 1. The Semester Calendar.

The present term calendar fails to provide sufficient time over the course of the term for significant and independent research, writing, and creative endeavor. The EPC therefore recommends the adoption of an early semester calendar to allow for greater independent work and study between classes and over the course of the term, especially at the junior and senior level. The first 15-week semester begins in late August and concludes before Christmas. It is followed by a reading day, a one-week examination period, and a three-week vacation. The second semester begins shortly after the New Year and concludes in early May. Each semester is divided by one week of vacation.

#### 2. The Weekly Calendar.

The weekly calendar should consist of five class days. Normally classes meet three hours weekly, either on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for 50 minutes, beginning at 8:00 am, or on Tuesday and Thursday for 75 minutes, beginning at 8:00 am. Regular classes normally end at 3:00 pm. The Tuesday and Thursday 11:00 - noon hour is reserved for public lectures, coffee hours, and other community activity.

Special arrangements to meet certain 100- or 200-level courses may be made by department chairmen with the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty. Details of the annual and weekly calendar will be worked out by the Registrar and the Executive Committee, in consultation with the Educational Policy Committee, in 1987-1988.

#### 3. Standards of Progress.

To meet standards of progress at the College, a student must satisfactorily complete 7 courses by the start of the sophomore year, 15 courses by the start of the junior year, and 24 courses by the start of the senior year. During the same period they must accumulate 12, 28, and 48 grade points.

25 ? not aligned at 24

**IV. Administrative Addendum.**

1. The normal faculty teaching load is 11 courses over two years, plus the additional responsibilities of independent study and supervision. Faculty may negotiate variable teaching loads with the chairman and the Dean as long as the average of 5.5 courses per year is achieved.
2. Sabbatical leaves may be taken for one semester at full salary or for one year at one half salary. The semester on sabbatical leave will be considered one in which the faculty member would have taught two courses.
3. An FTE is measured as 11 courses of teaching over two years.
4. The Humanities sequence consists of six courses taken in the freshman and sophomore years.
5. All departments are expected to offer a senior year experience for majors which provides ample opportunity for independent work and senior seminars.
6. Science laboratory sections, as at present, do not carry academic credit.
7. First-year foreign language courses normally meet for additional hours each week with faculty and drill instructors.
8. Transition year (1988-1989) graduation requirements:
 

Freshmen	$4 \times 8.5 = 34$ courses
Sophomores	$9 + 26 = 35$ courses
Juniors	$18 + 17 = 35$ courses
Seniors	$27 + 9 = 36$ courses
9. A JYA semester abroad will be considered a 3-course semester from a teaching load standpoint. A JYA year will be considered a 5.5-course load.
10. In 1987-1988 all courses in the curriculum will be submitted to the Faculty for approval.

**Calendar Conversion Table.**

Variable.	Current Three-Term.	Early Semester.
Course load/year (student)	$3 + 3 + 3 = 9$	$4.25 + 4.25 = 8.5$
Teaching load (faculty)	$2 + 2 + 2 = 6$	$2.75 + 2.75 = 5.5$
Weeks in term	$10 + 10 + 10 = 30$	$15 + 15 = 30$
Hours per term per course	40-50	45
Class hours/year (faculty)	240-300	225 <i>s/b increased</i>
Class hours/year (students)	450	360 <i>s/b increased</i>

Faculty hours/week/course	4-5	3-5
Faculty hours/week taught	8-10	6-13

Humanities Course Sequence	6	6
Hums Contact Hours	300	270
Hums Credits	6/36=16.6%	6/32=18.7%

### Tentative Calendar.

#### Fall Semester:

	Start	Vacation	End	Exams	Commencement
1988	A24	07-12,N22-28	D13	D15-21	-
1989	A23	06-11,N21-27	D12	D14-20	-

#### Spring Semester:

1989	J11	Mr17-27	My2	My4-10	May 14
1990	J10	Mr9-19	My1	My3-9	May 13

### Resolution A:

To adopt the Davidson curriculum and calendar for 1988-1989, with requirements effective for the entering Class of 1992, and to reevaluate its effectiveness in 1992-1993.