4.2 Program Curriculum

4.2 The institution's curriculum is directly related and appropriate to the purpose and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded.

Judgment of Compliance

In Compliance

Narrative of Compliance

The University maintains a curriculum that is directly related and appropriate to the purpose and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded.

The mission of The University of Alabama is as follows: "To advance the intellectual and social condition of the people of the State through quality programs of teaching, research, and service."

One of the primary ways in which the University achieves its mission is by offering 190 degree programs that are listed in The University of Alabama's current Program Inventory, as approved by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. The University has 70 baccalaureate degree programs and 120 masters, educational specialist and doctoral degree programs.

The University of Alabama assigns the responsibility of curriculum development and review to faculty who work in collaboration with department chairs, deans and the provost. This is stated in the Faculty Handbook, specifically in a section on Curriculum Matters. It provides an overview of the curriculum approval process and describes the roles of faculty, chairs, deans and the provost as follows:

Normally, recommendations about curricular matters are initiated at the program level and are reviewed at appropriate administrative levels. Implementation of recommendations depends on the availability of resources.

The Graduate Council and the Graduate Dean evaluate proposals for new graduate degree programs and recommend whether to seek approval for such programs.

The Honors Council is responsible for establishing criteria and approving courses for inclusion in the University Honors Program. Additional responsibilities include designing and conducting an annual evaluation of the Honors Program and providing an annual report to the Office for Academic Affairs. Members of the Honors Council include the Honors Program Director who acts as Chairperson of the Council, a representative from the Admissions Office, a faculty member appointed by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs from each undergraduate division, a representative from the Office for Student Affairs, and at least three students who are elected by the Honors Program Student Association from among students enrolled in the Honors Program.

At the baccalaureate level, degree programs have no fewer than 120 semester hours and are detailed in the Undergraduate Catalog. All undergraduate students must satisfy the core curriculum. Responsibility for the core curriculum rests with the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee (CCOC), which reports to the Vice President for Student Affairs and Vice Provost.
In the Undergraduate Catalog there is detailed information on Core Curriculum/General Education Requirements. The explanation for the original purpose for a core curriculum at The University of Alabama and the specific assumptions about how the Core Curriculum was developed are articulated in the Introduction to the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee Guidelines, particularly pp. 4-5. From that discussion, comes the following:

In short, the core curriculum is based upon the assumption that no one can become knowledgeable in every field, but that there are nevertheless certain skills, subjects, and methodologies that no educated person should be without. The essential skills include writing, both as an analytical tool and as a means of communication; critical reading; and the ability to perform mathematical computations beyond the level of college algebra. In the broadest sense, the essential subject matter is knowledge of one's own culture and an awareness of other cultures. And the essential methodologies may be listed as symbolic and deductive (e.g., mathematics and symbolic logic); quantitative and inductive (e.g., physical, biological, social, and behavioral sciences); and rhetorical (e.g., ethics and aesthetics).

Early in its deliberations, the Committee considered instituting new cross-disciplinary courses like those recommended in the recent Carnegie Report. The Committee decided, however, that courses of this sort are too susceptible to changes when the faculty members who initiate them are no longer available to teach them. The Committee also considered a number of courses that might be considered as basic to a college education as those that were eventually decided upon. For example, the Committee debated the possibility of requiring courses in ethics, economics, speech, foreign cultures, and the philosophy of science and technology. The Committee concluded, however, that because of curricular constraints in the various divisions, only a small number of courses could be required of every University student, and that the divisions and departments themselves would be encouraged to require more general education courses in a manner consistent with their overall objectives. Programs that would like to require a foreign culture requirement for their own students may consider adding additional requirements or structuring the social science, humanities, and writing requirements without imposing an additional burden on the students.

As a result of the statewide agreement formulated about 15 years ago, the oversight function for the UA Core Curriculum was assumed to have been taken over by the Alabama Articulation and General Studies Committee. However, after learning that was not the case, a few years ago Vice Provost Mark Nelson decided to reactivate the CCOC with the immediate task of developing a comprehensive program for reviewing all of the courses offered in the Core Curriculum on a continuing basis.

Two years ago, the CCOC began the dual task of developing a structure for reviewing core courses and initiating a review cycle for all core courses offered by the University. The results of that work are as follows:

1. The development of specific review criteria for each of the course designations in the core curriculum, based on the guidelines for each designation provided in the original institutional purposes for them in the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee Guidelines (missing document)
   a. Freshman Composition (FC)
   b. Fine Arts (FA)
   c. Foreign Language (FL)
   d. History (HI)
   e. Humanities (HU)
   f. Literature (L)
   g. Mathematics (MA)
   h. Natural Science (N)
   i. Social and Behavioral Science (SB)
j. Computer (C)
k. Writing (W)

2. The development of a Five-Year Review Schedule of Core Curriculum Designated Courses
3. The development of an online program for reviewing core courses and for archiving the complete review process (accessible to accrediting agencies in UAOPS)
4. The successful completion of the first two years of course reviews (2009, Spring 2010 and Fall 2010)

The record of this work by the CCOC is provided in detailed CCOC Meeting Minutes. Sample course reviews are presented here for Anthropology 103 and Biological Sciences 493.

The primary goal of the review process is to assure that all core courses, no matter what department or program is offering them, are meeting the necessary criteria for their designation in the Core Curriculum. However, the process also is helping identify issues in the Core Curriculum that the CCOC should address, in terms of relevance and appropriateness, as the institution undergoes growth and change. For example, the CCOC is currently discussing issues related to the Writing designation (W) in the Core Curriculum, such as class size, teaching resources, and writing pedagogy. Once the 5-year cycle has been completed, the long-term goal for the CCOC review process is to help identify common assessment measures within each core designation for departments offering such courses.

During the University's Academic Program Review process, each department under review is required to describe separately for its undergraduate and graduate programs any curriculum reviews that have occurred since the last program review. The departments include dates of reviews, reasons for reviews, results of reviews, and specific improvements made to the curriculum as a result of the reviews. An undergraduate program example can be seen in the Department of Modern Languages and Classics description of undergraduate programs' curriculum review, as part of the review of all programs in the department in 2009-2010. At the graduate level, an example can be seen in the Department of Modern Languages and Classics description of graduate programs' curriculum review, as part of the same 2009-2010 review.

The School of Law's Curriculum Committee continually reviews the curricula. Since the last ABA Site Evaluation, the Committee has proposed, and the faculty has accepted, more than 20 curriculum changes. A few examples are the addition of eight classes to the curriculum; the addition of an LL.M. program for students with law degrees from foreign institutions; the revision of prerequisites for tax classes; the addition of cross-listed classes with other departments on campus; and the addition of three hours of professional skills as a graduation requirement.

The University of Alabama has more than 20 discipline-specific accrediting agencies, a complete list of which is online under the title Accreditation, UA Programs, and which is updated regularly by the University's program review coordinator with input from each degree-granting college and school. These accreditation agencies periodically examine curriculum offerings within their respective disciplines to insure that they are directly related to the degrees being awarded.

The Graduate Catalog contains graduate policies and procedures recommended by the Graduate Council and given final approval by the Executive Vice President and Provost. The Catalog provides curricular guidelines for masters (Graduate Catalog Section 4.11.1), educational specialist (Graduate Catalog Section 4.11.2) and doctoral degrees (Graduate Catalog Section 4.11.3).

The University of Alabama's summary of Online Degree Programs Approved by SACS provides a current summary of online degree programs. When an online program is proposed, program proposers must document that curricular offerings are the same as those offered on campus. As an example, the Graduate School will not refer for committee review a proposal for a new online program unless it is as rigorous as the campus program in terms of factors such as admission requirements, required courses, and completion requirements.