



February 16, 2016

Dr. Gena Chandler-Smith
Chair, Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies

Re: Resolution CUSP 2015-16I, Resolution to Adopt the Implementation of the Pathways General Education Curriculum to Guide Implementation of Resolution CUSP 2014-15H (Resolution to Revise Presidential Policy Memorandum No. 125)

Dear Gena,

I am writing to you to convey the faculty senate's preliminary recommendations on Resolution CUSP 2015-16I, which would adopt an Implementation Plan for the Pathways General Education Curriculum, and that is currently before your commission. As you are no doubt aware, the senate considers the Pathways curriculum an issue of great importance, as it constitutes a fundamental reform of a core activity of the University that would involve a large fraction of the faculty in developing, revising, and implementing the curriculum. For this reason, we have taken a keen interest in the development of this plan over the past two years.

We are very pleased to note that the current version of the Implementation Plan has incorporated a number of the suggestions that were put forth both by the senate and by individual faculty members. We would like to thank the members and leadership of UCCGE and CUSP for being receptive to our input, and would like to extend our congratulations to UCCGE for its hard work and commitment to improving the educational experience of future Virginia Tech students. We believe that if properly implemented, the Pathways curriculum has the potential to significantly strengthen our instructional mission and to position us well for the demands of the 21st century.

However, in spite of the revisions that have been incorporated to date, we still find the Implementation Plan lacking in one critical respect, in that it does not address the question of the resources that will be required for a successful implementation of the Pathways curriculum. We believe that it is crucial that this issue be addressed head on, as Pathways will require significant resources both at the initial course development and approval stage, as well as after implementation to support the increased assessment burden as well as training for instructors, teaching assistants, and academic advisors. We would like to point out that the grant program that has already been instituted in support of the Pathways curriculum, while laudable, will not cover many of these costs, and additional resources outside of this program will be needed.

In an environment where the teaching mission of many departments is already underresourced, and faculty time is an increasingly scarce commodity, inadequate support is likely to lead to a situation where much of the faculty cannot justify devoting time to the curriculum, so that it falls well short of its potential, with an improvement in student education much too small to justify the significant amount of paperwork that it brings with it. This is a situation that we would all surely like to avoid, but experience with past university initiatives leads us to conclude that this is unfortunately a likely outcome unless the University makes it a priority to ensure that sufficient resources are provided.

Invent the Future

We appreciate that UCCGE may not feel that budget issues fall within their charge or competency, and fully understand that the shared governance system is not tasked with making budget allocations. However, we also strongly feel that since policy success is inextricably tied to availability of adequate resources, it is well within the bounds of shared governance to identify activities and personnel that are in need of additional support, and even to make recommendations regarding the level and type of resources that are needed for optimal implementation of a policy.

There is already precedent for this. For example, the new Undergraduate Honor Code that was adopted through governance in the Fall contains an explicit recommendation for the staffing level that would be required for the Honor System to function well. Therefore, we hope that CUSP will be able to incorporate this type of recommendation in the Implementation Plan before forwarding it to University Council. Such a recommendation could, for example, include a provision for collecting impact statements from each department or a recommendation that staff personnel be assigned to coordinate proposals and distribution of resources. At the same time, we do understand that this may be difficult to accomplish in the time allotted, and would therefore, as an alternative, settle for a commitment from the administration to perform and publish a budget analysis of the level of support that would be required to optimally implement the Pathways curriculum.

For the reasons just outlined, the disposition of the faculty senate is therefore to:

Tentatively support the adoption of the Implementation Plan for the Pathways General Education Curriculum, while strongly urging that a budgetary framework or at a minimum a listing of areas in need of additional support be included in the plan, or, in the alternative, that the administration perform a budget analysis on the resources required to optimally implement the plan, and then present this analysis to the Virginia Tech community in a timely manner.

Submitted on behalf of the faculty senate,



Rami Dalloul
Faculty Senate President