

THE CREDIT COMMITTEE REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

MAY 3, 2006

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In late November, 2005, Provost June Aprille appointed us – Scott Allison, Doug Hicks, April Hill, Joe Hoyle, David Leary, Erling Sjovold, and Val Vendrzyk – as a special committee charged with “bringing before the faculty by the end of the 2005-2006 academic year a proposal concerning course credit hours and graduation requirements.” We have worked toward that end, and what follows is the result of our labors. We thank those who have aided us in this endeavor – the faculty who responded to our online questionnaire and who shared many ideas and opinions with us, the students who participated in focus groups, the administrators who met with us to discuss various requirements and issues, the chairpersons and coordinators who provided information about their programs, the staff who helped us gather data, and those non-Richmond faculty and administrators who were generous in responding to questions and sending information about the practices in their own institutions. We hope and believe that all of this assistance has made it possible for us to offer a report that will help our colleagues decide how best to serve our students in this time (as ever!) of institutional growth.

In the following pages, we will present the context and rationale for our various recommendations. A summary listing of these recommendations can be found in the final section of the report. We hope this list will be useful to you, but will not be used to substitute for a careful reading and consideration of the entire report.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since the early 1900s, the standard measure of academic learning has been the “credit hour.” Evolving from a proposal by the Carnegie Foundation, the credit hour has been the typical means of internal institutional calculation, external accountability to state legislatures and other governing bodies, and transferability of academic work from one institution to another. For about 75 years, it was universally based on the assumption that learning was directly proportional to “seat time” in a classroom. This was an appropriate

assumption during an era when teaching consisted largely of lecturing and learning was assessed almost solely through classroom recitation and examination.

The presumption of a one-to-one relation between classroom seat time and learning began to dissolve in the 1960s and 70s as a result of newer pedagogies, different views about student learning, increasing emphasis on student research, and the allowance of more flexible definitions of “credit hour” by accrediting agencies. By the early 2000s, many institutions, including most liberal arts colleges and universities, no longer define academic credits in direct relation to time spent in the classroom. In fact, higher education organizations and educational theorists have argued against seat time as an adequate measure of student learning, and accrediting agencies leave the definition of “credit hour,” including its relation (if any) to classroom seat time, to individual institutions. Nationally, the only type of institution that currently retains seat time as a near-universal measure of academic credit is the community college; the next most common adherent is the large public (state) university. Private institutions are least likely to do so.

As regards the way in which coursework has been divided and scheduled, the standard model, across all institutions, used to be 5 courses per semester (or a rough equivalent fitted within a quarter or trimester system) with an average of three hours spent in the classroom per course per week. Forty years ago, graduation typically required the successful passing of approximately 40 courses yielding 120 credit hours. (Even then science courses were typically worth 4 credits, hence the less-than-40 courses for graduation on the part of some students.) That too has changed, especially in private liberal arts institutions. Of the top 40 colleges in the *U.S. News and World Report* 2004 survey, 36 now require that students take an average of 4 rather than 5 courses per term, and in all but two of these institutions classroom seat time is not directly correlated with the amount of academic credit that is awarded. (A third institution correlated seat time and credit in 2004, but no longer does.) In addition, the movement from 5 to 4 courses per term is no haphazard trend; there is no known instance of an institution changing back – or even considering changing back – from 4 to 5 courses per term. No institution that has made the change has reported dissatisfaction with it, and telephone interviews with academic leaders on these campuses revealed no sentiment for a change back to a 5 course system.

THE CURRENT SITUATION AT RICHMOND

Not counting variable-credit courses and experiences (e.g., special topics courses, independent studies, and the like), the University of Richmond’s online Banner system currently lists 1,337 undergraduate courses in the schools of Arts & Sciences, Business, and Leadership Studies. Of these courses, 1,186 (88%) are 3-credit and 4-credit courses. More specifically, 706 (60%), including virtually all of those offered by Business and Leadership Studies, are 3-credit courses; and 480 (40%), all of which are offered by Arts & Sciences, are 4-credit courses. Among the 1,059 3-credit and 4-credit courses listed under Arts & Sciences in the Banner system, 45% are currently 4-credit courses (see Table 1).

Table 1
Undergraduate Courses in the Banner System
as of early March 2006

| Cr. Hours | Arts & Sciences | Business | Leadership Studies | Totals |
|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| 0 | 33 | 4 | 0 | 37 |
| 1 | 43 | 1 | 1 | 45 |
| 2 | 58 | 0 | 0 | 58 |
| 3 | 579 | 99 | 28 | 706 |
| 4 | 480 | 0 | 0 | 480 |
| 6 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| 12 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Totals | 1,204 | 104 | 29 | 1,337* |

*This number does not include the 212 courses, typically independent study and special topics courses, that have variable credit, ranging between 0.5 to 6 credits.

Since some courses on the Banner system have never been offered and others are usually offered in multiple sections, a more accurate picture of current reality can be drawn from the actual course offerings in Fall 2005 and Spring 2006. Focusing only on 3- and 4-credit courses, 1,654 3- and 4-credit course sections have been offered in the 2005-06 academic year. Of these, 74% were 3-credit courses and 26% were 4-credit courses. (100% of Business and Leadership Studies courses were 3-credit courses; 67% of A&S courses were. The other 33% were 4-credit courses.) All of the data regarding 2005-06 undergraduate courses are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Undergraduate Course Sections Actually Taught
in Fall 2005 and Spring 2006

| Cr. Hours | Arts & Sciences | Business | Leadership Studies | Totals |
|------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| 0 | 161 + 139 = 300 | 13 + 15 = 28 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 328 |
| 0.5 | 24 + 24 = 48 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 48 |
| 1 | 185 + 159 = 344 | 13 + 16 = 29 | 3 + 1 = 4 | 377 |
| 1.5 | 1 + 4 = 5 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 5 |
| 2 | 102 + 102 = 204 | 3 + 4 = 7 | 1 + 0 = 1 | 212 |
| 3 | 433 + 438 = 871 | 138 + 140 = 278 | 31 + 41 = 72 | 1,221 |
| 4 | 218 + 215 = 433 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 433 |
| 6 | 18 + 15 = 33 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 33 |
| 12 | 3 + 3 = 6 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 0 + 0 = 0 | 6 |
| Totals | 1,145 + 1,099 = 2,244 | 167 + 175 = 342 | 35 + 42 = 77 | 2,663* |

*The numbers for Fall 2005 are listed *before* the plus signs, the numbers for Spring 2006 *after* the plus signs. The 0.5, 1.5, and 2 credit courses are individual variable-credit learning experiences.

What's the problem?

(1) Many advocates of 4-credit courses in the School of Arts and Sciences have strong reasons for (and strong feelings about) changing our undergraduate curriculum entirely to 4-credit courses and hence to a curricular model in which students would typically take 4 courses per term and would graduate with a minimum of 32 courses. An equally thoughtful and committed group of faculty, some inside and some outside the School of Arts and Sciences, argue passionately for a curriculum that is composed primarily of 3-credit courses and, hence, a curriculum that requires the typical student to take 5 courses per term and 40 courses to qualify for graduation. (Science students, who take 4-credit laboratory courses, would be the main exception.) Although this simplifies the issue, the arguments revolve at bottom around philosophical differences regarding whether it is better to provide a deeper and more intensive undergraduate education, on the one hand, or a broader and more extensive education, on the other. Advocates of the 4-credit, 4-course-per-term, 32-courses-to-graduate position argue, too, that changing to this system would bring UR into alignment with the vast majority of its comparison schools (which is true) and that it would serve as a magnet for top faculty and students, especially those who seek the kind of high quality mentoring and opportunities for independent pursuit of knowledge and creative expression that characterize outstanding achievements in teaching and learning. But advocates of the 3-credit, 5-course-per-term, 40-courses-to-graduate position point out that students will have more opportunities to explore and develop various interests, will learn more things about more subjects, and will find it easier to double-major or switch majors late in their college careers if UR retains and reaffirms its traditional curricular structure. Although no short summary will do full justice to these contrasting positions, it is important to understand that they provide the polar tensions within which the "credit issue" has to be seen. (Student opinion, by the way, divides pretty much along the same lines, with some seeing the advantages of deeper immersion, being spread less thin, and having fewer time management problems, while others prefer a broader set of experiences and an easier road to meeting the requirements of second majors and minors.) The key problem that brought our committee into existence, then, was the fact that our academic community as a whole has never satisfactorily addressed the 3-credit vs. 4-credit issue, which inevitably involves the related issues of student course load and graduation requirements. An attempt to address these matters was made in the strategic planning process that took place between 1998 and 2000, but no resolution was reached at that time, leaving some Arts & Sciences departments and programs to work out curricular options on their own. Since 2000, some of these departments have instituted this or that 4-credit course; others have changed wholesale to 4-credit-based curricula. This *de facto* rather than *de jure* evolution strikes even advocates of 4-credit courses as less than ideal. It strikes others as unjustified, irresponsible, and worse.

(2) Even granting that there have been 4-credit courses (such as science courses with labs) for a long, long time, the rationale for such exceptions, based on extra time spent in labs, was easy for most to accept. What concerns many at this time is that most of the 4-credit courses now on the books do not require additional seat time beyond the

three classroom hours typically required in 3-credit courses. Whatever the national trends and realities in this regard, feelings are very strong on this matter.

(3) Even those who realize and accept that seat time is no longer a typical correlate of credits-earned in institutions like our own are concerned that there is no compelling evidence that 4-credit courses are always more rigorous and demanding than many 3-credit courses. In fact, some wonder if this is even generally the case. To the extent that it isn't, our students' education, in terms of the sheer number of courses they have to take to achieve the 120-credit minimum for graduation, is effectively being reduced.

(4) Given that there is uncertainty and even skepticism about the relative demands in 3- and 4-credit courses, which is to say, the relative amounts of learning that takes place in 3- and 4-credit courses, there is a strong sense of possible inequities across academic programs and especially across the three undergraduate schools. At least by implication, the courses and curricula in some academic units seem to be claiming – or at least to be accorded – an unwarranted higher status than others.

(5) Students are confused by our present situation. Many do not perceive a clear and consistent difference between 3- and 4-credit courses, and some find it more difficult to plan their curricula with a firm sense of what they can expect from various offerings in terms of demand and differential learning outcomes. Particularly confusing is the fact that in some cross-listed courses, students registering under one rubric receive more credit than those registering under another, for exactly the same amount of work according to the same standards of assessment.

(6) Whether or not it is accurate, there is a strong and widespread perception that we have a “mess” on our hands. Even those of us on the committee who began our deliberations wondering what the problem was (“Can't students, advisors, and the Banner system add 3's and 4's, together with the other 0-, 0.5-, 1-, 1.5-, 2-, 6-, and 12-credit courses and experiences that currently make up our curriculum, until a student's transcript reaches the magical 120 credits?") – even we who felt this way four months ago soon came to realize that the system we have has become unwieldy, unjustified, inequitable, and confusing.

Additional reasons for trying to resolve this matter could be given, but these should suffice.

What we offer below is our best attempt to sort out some fundamental issues in a way that, we hope, will help us, as an academic community, to move beyond the current conflicts and stalemate. We are under no illusion that we have discovered – or that anyone can discover – a solution that will satisfy everyone, especially given the polarized and tenaciously held convictions of many faculty. Indeed, one of the deeply disturbing aspects of our work as a committee has been the stark evidence of distrust and animosity that surround the issues that we were charged to investigate. Nonetheless we ask and hope that our various proposals will receive a calm and fair hearing – if possible,

accompanied by a temporary suspension of dearly held beliefs and emotions. Many will conclude that what we propose represents a compromise, or a series of compromises, between the two extreme positions that are entrenched on our campus. We understand how they could feel that way, and recognize that in some respects they are right, but we did not arrive at our recommendations simply through bisecting regnant opinion. We think that what we propose is more than reasonable, given both educational principle and current realities, and that it could allow us, finally, to move ahead in a way that will enhance the quality of our courses, curricula, and – ultimately – the education of our students.

One final introductory comment is in place. Throughout our deliberations we have been guided by the University's strategic plan (approved by the faculty and adopted by the Trustees on May 12, 2000). *Particularly relevant are the following statements and related commitments that we as a faculty have already made:*

While the Richmond experience should be coherent, it should also leave room for discovery, invention, and creative play. (p. 11)

We should structure faculty teaching load not only to foster individual research, but also to intensify the undergraduate academic experience, provide additional opportunities for student-faculty interaction, and enrich our intellectual community. An intensified academic experience will mean different things in different contexts. In the sciences, for example, it could mean more opportunities for faculty-student collaboration in research; in the humanities, it could mean greater attention to student writing, with more extended projects and greater opportunities for feedback and revision. (p. 17)

Students with the best records in high school want to attend the schools with the best faculty, best programs, and highest achievers. (p. 43)

Objective 1: Recruit and retain a diverse community of the most creative, academically focused students. (p. C-4)

Objective 2: Develop curricular and co-curricular programs that inspire students to engage in independent thought, intellectual discovery and cross-cultural communications, and encourage faculty-student collaboration, in-depth study, and integrative learning. (p. C-5)

Objective 3: Recruit and develop the best teacher-scholars; provide additional opportunities for creativity, discovery, mentoring of student projects, and other forms of interactive learning; and pursue hiring strategies that facilitate integrated learning. (p. C-6)

Objective 4: Improve quality of teaching and research and promote more ambitious faculty research. (p. C-7)

Objective 5: Promote evaluation practices that encourage rigorous teaching, ambitious research, and conscientious self-assessment, and that provide faculty with substantive feedback from their departmental chairs and colleagues. (p. C-8)

We ask that you too keep these objectives in mind as you consider the various issues and recommendations that we will now present.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES AND OUR BASIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Seat Time and Academic Credit: Should They Be Correlated at UR?

Whatever system we decide upon, we need to resolve the issue of seat time in relation to academic credit. As mentioned above, classroom seat time and the awarding of academic credit have been decoupled in most institutions of our type (i.e., in our particular Carnegie classification). The key reasons for this decoupling, as we have suggested, is that learning is no longer presumed to take place only, or even primarily, in the classroom, laboratory, or studio. Especially in private residential colleges and universities, students are expected to engage in significant learning experiences outside the physical and temporal bounds of required class meetings. Whether they include group activities, research projects, heavier reading assignments, Blackboard postings, email exchanges, extended writing requirements, or off-campus learning experiences, faculty now typically employ a more varied array of teaching and learning strategies to replace or supplement traditional classroom lectures and exercises. In many instances, grading practices reflect this broader range of alternatives, as the standard classroom exam is no longer the only, and sometimes not even the major, means of assessment. All of this, we believe, is consistent with evolving understandings regarding how student learning can be deepened and made longer-lasting, how some students can perform better in response to multiple teaching and learning strategies, and how faculty at UR in particular can and should attempt to meet the objectives set forth in our current strategic plan.

As a result, **we recommend acceptance of the fact that seat time and academic credit have already been decoupled at Richmond as elsewhere, with the important new stipulation that courses should require an agreed-upon minimum average amount of time per week in combined inside- and outside-the-classroom activities.** We make this recommendation fully cognizant of the fact that time in and of itself is not a completely reliable proxy for student learning. Using it as a metric implies that for every specified unit of time there is a correlative and consistent amount of learning. This isn't entirely likely, except in theory and on average, since study skills, background knowledge, individual concentration, familiarity and facility with different topics, and the like vary student by student from one field to another. Nevertheless, given the incredible variety of teaching and learning styles as well as the significant variation of novelty and difficulty of subject matters (which itself varies per student, not just by discipline), we have found it hubristic and infeasible to think that we could define the number of pages that should be read, the types of analytic papers that should be assigned, the kinds of requirements that should be implemented, etc., in order for a given course to be anointed as worthy of a given amount of credit. As a result, **we recommend that UR should award credit per course as a function of minimum-time-on-task.** What that time should be we will address at the end of the next section of this report, after we have

offered a recommendation regarding whether UR should have one, two, or more standards (i.e., models) for courses.

2. Typical Courses: Should We Have One Standard, Two Standards, or More?

Although the Banner system records nine different course “sizes” (see Table 2), the rubber hits the road when we begin to consider our typical courses – the 1,186 3-credit and 4-credit courses that constitute the bulk of our curriculum. As a result, we will begin by discussing whether we believe that UR needs these two basic models (3-credit courses and 4-credit courses) or something like them for our regular, i.e., typically sized courses. We will address the other alternative sizes (currently 0, .5, 1, 1.5, 2, 6, and 12 credits) later in this section.

As we indicated earlier, only the School of Arts and Sciences currently offers 4-credit courses. Advocates for these courses argue passionately for the need to challenge our students with more and deeper readings, with more and multiply-drafted writing, with more and individually tailored projects, and so on. It doesn’t take long in listening to articulate advocates of this position to see a compelling connection between their aspirations and the commitments expressed in our strategic plan. If we as a committee were persuaded that all current 4-credit courses do in fact measure up to the enhanced expectations expressed by these advocates, and that all the 3-credit courses that would have to be upgraded during a relatively brief transition period to an all-4-credit-based curriculum would also measure up, we might have recommended that UR adopt an all-4-credit curriculum. However, things are a bit more complicated than that.

Although we are persuaded that some of the 4-credit courses designed over the past six to seven years *do* prompt students to engage course material and objectives more intimately, creatively, and responsibly, we are not persuaded that all current 4-credit courses do this. We won’t pretend to have definitive data in this regard, but we can point to fairly consistent feedback from faculty and students as well as the strong impression created by our informal and selective reviews of syllabi – for whatever such reviews can reveal, independent of adequate knowledge of various fields, classroom visitations, scrutiny of completed assignments, testing of actual student learning, and the like. This feedback and these selective reviews make us confident that what we should have expected in any case is in fact true: *No two 4-credit courses are exactly equal in the challenges and apparent learning opportunities that they offer.* Some seem worthy of 4 credits; some don’t. Lest this be taken as an indictment of 4-credit courses, however, we hasten to add that *no two 3-credit courses are exactly equal in challenge or in the amount and depth of learning they provoke.* Some seem worthy of 3 credits; some don’t. And going on step further, *some 3-credit courses are as challenging as, or more challenging than, some 4-credit courses.* But who, in the end, should be surprised by this?

We will address the issue of how equality of course demand and student learning can be approximated more closely later in this report. At present, we want to focus on the primary reason **we are now recommending that all current courses of the 3- and 4-credit variety should be treated more or less the same – in fact, exactly the same.**

We recommend, in short, that UR adopt a unit system in which the typical course is designated 1 unit, similar to what is now being done by most of the top national liberal arts colleges in the *U.S. News and World Report* survey. In such a system, “a course is a course is a course,” whether courses are called “units” or are simply accorded an identical number of credit hours. (In our case, we recommend the language of units, partly to get everyone’s mind off current squabbles regarding the 3- vs. 4-credit issue.) Although we are going to recommend processes aimed at optimizing equality of demand and learning across units, as noted above, we do not expect that such equality will ever be absolute, just as it never has been, and never will be, at any other educational institution in the universe. It is precisely this fact that has led us to propose calling each full, regular, currently designated 3- or 4-credit course a “unit.”

So what will determine if a course deserves a full unit of credit? As suggested above, we believe that the most equitable, reasonable, and assessable standard would be the average time-on-task per week, accumulated across all relevant inside- and outside-class activities. Specifically, **we recommend that the minimum time that the typical good student should need to spend on a course, if that course is sufficiently challenging and if that student is to achieve a high level of learning, should be an average of 10-14 hours per week.** Since this accords with the old supposition that students should be spending at least 3 hours in study for every hour of class, someone might say that this represents no net gain if units are to be roughly equivalent to current 3-credit courses, and much less if they are to be more closely equivalent to 4-credit courses. In fact, however, demanding 10-14 hours per week of inside- and outside-class activity will represent a significant increase beyond what is apparently the actual norm at this time. Even rounding up from the data points provided by our annual Senior Survey and the annual National Survey of Student Engagement, in order to account for any possible flaws in the data, it is clear that the average number of hours that UR students spend on course-related work outside the classroom is no more than 20 hours per week (see Tables 3, 4, and 5 below). So even those students who are now carrying 4 or fewer classes – *and 60% of all undergraduates carried no more than this per term from Fall 2001 through Fall 2004* (see Table 6) – even these students are apparently spending no more than 5 hours per week in outside-class activities related to each of their courses. For every course that meets only 3 hours per week, that would mean that students spent only 8 total hours, on average, on class-related work. Thus, there should be no mistaking the fact that *we are calling for a significant increase in academic expectations, which will require a significant change in faculty culture as well as student culture at UR.*

Table 3

Average Weekly Hours of Study by UR Seniors*
from the 2005 Senior Survey

| Hours | Number | Percentage | Cumulative % |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Less than 1 hour | 4 | .6% | .6% |
| 1-2 hours | 53 | 7.8% | 8.4% |
| 3-5 hours | 153 | 22.5% | 30.9% |
| 6-10 hours | 205 | 30.1% | 61% |
| 11-15 hours | 98 | 14.4% | 75.4% |
| 16-20 hours | 97 | 14.3% | 89.7% |
| Over 20 hours | 70 | 10.3% | 100% |
| Totals | 680 | 100% | 100% |

* Since there is reason to think that the UR survey underestimates the hours of study, we are also giving the data (below) from the better-designed National Survey of Student Engagement.

Table 4

**Average Weekly Hours of Study by UR Undergraduates in Comparison
to Undergraduates at Other B.A. and M.A. Institutions**
from the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement

| Class of Students | B.A. Institutions | UR* | M.A. Institutions |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| First Year Students | 11-15 | 16-20 | 6-10 |
| Senior Year Students | 16-20 | 11-15 | 6-10 |

* Although the data don't allow firm conclusions, the average reported hours of study seem relatively consistent across all three undergraduate schools. B.A. institutions award only B.A. degrees whereas M.A. institutions award both B.A. and M.A. degrees. See the note under the next table regarding the institutions in the NSSE survey.

Table 5

Data from the Top 5% of Institutions in Terms of Study Hours*
from the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement

| Hours of Study | First Year** | Senior Year |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1-5 | 6% | 7% |
| 6-10 | 16% | 17% |
| 11-15 | 20% | 21% |
| 16-20 | 20% | 19% |
| 21-25 | 17% | 14% |
| 26-30 | 11% | 11% |
| More than 30 | 4% | 11% |

* The data in this chart are from the 24 institutions that had the highest reported average weekly hours of study. There were a total of 470 institutions in the 2004 NSSE survey, with 160,000 respondents in all. Eighteen of the top 40 liberal arts colleges in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2005 listing were among these 470 institutions: Bryn Mawr, Bucknell, Colorado College, Colgate, Connecticut College, Dickinson, Franklin & Marshall, Furman, Hamilton, Holy Cross, Lafayette, Macalester, Harvey Mudd, Scripps, Trinity, Vassar, Washington & Lee, and Whitman.) It is worth noting that at least 62% (and probably some of the additional missing 6%) of first-year students and 64% of senior students in these “top 5%” institutions report studying 20 hours or less per week.

** This column totals only 94%; some students opted not to respond or provided invalid responses.

Table 6

Percentage of Richmond Undergraduates Taking 4 or Fewer Courses
in the 7 semesters from Fall 2001 through Fall 2004

| School | Number of Students | % with 4 or Fewer Courses |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Arts & Sciences | 11,642 | 63% |
| Business | 1,447 | 34% |
| Leadership Studies | 185 | 41% |
| Totals | 13,274 | 60% |

How about all the other course sizes in our current curriculum (see Table 2)? In recommending that UR adopt a unit system, we are committing ourselves to the proposition that our curriculum should be simplified, along the same lines undertaken by many other colleges and universities. While this simplification may be seen as reducing some of the flexibility in our present curriculum, we believe that it would reduce many of the inequities that are apparent in our current system. In the sciences, for instance, some faculty give less credit and some give more credit for essentially the same amount of independent research. Similarly, it seems to be the case – not surprisingly in a system that allows a great deal of variation without much oversight – that some faculty and some departments give widely varying credit for essentially the same sort of commitment and achievement in independent study. We think these and other concerns about inequitable standards provide compelling grounds to simplify our system by creating one major category for “regular” courses and two (rather than the current seven) alternatives for “exceptional” courses and individually tailored learning experiences that fall short of warranting a full unit of credit. Therefore, **we recommend that, in addition to full units, UR should recognize half-unit and quarter-unit learning experiences, with the proviso that quarter units may be earned only on a Pass/Fail basis.** By having common standards for half units and quarter units, which we will discuss below, we hope that some of the practices in our current system will be eliminated and others will be enhanced so that they will deserve the awarding of one or the other of these two kinds of alternative credit.

We reached this recommendation regarding *two* alternative credit sizes after reviewing and communicating with department chairpersons about the wide range of learning experiences that fall below the current 3- and 4-credit level at UR. We initially

concluded that all academic departments and programs could accommodate a shift to just whole and half units, although the shift would be more difficult for some. However, several departments continued to express concern and skepticism, and we were eventually won over to their point of view. In fact, even with the addition of this third credit size, some departments and programs may still have to eliminate or bundle some of their fractional learning experiences. Nevertheless, we believe that all departments and programs will now be able to adapt to the unit system we are recommending, and that this system will be simpler, more equitable, and better for our students. The reason we are recommending that quarter units be awarded only on a Pass/Fail basis is that we want to underscore that our curricula should be offered primarily in full and half units. Smaller-scale learning experiences like colloquium-related programs, music lessons, intern-like activities in Theatre and Dance, and individually tailored studies that do not warrant a full or half unit are clearly valuable, but are not on a par with the more substantial learning experiences that warrant a full or half unit of credit. For many of them, a specific letter grade would in any case seem less appropriate.

Half units would serve for learning experiences – sometimes classroom courses – that are more demanding than quarter-unit experiences (as defined below), but not as time demanding as full-unit courses. These may include independent studies that are more substantial than those given a quarter-unit of credit, significant research experiences, and internships. As regards half-unit classroom courses, we believe that there is a need and that there will be a market for half-unit courses that would introduce students to topics not usually covered in our curriculum and also for half-unit courses that would provide opportunities for visiting faculty, including international visitors, some here for only part of a semester, to offer courses from which our students would benefit. These courses could be spread over the entire semester or be offered more intensively over shorter periods. Half-unit courses might also be an attractive option in our Summer School programs. In any case, consistent with our recommendation regarding time-investment in full-unit courses, **we recommend that half-unit courses and other half-unit learning experiences should demand at least 5-7 hours of work per week (or at least 70 to 98 hours per semester) and that quarter-unit learning experiences should demand at least 2.5 to 3.5 hours of work per week (or at least 35 to 49 hours per semester).** We think that defining expectations in this way will make it easier for faculty and departments to assign half and quarter units in an equitable and appropriate manner. Please note that learning experiences that fall short of 2.5 hours per week would not be given academic credit, unless they were part of a larger ensemble of learning-related activities. (Someone constructing a theater set might also spend time on lighting.)

It seems only fair to add that, in the schools that we researched, the use of quarter units is rare. Though we haven't done an exhaustive survey, we have found only one institution on the unit system that uses quarter units. (In that singular case, it is for credit-bearing music lessons.) Still, we believe that quarter units will serve a number of departments and students well, and we would like to underscore that having 3 rather than 9 credit categories represents a significant amount of housecleaning and that the rationale for having 3 is strengthened considerably by the fact that we have also recommended a precise way (in terms of time-demand) to define the differences between them. We

believe that this system would allow some reasonable variation in the “size” of learning experiences while also reducing the likelihood of inequitable “rewards” for those experiences.

At the other end of the spectrum are courses and learning experiences that by their nature demand far more time than would reasonably be expected in a typical full-unit course. We have in mind some of the upper-level science courses, intensive language courses, and student teaching practica. We believe that each of these situations can be handled with multiples of whole and half units. In fact, **we recommend that science departments offering upper-level courses that demand 3 or more hours of classroom time, plus 3 or more hours of laboratory time, plus significantly more outside-class and outside-lab study than is typical in lab courses, should consider either reducing the scope and demand of these courses or repackaging them as full-unit courses that meet the 10-14 hour minimum time expectation, plus separate but related half-unit courses that meet the 5-7 hour minimum time expectation. Similarly, we recognize that intensive language courses are de facto 2 units in one, and hence should be accorded 2 units of credit. And the same sort of argument applies for the Education Department’s teaching practicum program, which should be accorded 3 units of credit, with another half unit for the related seminar.**

Currently, the School of Arts and Sciences has a rule that “a major will require 30 to 42 hours in a single subject area, including all prerequisites within the subject area” and “no more than 64 total hours, counting all courses both inside and outside the subject area, including all prerequisites for those courses and Calculus II.” The School has also determined that “the interdisciplinary studies program will require a minimum of 30 hours and no more than 64 total hours, including all prerequisites.” Translating these statements on a percentage basis from credit hours within a 120-credit system into units within a 35 unit-system, the lower limit for A&S majors will be 9 units, the upper limit for requirements within the subject area will be 12 units, and the upper limit for all requirements inside and outside the subject area will be 19 units. The range for interdisciplinary studies, as defined above, will be 9 to 19 units. (We have discussed only Arts & Sciences in this paragraph because, although the Schools of Business and Leadership Studies state their current requirements in the undergraduate catalog, they do not stipulate a range of alternative possibilities as does the School of Arts and Sciences.)

3. The Ultimate Question: What Should Be Required for Graduation?

In previous discussions about the credits-per-course issue, the ultimate question for many faculty has been the number of courses students will be required to have on their transcripts to qualify for graduation. However, our deliberations have led us to believe and now to propose that a cluster of related recommendations – not just about the minimum number of units students will be expected to have on their transcript, but also about the minimum number of full-unit courses they will be expected to take at UR (or in approved study abroad programs), the minimum number of units they will be expected to take each term to warrant full-time status, and the maximum number of units they will be allowed to take each term – would do a better job of assuring that they receive a true,

valuable, and distinctive *Richmond* education. For that reason, we ask that you consider the following ensemble of proposals, not just the punch line about the minimum number of courses a student must accumulate on a transcript. We also ask that you keep in mind that at present the courses on a student's transcript that count toward his or her graduation can and often do include a large number of courses and course-equivalents (from AP, IB, CLEP, and other forms of transfer credit) that do not represent educational experiences at Richmond.

With all of this in mind, **we recommend, first, that the minimum number of units that must be on a student's transcript at the time of graduation should be 35.** Given the increase in academic expectations associated with our proposed definition of a unit (namely, that a unit should involve 10-14 hours of in-class and outside-class activities), we believe that 35 units is a reasonable number at this juncture in Richmond's history. To those whose initial preference might have been a requirement of 40 courses for graduation, we want to point out that the actual number of courses that students currently have to take, given the existence of 4-credit courses, is already less than 40, for some even as low as 28. To those who hoped that we would recommend 32 courses, we feel compelled to say that we do not believe that there is adequate justification to do so at present. Faculty across schools, departments, and programs have to raise the level of their courses and maintain that level over some reasonable period of time before we, as a faculty, can have adequate confidence that our students will not be cheated by an additional reduction in the required number of courses. When that time comes, another faculty committee should consider the feasibility and desirability of another reduction in the number of courses required for graduation. For now, we believe that our curriculum will be significantly advanced if faculty take on the challenge of meeting our proposed definition of a unit, and we are confident that students will benefit from the increased rigor of their courses and the additional opportunities these courses will afford them.

We discussed at some length whether or not an individual school would have the right to require a minimum number of courses for graduation that is higher than the institution-wide minimum. (We recognize that no school could decide to require fewer than the institution-wide minimum.) While we don't endorse the idea, there is no rule that would make this impossible.

Given the 35 course minimum that we are recommending and assuming that a student had earned no AP or other college-level credit before matriculation, here are some variants regarding what his or her class schedule might look like:

Table 7

**Illustrative Class Schedules for a Student Coming to UR
without any Prior Academic Credit**

| Class | Alternative #1 | | Alternative #2 | | Alternative #3 | |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| | Fall | Spring | Fall | Spring | Fall | Spring |
| First Year | 5 units | 5 units | 4.5 units | 4.5 units | 4.5 units | 4.5 units |
| Second Year | 5 units | 5 units | 5 units | 5 units | 4.5 units | 4.5 units |
| Third Year | 4 units | 4 units | 4 units | 4 units | 4.5 units | 4.5 units |
| Fourth Year | 3.5 units | 3.5 units | 4 units | 4 units | 4 units | 4 units |

Of course, one or more of the half units in this table could be comprised of two quarter units. Note, too, that many entering students now bring *some* AP or other college-level credit along with them, or take a summer course or two along the way, so the profiles depicted in Table 7 will be common but not necessarily typical.

Second, we recommend that the minimum number of units that a student must take at UR (or in an approved study abroad program while enrolled at UR) should be 30. In addition, we recommend that this 30-unit minimum may be fulfilled with any course that is worth at least a half unit (that is, exclusive of quarter units). (We make this recommendation with entering first-year students in mind. See the end of this paragraph for comments about transfer students.) Here we are approaching the issue of graduation requirements from the other end. We want to assure that every student gets a *Richmond* education. As it is now, some are bringing in so many outside credits that their education *so far as we can guide and provide it is* somewhat diluted. By requiring at least 30 units, we will guarantee that a student's education is substantial, assuming of course that all of the courses that student takes at Richmond are substantial, according to the definitions we have offered above. Please note that we are *not* proposing a limit on the number of transfer credits. Although this requirement will limit the number of transfer credits that can be counted toward the minimal graduation requirement, transfer credits will remain very meaningful in helping a student advance more quickly to upper-level courses, in making it easier for him or her to double-major, and so on. This requirement will simply assure that in reducing the overall number of courses required for graduation, we will not be reducing the educational experiences that he or she will have below a reasonable minimum. In fact, it guarantees that approximately 86% of our typical four-year students' college education will be received at Richmond, within programs devised and directed by Richmond faculty. (In the case of study abroad, students' courses will, at minimum, be approved by Richmond faculty.) We think this is appropriate. As regards transfer students, we assume that proportionate adjustments would be made according to the point at which they matriculate at the University. Hence a student entering UR at the start of the junior year would have to take at least 15 units at UR (including approved courses taken abroad during his or her matriculation) to fulfill this part of his or her graduation requirements.

Third, we recommend that the minimum number of units that a student must take to qualify for full-time status in any given semester should be 3.5. One reasonable fear is that by reducing the number of courses that students take, we might simply be making it possible for students to invest more of their time in non-academic pursuits. We have tried to address this matter by defining a higher minimum number of hours that should be required by units and half units. Still, in recognition that student culture will not change immediately, just as faculty culture won't, we are proposing that all full-time students must be registered for at least 3.5 units during each semester of his or her college career. We believe that this requirement addresses concerns that some might have about the substantiality of the curricular structure on a semester by semester basis.

Fourth, we recommend that the maximum number of units that a student should be allowed to take per semester should be 5. As the illustration given in Table 7 has already suggested, we assume that students will not only be able to take 5 units per term, if they so choose, but that some students will have to do so, in fact, as many as 4 out of 8 semesters. Since one of the key arguments by proponents of a 4-course-per-term curriculum has been that students' time and energy are too scattered across 5 courses, we want to point out that, at the moment, students may well be too scattered, but the scatter doesn't seem to be the result of their academic commitments. Rather, they seem to be involved disproportionately in non-academic pursuits. Our job as a committee is not to preach to students about their priorities, it is to encourage faculty to help change those priorities by structuring the assignments and expectations in their courses so that students will *have* to spend more time on them if they wish to be successful in their academic work. Once enough faculty do that, and a sufficient number of students have reorganized their priorities and schedules, it will be time to revisit the issue of whether or not students should be allowed to take up to 5 units in a given term, and hence, whether or not it is time to reconsider the overall course-requirement for graduation. (One useful indicator, besides student feedback about the increased demands being placed upon them, would be the achievement of an average 12 hours of time-investment in the majority of individual courses, as measured by the gathering of new SEI data as we suggest below.) But right now, we do not feel that we could argue compellingly for a curriculum that would ban students from taking 5 units. The best students may wish to take 5 units even when they do not need to do so; others may have to do so from time to time, given the minimum number of courses we are recommending. In either case, however, students should know that they will have to discipline themselves to handle a great deal of work. Faculty, meantime, should make their demands and award their grades according to higher standards. Bending out of sympathy or failure of nerve in requiring what one feels is appropriate will not change either faculty culture or student culture in the ways that promise to make Richmond a better academic institution.

Please note that while we are recommending that students be allowed to take up to 5 units per term, we are also recommending that students be allowed to take *no more than* this number. We believe that exceptions to this limit, if any, should be very rare – so rare as to require the signature of the academic dean of the student's school.

There are two related matters that we need to address, though they are largely clerical in nature. In converting to a unit system, UR would be getting away from reliance on “credit hours” as the measure of its educational programs. However, our accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), requires any member institution that organizes its curriculum on the basis of units to indicate the credit-equivalence of these units, for the sake of regional standards (every institution must require 120 credit-hours or their equivalent for graduation), to allow comparative data gathering, and to facilitate the transfer of earned credit into and out of any given institution. To fulfill this mandate, **we recommend that units be designated as equivalent to 3.5 credit hours.** We do this for a number of fairly straightforward reasons. To designate units as equivalent to 3 credit hours would result in a shortfall with regard to the 120 credit-hour standard for graduation (35 units x 3 credit hours = 105 credit-hours). To designate them as equivalent to 4 credit hours would result in an excessive number of credit hours being required for graduation (35 units x 4 credit hours = 140). In addition, a student taking the maximum 5 units in a given term would be carrying a number of credits that would violate our current maximum credit limit, and in any case would seem to trivialize the quality of our individual courses (5 units x 4 credit hours = 20 credit hours). Therefore, 3.5 credit hours per unit seems to us to be the ideal conversion factor (35 units x 3.5 credit hours = 122.5 credit hours; 5 units x 3.5 credit hours = 17.5 credit-hours, our current upper limit for a given term). As we say, this is largely a clerical matter, but nonetheless something that faculty should know about and endorse as part of the set of proposals we are making. (And in case you are wondering, yes, there is precedent for using fractional credits as a conversion factor in unit systems.)

The second related matter regards the conversion into units of credit-bearing courses that are transferred into UR. Because many other colleges and universities award 3 credit hours to their standard courses, **we recommend that courses that were awarded either 3 or 4 credits by another institution, and have been accepted for transfer into UR, should be designated as equivalent to one unit.** We don’t believe that this recommendation needs any further discussion.

THE ADVANTAGES AND OTHER CONSEQUENCES OF OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The major advantages of our recommendations revolve around an increased focus and intensity in the student learning experience. Even though we haven’t recommended moving to a pure 4-course-per-term system, which would optimize these particular advantages, we believe that our full set of proposals, working together, will lead to a reduction in the fragmentation that many students currently experience. Besides reducing the number of times they will have to juggle the requirements of 5 different courses (something that often spreads students too thin, even by their own admission), our recommendations should also minimize the tendency of students to designate one of their courses as the “other course” to which they give low priority. As a result, we believe that the system we propose will result in students giving more serious attention to, and gaining more from, each of the courses that they take.

Having said this, it is important to note that some students will still have to take 5 courses now and then and that every student will be allowed to take 5 courses, if he or she chooses to do so, without any special permission. Indeed, to the extent that faculty do not raise the expectations in their courses as completely as we have proposed, a greater number of students will probably continue to take 5 courses per term. Fair enough. This simply underscores that faculty have it within their power to assure to assure that each course gets as much attention as it deserves.

Lest someone think we are proposing too radical a change, it is relevant to note again that between Fall 2001 and Fall 2004, 63% of Arts & Sciences students, 34% of Business students, and 41% of Leadership Studies students – in all, 60% of our undergraduate students – carried 4 or fewer courses (see Table 6). Although we have not tabulated more recent data, we can only assume that, if anything, the percentages are higher at this time. In essence, then, we are already moving the road toward a 4-course-per-term standard. What we've done is to propose (a) a rationale for this movement, (b) a curricular structure in which this movement is more readily comprehended and controlled, (c) a measurable criterion of the time-commitment that a course should entail, and (d) a definition of the minimum number of courses necessary to assure that a student has in fact received a "Richmond education." By mandating that every full-time student must take at least 3.5 units of coursework per semester and that all students who enter the University at the start of their first year in college must take at least 30 full units of coursework at UR (or in an approved study abroad program), we have, we believe, addressed the concern of some faculty about the possible diminution of our students' education.

Clearly, changing the structure of our curriculum will have additional consequences. Double majoring, while still possible, will require more careful planning and will absorb a higher portion of a students' educational experience. In addition, it will be relatively more difficult – certainly not impossible – for students to switch majors in the latter years of their time at Richmond. And in some cases, especially for Business and science students, double-majoring or minoring may demand some additional courses beyond the minimum required for graduation. But this simply underscores that every choice has a trade-off, and that some choices will require a unique set of commitments. This is not a significant problem, so far as we can see, and it might have the benefit of reducing the number of students who seek double majors unnecessarily and for the wrong reasons. In any case, some of those for whom double majoring makes sense will simply end up taking a number of courses that more closely approximates what they would have taken within the previous (i.e., the current) curricular structure – and in the meantime the courses in each of their majors would have been enhanced to, or maintained at, the level we have recommended.

Meanwhile, the changes we have recommended will demand the reconsideration, amendment, and possible repackaging of courses and curricula. (We will discuss this process in the next section of this report.) While we are not going to recommend new limits on the number of courses that may be required by individual majors, we do want to

encourage departments and programs to keep the total number of required courses as low as possible in recognition of the value of non-major courses, whether elective or required by some other program.

The staff members of our Admission Office, like admission staff everywhere, prefer to have as many advantages as possible as they seek to enlist the best students. One strong carrot these days is the number of course credits (through AP, IB, and various forms of prior college-level education) that can be transferred onto a prospective student's Richmond transcript. (At present, up to 30 credit hours may be transferred into UR by an incoming student.) We want to leave the Admission Office's hands as untied as possible. Our recommendation to set a floor on the number of UR courses that are required of those seeking a Richmond degree is, we believe, a good way to address different concerns. Students would still be able to transfer and count outside credit toward fulfilling various requirements, attaining higher placement, earning double majors, and the like, but not to the detriment of their Richmond education. As mentioned earlier, the 30 units of Richmond coursework that a four-year student would have to take would constitute almost 86% of the minimal graduation requirement of 35 courses, no matter how many additional credits had been transferred onto their Richmond transcript for purposes other than meeting this requirement. (And as a reminder, the minimal number of Richmond units would be adjusted *proportionately* for those students who transferred to UR after the start of their collegiate careers.)

All in all, then, we think that what we have proposed makes sense, is responsive to the various ideals and concerns that have been expressed to us, is eminently workable, is consistent with our strategic plan, and promises to serve our students well.

IMPLEMENTING OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Whatever curricular structure we have will matter little if we do not offer the best possible courses and curricula within that structure. Much will depend, then, on the commitment and effort of the faculty to assure not only the quality of our courses and curricula at the time we would institute this new unit system, but also – and more importantly – the progressive improvement of those courses and curricula over time. Although implementation will fall under the jurisdiction of others, we believe that we should offer some comments and suggestions that will convey a general sense of the activities and deadlines that can be expected if our recommendations are accepted. We will also offer a tangentially related suggestion (the fifth numbered comment, immediately below, regarding the Arts & Sciences course-approval process) that emerged during our intensive consideration of curricular matters over the past few months.

(1) An Implementation Committee would be needed to monitor and guide the overall process. We assume that if the faculty approve our recommendations, it will be the Provost's responsibility to appoint this committee, which might reasonably include representatives of the offices that oversee Richmond's compliance with regional and national standards (e.g., Admissions, Athletics, Financial Aid, the Registrar's Office, and Institutional Research) as well as faculty and academic administrators. The Committee

would have to review the approved recommendations, identify, and then resolve any and all remaining issues, reporting back to the faculty both for informational purposes and for all appropriate endorsements and approvals. The Committee would also assign responsibilities for various recommendations to the appropriate school, dean, faculty, or committee. The three academic deans will clearly play leading roles in this transition.

(2) We assume that each department and program, under the usual oversight of the appropriate dean and following current procedures for any necessary endorsements and approvals, would review its courses and curricula with the newly approved curricular structures and guidelines in mind, making any and all amendments that seem necessary and desirable.

(3) We assume that the substantive reviews of departments and programs that already occur periodically (perhaps every five years or so) would subsequently include careful consideration of how well the letter and spirit of the approved new guidelines were being fulfilled. In particular, attention would be paid to how well units, half units, and quarter units were meeting the expectations that students should spend, respectively, an average 10-14 hours per week, 5-7 hours per week, and 2.5-3.5 hours per week on these differently sized units. It seems to us that for the sake of increased uniformity and equity across departments and programs it might be a good idea for these reviews to include an evaluator (or evaluators) from outside the department or program, but this is, of course, a matter for others to consider and decide. The main point we wish to make is that in any substantive review of a department or program, a focus on how well its courses and curricula were meeting expectations and standards would be appropriate.

(4) To help both individuals and groups assess their success in meeting approved guidelines, we think that the appropriate persons within each of the three undergraduate schools should consider modifications of the current Student Evaluation of Instruction form to include questions relevant to how well a course is satisfying both the letter and the spirit of the 10-14, 5-7, and 2.5-3.5 hour requirements associated with units, half units, and quarter units, respectively. Such questions might get at the *amount* of work in the course, the *difficulty* of this work, the *relevance* of this work to the topics and objectives of the course, and the *average number of hours spent per week inside and outside the classroom* on work related to the course. Responses elucidating such matters would reveal significant aspects of the qualitative as well as quantitative features of the course. Clearly, what students *learn* in a course is more important than how difficult or time-demanding it is, but the two factors are clearly correlated.

(5) Looking to the future, we wonder if it might not be worthwhile for the School of Arts and Sciences to consider instituting a newly designated Curriculum Committee – separate from the university-wide General Education Committee – that would review new course proposals. (This committee would be comparable to the committees that already exist in the other two undergraduate schools.) We have a sense that a separate committee would be useful in helping to guarantee a more thorough review process above the level of departments and programs, a process that would allow more back-and-forth communication and sometimes revision prior to the endorsement of new course

proposals. This would help to normalize higher expectations and to establish more consistent standards and practices across the wide range of departments and programs in the School. Clearly, this is only a suggestion for the appropriate persons to consider.

In terms of the sequence of events and the target date for implementation, we believe the Implementation Committee would confirm a natural target date that is suggested by the fact that a new undergraduate catalog will be produced for the 2008-2010 academic years. In any case, our committee agrees with the Registrar that this would be the most logical and appropriate time to institute the new unit system, if it is approved by the faculty. So, with the Fall of 2008 as the projected end-point, the general timeline would be something like the following:

(1) During the 2006-07 academic year, all faculty would engage in department- and program-level review of courses and curricula, deciding which extant courses may already be appropriate for the new curricular structure and objectives, which need modification, which need to be dropped, and which new courses need to be developed. All such activity – affirming, modifying, dropping, and developing – should begin to take place at the earliest possible time.

(2) By the start of the 2007-2008 academic year, all departments and programs would have started submitting new courses and programmatic changes for appropriate approval.

(3) By early in the Spring 2008 semester, all courses that departments and programs wish to appear in the 2008-2010 undergraduate catalog would have to be submitted for, and be given, the appropriate approvals. Any courses to be offered in the Fall 2008 term would need to be in the vanguard of this process so that they could be listed for advance registration in April.

(4) In the Fall 2008, the new unit system would be in place for the new entering class, all of whose academic records would be recorded in units. For the other three classes, already matriculated at UR, two transcripts would be kept, one with work from previous semesters recorded in credit hours and one with all new work recorded in units. While retaining previous work in credit hours, the Registrar would translate current students' GPAs and credit toward graduation into units so that their academic records would be up-to-date and accurate. Although this would require considerable work, the Registrar is confident that her office can handle the transition.

This is, of course, only an outline of the major things that would have to take place. The Implementation Committee's first task would be to refine it. It may all seem very daunting, but we are convinced that it can be done because it has already been done by many other colleges and universities that have made similar transitions. More important than the challenges posed by this transition, we believe, is the fact that it would represent an exciting rite of passage to a new era at the University of Richmond, one that builds on the past but is focused on the future.

SOME FINAL COMMENTS

Since so much of what we have written in this report focuses on requirements, including the “demand” for more “work” on the part of our students, we want to emphasize in closing that all of us, on and off the Credit Committee, need to bring the full resources of our creativity and humanity to bear upon the task before us, whether or not the proposals in this report are accepted. All of us should want the University of Richmond to offer a positive, exciting curriculum that inspires and motivates our students to the highest possible kinds of learning and achievement. Curricular structures and the requirements associated with them are simply the means that we use to reach our educational objectives.

We want to emphasize, too, that all of us should want *better* work not just *more* work from our students. Every additional portion of time spent by our students on their courses need not involve additional assignments. Some might well involve work done *more slowly* and with *greater concentration*, or work done *more thoughtfully* with *more complex analysis*, or work done *again* (such as re-reading or re-writing) for the purposes of *deeper comprehension* or *increased clarity and persuasiveness*. If we held students more accountable for having precise and impressive things to say in class about the study they have done, and if we backed up our higher expectations with grades that underscored how serious we are, students would probably attend more closely and carefully to their work outside the classroom. Indeed, if students knew that we expected them to *explain* what they had studied, and not just *summarize* it, they would probably spend more time preparing for class and get more out of it. We give these few illustrations simply to highlight the fact that we are not simply calling for an increase in the sheer quantity of assignments.

All of us have heard colleagues say – and perhaps we ourselves have thought – that “I’d like to assign. . .but I can’t because....” Often the reasons given are that students will resent it, or they simply wouldn’t do it. But isn’t this a cop-out? Shouldn’t we assign and expect what we think is best for our students, and grade their efforts accordingly if they don’t do it, whether they are resentful or not?

Some faculty say that they hesitate to do what they feel they should because they are afraid that students will give them lower teaching evaluations. Especially among the untenured, this is an understandable concern, even if one ought not give in to it. But how about the tenured faculty? The habits established in one’s untenured years are rarely changed in later years. Perhaps it would help to have more data on this, but it is our impression that many of our community’s most highly regarded teachers are, in fact, among the most challenging. We should give our students more credit. Like any of us, they might prefer to get off more lightly, but they know it is better to have high expectations placed upon them, and most will respond to demands that are relevant to the topics and issues at hand. Our job is to be sure that our expectations *are* relevant to the objectives of our courses, and that we are there to help our students meet the challenges we place before them.

As we discussed the higher expectations that should accompany our proposed reduction in the overall number of courses students must take to qualify for graduation, it occurred to us that another reasonable way to increase expectations might involve a reconsideration of what many of us have done in shifting from relatively more “objective” examinations to relatively more “discursive” or “synthetic” examinations. We fully support discursive and synthetic examinations, but we wonder if students would read more carefully, underlining and keeping notes, and be more likely to go back and re-read again, if they knew they would be held more accountable for *details* and *specifics* as well as for general arguments and conclusions. Again our point is that there are ways to increase the amount of time that students spend on courses that have more to do with what we expect them to *get from* and *do with* current materials than it does with assigning additional materials. No doubt in many cases additional materials should be assigned, but it is what is done with course materials that matters most.

We believe that all of us can learn a great deal from one another. We emphasized in our suggestions about the course review and approval process that curriculum committees could perform an extremely valuable service by broadcasting the good ideas that come their way in the course of fulfilling their responsibilities. The same kind of sharing can and should be done within our various academic departments and programs. It is our sense that this kind of collegial sharing and assistance does not happen as frequently as it should. No matter what curricular structure we choose, we should dedicate ourselves to increasing the sharing that we do. Ideas like using office hours for mandatory reviews and discussions with students during times of the semester when relatively few students tend to drop by during office hours could work for many of us and provide ways for students to usefully increase the number of hours they spend on course-related activities.

In recommending that courses be constructed and offered in ways that require a typical good student to spend 10-14 hours on each of them if he or she wishes to do well, we realize that there will still be students who, for whatever reason, put fewer hours into this or that course. That is predictable and understandable. What we envision, however, is a curriculum in which such students would be much less likely to receive *As* and *Bs* in those particular courses. The standards of excellent and good work that we propose and enforce at the University of Richmond should be pitched at levels that require a serious commitment to learning. We hope that we can all agree to that, whatever curricular structure we decide is best for our students.

As far as we are concerned – we, the committee charged to look into this matter – the best curricular structure for our students at this point in the University of Richmond’s history is a unit system with the features that we have described in this report. Through careful study and much discussion of our community’s current practices and opinions, we have come to believe that the system we have proposed will extricate us from the messy, inequitable, and confusing system into which we have fallen somewhat willy-nilly – and hopefully from the contentious and at times even acrimonious debates surrounding it – while also providing a good platform for our students’ education. Indeed, we believe that if our community uses this moment of possible structural transition as an opportunity to

raise our collective expectations, standards, and practices, we can initiate changes in both our faculty and student cultures that will contribute in a very positive manner to the achievement of some of our central agreed-upon goals, as articulated in our current strategic plan: “to intensify the undergraduate academic experience, provide additional opportunities for student-faculty interaction, and enrich our intellectual community” while encouraging “faculty-student collaboration, in-depth study, and integrative learning” and leaving room for “discovery, invention, and creative play” (see the summary of our strategic plan goals on p. 6 of this report).

We submit this report with our unanimous and wholehearted endorsement of the 13 recommendations we have made. A summary listing of those recommendations can be found in the next and final section of this report.

A SUMMATION OF OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are the recommendations that we have made, along with page citations that will help you locate discussions regarding each of them. In providing this list, we fervently hope that you will use it as a useful way to refresh your memory on certain points, not as a substitute for reading and considering the entire report.

1. **Decoupling of Seat Time and Academic Credit:** We recommend acceptance of the fact that seat time and academic credit have already been decoupled at Richmond as elsewhere, with the important new stipulation that courses should require an agreed-upon minimum average amount of time per week in combined inside- and outside-the-classroom activities. (p. 7)
2. **Use of Time-on-Task as a Standard:** We recommend that UR should award credit per course as a function of minimum-time-on-task. (p. 7)
3. **Change to a Unit System:** We recommend that all current courses of the 3- and 4-credit variety should be treated more or less the same – in fact, exactly the same. We recommend, in short, that UR adopt a unit system in which the typical course is designated 1 unit, similar to what is now being done by most of the top national liberal arts colleges in the *U.S. News and World Report* survey. (pp. 8-9)
4. **10-14 Hours as the Time-Standard for a Full Unit:** We recommend that the minimum time that the typical good student should need to spend on a course, if that course is sufficiently challenging and if that student is to achieve a high level of learning, should be an average of 10-14 hours per week. (p. 9)
5. **Institution of Half and Quarter Units:** We recommend that, in addition to full units, UR should recognize half-unit and quarter-unit learning experiences, with the proviso that quarter units may be earned only on a Pass/Fail basis. (p. 11)
6. **Proportionate Time-Standards for Half and Quarter Units:** We recommend that half-unit courses and other half-unit learning experiences should demand at least 5-7

hours of work per week (or at least 70 to 98 hours per semester) and that quarter-unit learning experiences should demand at least 2.5 to 3.5 hours of work per week (or at least 35 to 49 hours per semester). (p. 12)

7. **Exceptional Cases:** We recommend that science departments offering upper-level courses that demand 3 or more hours of classroom time, plus 3 or more hours of laboratory time, plus significantly more outside-class and outside-lab study than is typical in lab courses, should consider either reducing the scope and demand of these courses or repackaging them as full-unit courses that meet the 10-14 hour minimum time expectation, plus separate but related half-unit courses that meet the 5-7 hour minimum time expectation. Similarly, we recognize that intensive language courses are de facto 2 units in one, and hence should be accorded 2 units of credit. And the same sort of argument applies for the Education Department's teaching practicum program, which should be accorded 3 units of credit, with another half unit for the related seminar. (p. 13)

8. **35 Units as the Minimum Requirement for Graduation:** We recommend that the minimum number of units that must be on a student's transcript at the time of graduation should be 35. (p. 14)

9. **The 30 Unit Rule:** We recommend that the minimum number of units that a student must take at UR (or in an approved study abroad program while enrolled at UR) should be 30. In addition, we recommend that this 30-unit minimum may be fulfilled with any course that is worth at least a half unit (that is, exclusive of quarter units). (p. 15)

10. **The 3.5 Unit Rule:** We recommend that the minimum number of units that a student must take to qualify for full-time status in any given semester should be 3.5. (p. 16)

11. **The 5 Unit Rule:** We recommend that the maximum number of units that a student should be allowed to take per semester should be 5. (p. 16)

12. **The Credit Equivalent of Units:** We recommend that units be designated as equivalent to 3.5 credit hours. (p. 17)

13. **The Unit Equivalent of Credits:** We recommend that courses that were awarded either 3 or 4 credits by another institution, and have been accepted for transfer into UR, should be designated as equivalent to one unit. (p. 17)