

## Recommendations from the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee

### I. Recommendations to take effect with the 2013-14 Catalog:

#### A. Policy on Internships

##### Background and rationale for change:

In recent years internships have become a more prominent feature of undergraduate education nationwide, including liberal arts colleges and universities. Quality internships allow students to apply classroom learning and integrate the theoretical and practical in ways that strengthen student success after graduation. The University Strategic Plan adopted last year includes the following strategy that supports our efforts to “refocus academic programs to blend effectively the liberal arts, professional education, and experiential learning”:

*Strategy 2: Review all degree programs with the aim of enhancing experiential learning through activities such as undergraduate research, creative performance, service learning, internships, and international study opportunities.*

Our current internship policy, developed in the early 1990s, limits to four the number of internship credit hours that can count toward graduation. Over the last few years several departments across campus have identified and worked to provide additional semester-long internship opportunities for students, including the Chicago Semester, the Hands-On Program in Christian Missions, and Summit Adventure in outdoor education. In order to make it more feasible for students to take advantage of these opportunities, we propose that the number of internship hours allowed to count toward graduation be increased to six. However, to protect the integrity of course requirements, particularly for majors that require fewer hours, this revision allows departments to restrict the number of internship hours that can count toward the major. In that case, internship hours above a certain threshold set by the department would count toward elective credit, with the maximum of six hours counting toward graduation.

##### Current policy on internships from 2012-13 Catalog, p. 49

The University offers a learning environment which combines practical experience with classroom theory. The number of credit hours available and the minimum prerequisites for participation will be determined by the department offering the internship. All courses will be graded on a Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory basis.\* Not more than four (4) hours from internships will apply toward major, minor, or graduation.

Participation also requires prior approval of individuals in the University and the organization in which the internship will take place. Forms for participating in internships are available from the appropriate academic dean. Once the Academic Vice-President has approved these forms, the student must register prior to beginning the internship.

\* This course will be graded on a Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory basis where Satisfactory is defined as a grade of C or higher and Unsatisfactory is equivalent to any grade below C.

##### Proposed revision of internship policy for 2013-14 Catalog

The University offers credit-bearing internships to foster a learning environment which combines classroom theory with practical experience. The department offering the internship will determine (a) the minimum prerequisites for participation, (b) the number of credit hours assigned for the internship, and (c) the number of hours that may apply toward a major or minor. However, not more than six (6) internship hours will apply toward graduation. All internships are graded on a Satisfactory-Unsatisfactory basis.\*

[No change to second paragraph or footnote.]

## II. Recommendations to take effect with the 2014-15 Catalog

**A. General Degree Requirements:** The committee proposes reducing both the minimum number of hours required to graduate and the minimum number of junior-senior hours required. The committee further proposes that the limitation of 40 hours in a single department be removed from graduation requirements.

### Background and rationale:

In 2011 the Arkansas General Assembly passed a bill requiring all state-supported colleges and universities to limit degree programs to 120 hours. While the mandate does not currently apply to private institutions, it potentially places OBU at a competitive disadvantage at a time when college costs and graduation rates have become overriding concern for prospective students and their families. Other states in our region, including Missouri, Tennessee, and Texas have adopted the 120-hour standard, and it seems unlikely that this trend will be reversed given current pressure to improve college attainment and graduation rates.

Although the state mandate played no role in the decision to review our CORE curriculum, the timing coincided with this review project, which the Interdisciplinary Studies Committee initiated in the spring of 2011. One of the goals of the review has been to reduce the total number of hours required in the CORE. If adopted, the ISC's proposed curriculum revision would make it easier for departments to adjust their degree programs to a 120-hour minimum. Under this proposed policy, some majors may still require more than 120 hours for graduation, but they will need to submit a rationale to the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee for programs that exceed the 120-hour minimum.

A related issue is the number of junior-senior hours required for graduation. The committee proposes that this requirement be changed to 39 hours, which on a percentage basis, is almost the same as 42 of 128 hours.

The final proposed change would remove the stipulation that no more than 40 hours in a student's major department can count toward graduation. The committee identified several reasons for supporting this change:

1) Under our current curriculum structure, some majors already require more than 40 hours in a single department, while others require more than 40 hours in closely related areas of study using different prefixes. A majority of the committee believes it would be appropriate to remove a stated requirement that has already been subordinated to the goal of creating the optimal curriculum for students in a particular field.

2) The committee believes that the core curriculum, along with the requirements for a minor or emphasis, ensures that students receive a sufficiently broad-based education in the liberal arts tradition. This 40-hour rule originated in the 1950s when Ouachita College adopted "areas of concentration" consisting of 45 hours, with no more than 40 hours allowed in one department. Our curriculum and university structures have changed dramatically since that time, and while the committee believes it's important to resist unrestrained specialization, the committee does not see the 40-hour limit as necessarily helpful in ensuring that graduates have

both the breadth and depth associated with a strong liberal arts education. (See the catalog statement on Liberal Arts Education, p. 5 in the 2012-13 catalog.)

3) Finally, in keeping with our final proposal to adopt a set of university-wide learning goals and measurable outcomes (see II.B. below), instead of restricting the number of hours students can take in a particular department, the committee believes it's more important to encourage departments to align their curricula with the general university learning goals.

Current General Degree Requirements, 2012-13 Catalog, p. 32

**6. Hours Requirement:** A minimum of 128 semester hours is required for graduation.

NOTE: No more than 40 hours may be counted toward graduation in a student's major department. No more than 30 hours may be counted toward graduation in any other department. A maximum of 4 hours of music ensembles and 2 hours of physical education activities courses may count toward the 128-hour minimum.

**7. Junior-Senior Hours:** A student must complete a minimum of 42 hours of courses from the 3000/4000 level. At least 12 must be in the major and 6 in the minor.

Proposed General Degree Requirements, 2014-15 Catalog

**6. Hours Requirement:** A minimum of 120 semester hours is required for graduation.

NOTE: ~~No more than 40 hours may be counted toward graduation in a student's major department. No more than 30 hours may be counted toward graduation in any other department.~~ A maximum of 4 hours of music ensembles and 2 hours of physical education activities courses may count toward the 120-hour minimum.

**7. Junior-Senior Hours:** A student must complete a minimum of 39 hours of courses from the 3000/4000 level. At least 12 must be in the major and 6 in the minor.

**B. Goals for Student Learning:** The committee recommends that the following student learning goals, drafted by the Interdisciplinary Studies Committee as part of the Core Curriculum revision, be adopted as university-wide goals. If adopted, these goals will guide the entire educational process at Ouachita. All curricular and co-curricular programs will identify student learning outcomes, ensure that they are clearly aligned with these university goals, develop appropriate assessment measures to document their level of effectiveness, and use the results as the basis for continuous improvement.

**Proposed Learning Goals for Ouachita's Educational Programs**

Through all its educational programs—curricular and co-curricular, classroom and experiential—Ouachita promotes the following goals for student learning:

1. Intellectual and applied skills that promote competency and lifelong learning, including articulate communication; critical and creative thinking; analytical and quantitative reasoning; scientific reasoning; and information literacy.
2. Engagement with content and methods of the major domains of knowledge.

3. Heightened awareness of personal and social responsibility, including the ability and inclination to practice civic engagement, ethical reasoning, personal integrity, stewardship, physical well-being, and spiritual growth.
4. Appreciation for cultural diversity and development of intercultural competence for constructive engagement in both local and global contexts.
5. Depth of knowledge and skills in a chosen discipline or combination of disciplines sufficient to provide the foundation for advanced study, professional competence, and meaningful work.
6. Ability to connect learning across disciplines and apply knowledge and skills to solve problems.