

## **FACULTY MEETING MINUTES**

Wednesday, April 6, 2016

3:35 PM – Heritage Commons

Before addressing formal business items on the agenda, Speaker Anne Jung-Mathews reminded faculty that the Faculty Senate election results had been emailed to everyone, and due to the number of vacancies, including a Faculty Speaker Elect, encouraged members in attendance to reconsider serving on a committee in some capacity to ensure proper representation of PSU, students, faculty and staff.

### **I. Approval of the draft minutes of March 2, 2016 meeting.**

The March 2, 2016 minutes were approved as written. These minutes are available online on the Faculty Governance site: <http://www.plymouth.edu/committee/faculty/faculty-agendas-minutes/faculty-meeting-minutes/>

### **II. Reports**

#### **A. Don Birx, President**

The President's report was sent out electronically in advance of this meeting. President Birx was out of town and was unable to be present in person.

#### **B. Julie Bernier, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs**

The Provost's report was sent out electronically in advance of this meeting. Provost Bernier was available to answer questions.

Although not specifically pertaining to Provost Bernier's report, Dennis Machnik from the Department of Atmospheric Science and Chemistry asked a question about whether Advancement policies have changed. In particular, he has not seen any donations to the Mark Silvestre Planetarium and he heard that funds earmarked for a particular purpose are now being rerouted to the "general" fund?

Provost Bernier responded by saying she was not aware of this issue and did not believe this would occur with earmarked funds, but she said she would follow-up with the Advancement office and report back.

There were no further questions from the floor for Provost Bernier.

#### **C. Hilary Swank, Chair, Curriculum Committee**

The Curriculum Committee report was attached to the agenda prior to the meeting. (See Attachment 1) There were no questions from the floor.

### **III. Old Business (none)**

### **IV. New Business**

A. Resolution of Standing Committees (none)

B. Cathie Leblanc, Chair, 4-Credit Task Force

Cathie, on behalf of the 4-Credit Task Force, made the following motion, which was seconded:

**MOTION:** *The 4-Credit Task Force recommends that the faculty endorse a plan allowing interested programs to transition to a 4 credit curriculum with the following limitations/caveats/action items:*

- *4 credit courses will meet for at least 200 minutes per week.*
- *By “program,” the Task Force means discipline-specific courses only, not General Education or First Year Experience courses.*
- *Directions and First Year Experience classes in General Education must remain at their current credit levels unless and until all of gen ed/FYE migrates to 4 credits. When and if these courses become standardized at 4 credits, the overall number of credits dedicated to General Education should not be increased or decreased. That is, students currently take 33-36 credits of Directions and First Year Experience classes. If the General Education program transitions to 4 credit classes, no fewer than 33 and no more than 36 credits can be required in Directions and First Year Experience.*
- *The Provost or responsible party must develop a time block schedule for classes that is flexible enough to handle 1, 2, 3, and 4 credit classes. The time block schedule must also be flexible enough such that instructors can determine the optimal number of class meetings per week for the content and activities of each individual class.*

*Programs wishing to remain in their current credit format may do so.*

A more detailed report of the 4-Credit Task Force was attached to the agenda prior to the meeting. (See Attachment 2)

**Rationale:**

The 4-Credit Task Force has done a significant amount of work investigating the pros and cons of moving to a four credit curriculum. We have found that there is no persuasive data to suggest that a 4 credit model is inherently “better” than a 3 credit model nor is there persuasive data to suggest that a 3 credit model is inherently “better”. Instead, we believe the decision for whether a program is based on primarily 3 credit courses, 4 credit courses, or some combination of the two (with some 1 and 2 credit courses thrown in) depends on the pedagogy and goals of the program.

In the time since we began our work, the focus of the University has shifted to the idea of clusters in which students are engaged in significant applied experiences as part of their education. Many of these applied experiences would benefit from longer time blocks than we

typically have available to us. These experiences are also probably more easily offered in 4 credit blocks rather than 3.

We recognize that programs will engage with clusters in a wide variety of ways and on potentially different timelines. In addition, there are many kinds of change currently occurring at the University. Therefore, we feel that it is unwise at this time to mandate that all programs move to a 4 credit curriculum. On the other hand, some programs will benefit from a more rapid move to a 4 credit curriculum but our current infrastructure makes creating and offering 4 credit courses difficult.

Therefore, we recommend that the University allow programs to move more easily to a 4 credit curriculum by changing the course time schedule to officially accommodate such classes. Programs would then be free to choose the right mix of course credit assignments to meet their goals.

Extensive discussion took place addressing the pros and cons of moving to a 4-credit, 200 minute model curriculum, including revisiting the report from 2008. Some concerns expressed included:

- Why not make it mandatory that all programs move to a 4-credit model rather than allowing for some departments to maintain their current credit format? This decision greatly impacts the already understaffed Registrar's and Undergraduate Advising offices;
- There may be many questions about the logistics: What will the block schedule look like? When will the plan be put in place? What is the overall timeline within which to accomplish this transfer?
- General implications for General Education – will it be left out of the conversion?
- Work load, equity and credit banking need to be addressed.
- How will this change affect online classes or alternate meeting times? Will the time limit of the 4-credit model apply to these courses?

Provost Bernier's report contained the following caveats below:

1. That Academic Deans prepare a time block schedule and timeline for implementation for review prior to the September meeting of the faculty.
2. By October 15, 2016, departments identify programs that they intend to move to a 4-credit curriculum.
3. With the information above, an analysis will be completed by Academic Affairs to determine the feasibility of implementing the new time blocks and a report provided to the faculty at the December 2016 meeting.
4. The Gen Ed Committee (or a task force assigned) will review and make recommendations for revision to the Gen Ed program based on a 4-credit model and in support of the Strategic Clusters and report to the faculty by (TBD).
5. Assuming a positive outcome on #3 above, program changes will occur Spring 2017 and Fall 2017. The transition to 4-credits will begin Fall 2018 with programs transitioning over and the new time block schedule implemented Fall 2018.

Provost Bernier encouraged faculty to start identifying which programs they intend to move to a 4-credit curriculum, and although some programs have 4-credit courses now, it is not possible for all programs to shift without a new time block schedule.

With respect to General Education, the General Ed Committee will be looking at the General Ed Task Force report next week and after review, will make recommendations and send out a report of their findings.

Cathie reported that with respect to online courses/alternate meeting times, the 4-credit change would mean additional expectations in online classes equivalent to the additional credit.

There was consensus among the group that this is the time to implement innovative curricular change as the University moves forward with the establishment of Strategic Clusters and transforms PSU in a new direction where student recruitment and retention will be enhanced by providing hands-on learning and open labs.

Question was called, seconded and the vote was to end discussion.

The motion of the 4-Credit Task Force was approved.

## **VI. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 4:17 pm. [Note: Announcements followed Adjournment]

Respectfully submitted,

Lillian Rozanski, Scribe

**Curriculum Committee Report**

The Curriculum Committee conducted electronic business in March. The committee voted to delete the Literature and Film Option in the English Major.

The committee's next deadline is April 6th for its April 15th meeting at 2:30 in the HUB Student Senate Room.

DRAFT

## Final Report from the Four Credit Task Force—March, 2016

### Members and Charge

In the Spring 2014 semester, Provost Bernier asked for volunteers to serve on a Four Credit Task Force; all nine volunteers were appointed to the original task force, although there have been several changes of composition since then. Two of the original nine members left the University, another left because of a re-appointment but recruited a replacement. Thus, the Task Force is currently comprised of seven faculty members, listed at the end of the report.

Provost Bernier charged the Task Force with the following:

- 1. To review the majority and minority reports of the previous (2008) task force on moving to a four credit model. To identify areas not previously addressed.*
- 2. To develop a report to the Faculty on the implications of changing to a 4-credit course model with attention to at least the following:*
  - the impact of such a model on Faculty workload*
  - financial implications of such a plan*
  - pedagogical concerns and student performance outcomes*
  - scheduling considerations*
  - general implications for General Education, but not specific policies or procedures of concern to the General Education Committee*
  - a possible time-line for implementation*
- 3. To make an interim report to the Faculty at the December 2014 Faculty Meeting and a final report to the Faculty in April 2015.*

In September 2014, we met with Provost Bernier to be sure we understood our charge. We were originally supposed to make a recommendation to the full faculty at the April, 2015 faculty meeting about whether to move to a 4 credit curriculum or not. Instead, the Task Force voted in February, 2015, to suspend our activities until the results of the URSA process were known. Since the final URSA evaluation report was released in January, 2016, the 4 Credit Task Force has met several times to discuss our recommendation, especially in light of the University's move toward clusters.

### 2008 Four Credit Task Force Executive Summary

The 2008 Four Credit Task Force, comprised of 18 faculty across a variety of disciplines, provided a detailed report with research on the definitions and history of the credit hour, the purpose of the credit hour, how seat time is related to the credit hour, on the current conceptualization of seat-time in US higher education, the current discussion/climate/research pertaining to credit hours in higher education, the advantages of changing from a 3 credit model to a 4 credit model (including interdisciplinary teaching, team teaching, supervising students with service learning projects, and more experimentation with technology), as well as disadvantages of a credit hour system. They provided a FAQ and time block

models as well as summaries of visits to three New England universities that had recently made the switch to four credits (Keene State University, University of Maine-Farmington, and St. Joseph's College, Maine). Rather than duplicate this helpful and substantial work, the 2014 Task Force built on this research and addressed the conditions that have changed since the previous task force. (See the 2008 Task Force Report in Appendix B and the 2008 Minority Report in Appendix C for more details).

### **How Has the University Changed Since the Recommendations of the 2008 Task Force?**

In December 2014, we reported (see Appendix A for the December 2014 report) that our conversation with Provost Bernier led us to the understanding that there were several factors that have changed for the University since the 2008 Task Force completed its work and those factors were driving the desire to reexamine the idea of a 4 credit curriculum. Those factors included:

1. Plymouth State University's student retention rate has declined and one possible outcome of a move to a 4 credit curriculum is that students taking 4 classes a semester, rather than 5, would increase academic success and, therefore, retention rate.
2. The General Education program was newly implemented in 2008. Since a move to a 4 credit model would involve an overhaul of the General Education program, many faculty opposed the move on those grounds. In recent months, assessment and possible modification of the General Education program has been the focus of some faculty discussion and so a discussion of the 4 credit model might also be appropriate at this time.
3. The administration (and many faculty members) would like the standard teaching load to be 3 classes a semester. A 4 credit curriculum might allow PSU to move to a 3-3 teaching load without a negative budget impact.
4. PSU's budget situation is significantly different than it was in 2008 and moving to a 4 credit model might save money.

In the fourteen months since that December 2014 report, several additional factors have arisen that should be considered in deciding whether to move to a 4 credit curriculum:

1. The budget situation has changed to the point that most course reallocations that allow faculty to teach a 3-3 or 3-4 load have been taken away. Therefore, nearly all faculty have a standard 4-4 teaching load at the current time.
2. A General Education Review Task Force has been created and is examining ways in which General Education might be revised. As mentioned above, a discussion of moving to a 4 credit General Education program might be appropriate at this time of possible change.
3. The University has hired President Birx, who has a significantly different vision for our future than did President Steen. In particular, the University is moving towards an open lab, cluster organization that involves students, faculty and staff working on interdisciplinary projects. Although we don't yet understand all of the implications of this shift in vision, the University must be as flexible as possible in support of curricular decisions concerning how best to accommodate open labs and interdisciplinary collaborations within the constraints of physical classroom space and effective usage of a time block schedule.

## Conclusions

Since beginning our work, we have come to the following conclusions:

1. There are no statistical data that “prove” that a 4 credit model will increase student academic success in the form of increased GPAs, increased retention rates or increased graduation rates. In fact, we could find no studies that attempted to directly measure the effect of a 4 credit model compared to a 3 credit model. In our December 2014 report (see Appendix A), we presented some data about Keene State College’s graduation rates that might have shown a correlation between a 4 credit model and graduation rates but even that interpretation was disputed among members of the Task Force.
2. Redesigning program curricula around 4 credit classes will require work on the part of the faculty. Plymouth State University is engaging in significant institutional change at the moment and so for some programs, the redesign of the curriculum to 4 credit courses may be exactly what is needed in order to take advantage of our current cluster, open lab direction. Other programs may find that staying a 3 credit classes allows them to best take advantage of our new direction.
3. Because of NEASC requirements, General Education must comprise at least one third (40 credits) of the credits required in any program. Depending on how one counts General Education credits, our current program is either just at or a bit above this minimum (24-26 credits for Directions courses, 9-10 credits for First Year Experience courses, and 18 credits for Connections courses, at least 9 of which are also courses required for the major and so may or may not be counted as General Education courses depending on one’s perspective). If the University moves to a 4 credit curriculum, the number of credits required in General Education should not be increased. That is, simply adding 1 credit to every General Education course would result in a General Education program that is approximately 25% larger than it currently is and we are strongly opposed to that. Therefore, moving General Education classes (especially Directions and First Year Experience) to 4 credits must happen as part of a restructuring of the General Education program as a whole and cannot be done at the individual department level. In addition, the General Education program must be reexamined carefully the appropriate way to keep General Education at the same number of overall credits but still meet the goals of the program.
4. The administration is likely to change the current time block schedule to accommodate a more flexible array of options for class meeting times and contact hours regardless of the decision made by the faculty on the 4 Credit Task Force recommendation. The new time block schedule must more easily accommodate 4 credit courses as well as open labs and collaborations than our current schedule does but it should also accommodate 3 credit courses in ways that do not waste valuable classroom space. Such flexibility will likely require a time block schedule that is more complex than our current schedule but that complexity is acceptable as long as departments have enough time block and classrooms to schedule all of their needed courses.

**Motion:** The 4-credit Task Force recommends that the faculty endorse a plan allowing interested programs to transition to a 4 credit curriculum with the following limitations/caveats/action items:

- 4 credit courses will meet for at least 200 minutes per week.
- By “program,” the Task Force means discipline-specific courses only, not General Education or First Year Experience courses.



- Directions and First Year Experience classes in General Education must remain at their current credit levels unless and until all of gen ed/FYE migrates to 4 credits. When and if these courses become standardized at 4 credits, the overall number of credits dedicated to General Education should not be increased or decreased. That is, students currently take 33-36 credits of Directions and First Year Experience classes. If the General Education program transitions to 4 credit classes, no fewer than 33 and no more than 36 credits can be required in Directions and First Year Experience.
- The Provost or responsible party must develop a time block schedule for classes that is flexible enough to handle 1, 2, 3, and 4 credit classes. The time block schedule must also be flexible enough such that instructors can determine the optimal number of class meetings per week for the content and activities of each individual class.

***Programs wishing to remain in their current credit format may do so.***

The Task Force voted 4-3 in favor of this motion. The three faculty members who voted against this recommendation voted in favor of moving the entire curriculum to a 4 credit model. No one voted to endorse a 3 credit model. We think the changes occurring at the University indicate that some programs that currently offer mostly 3 credit courses would be best served by offering mostly (or all) 4 credit courses but our current structures make doing so difficult. This is why we recommend that the administration determine mechanisms to more easily support the delivery of 4 credit curricula.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the 4 Credit Task Force:

Deborah Brownstein—College of Business Administration

Lisa Doner—Environmental Science and Policy

Cathie LeBlanc—Communication and Media Studies

Ann McClellan—English

Sam Miller—Atmospheric Science and Chemistry

Paul Mroczka—Music, Theater, and Dance

Justin Wright—Mathematics

## APPENDIX A

### Interim Report from the Four Credit Task Force—December, 2014

#### Members and Charge

In the Spring 2014 semester, Provost Bernier asked for volunteers to serve on a Four Credit Task Force, which was then created with all of the faculty members who volunteered. The task force is comprised of nine faculty members, listed at the end of the report.

Provost Bernier charged the Task Force with the following:

- 1. To review the majority and minority reports of the previous (2008) task force on moving to a four credit model. To identify areas not previously addressed.*
- 2. To develop a report to the Faculty on the implications of changing to a 4-credit course model with attention to at least the following:*
  - the impact of such a model on Faculty workload*
  - financial implications of such a plan*
  - pedagogical concerns and student performance outcomes*
  - scheduling considerations*
  - general implications for General Education, but not specific policies or procedures of concern to the General Education Committee*
  - a possible time-line for implementation*
- 3. To make an interim report to the Faculty at the December 2014 Faculty Meeting and a final report to the Faculty in April 2015.*

In September, we met with Provost Bernier to be sure we understood our charge. We will be making a recommendation to the full faculty at the April, 2015 faculty meeting about whether to move to a 4 credit curriculum or not. The full faculty will then vote on our recommendation. In other words, the charge to the Task Force is to conduct research and gather data concerning a possible curricular change rather than make a policy about the possible curricular change.

Our conversation with Provost Bernier also led us to the understanding that there are several factors that have changed since the 2008 Task Force completed its work and those factors are driving the desire to reexamine the idea of a 4 credit curriculum. Those factors include:

5. Plymouth State University's student retention rate has declined and one possible outcome of a move to a 4 credit curriculum is that students taking 4 classes a semester, rather than 5, would increase academic success and, therefore, retention rate.
6. The General Education program was newly implemented in 2008. Since a move to a 4 credit model would involve an overhaul of the General Education program, many faculty opposed the move on those grounds. In recent months, assessment and possible modification of the General Education program has been the focus of some faculty discussion and so a discussion of the 4 credit model might also be appropriate at this time.
7. The administration (and many faculty members) would like the standard teaching load to be 3 classes a semester. A 4 credit curriculum might allow PSU to move to a 3-3 teaching load without negative budget impact.

8. PSU's budget situation is significantly different than it was in 2008 and moving to a 4 credit model might save money.

### **Areas Not Previously Addressed**

The Task Force meets twice a month and, as our charge suggests, we began our work with a thorough review of the majority and minority reports from the 2008 Four Credit Task Force. We determined that the following areas were not fully addressed in those reports:

1. Are there any statistical data from institutions that have moved to a 4 credit model about the impact of that move on student success (engagement, retention rates, graduation rates, time to graduation, etc.)?
2. Are there other compelling factors (for example, financial) to support the move?
3. What would the time block schedule look like if we move to a 4 credit model?
4. Since the other USNH institutions use a 4 credit model, there are numerous questions about ease or increased difficulty of transfer between institutions:
  - a. What percentage of our students transfer to schools using a 4 credit model?
  - b. What percentage of our transfer students come to us from schools using a 4 credit model?
  - c. How do the other USNH institutions deal with transfers from 3 credit institutions (like the community colleges)?
5. What would each major at PSU look like in a 4 credit model and how difficult would it be to draft those new curricula?
6. What would a 4 credit general education program look like?
7. What impact will a 4 credit model have on faculty scholarship? How will faculty who currently have credits reallocated to scholarship be dealt with? Will that reallocation go away? If it does go away, what impact will that have on our expectations for scholarly activity through the tenure process?
8. What impact will a 4 credit model have on faculty who have release time for service (for example, department chairs and program coordinators)?
9. What impact will a standard 3 course per semester (12 credits) teaching load have on faculty recruitment?

### **Statistical Data: Student Success, Retention, and Graduation Rates**

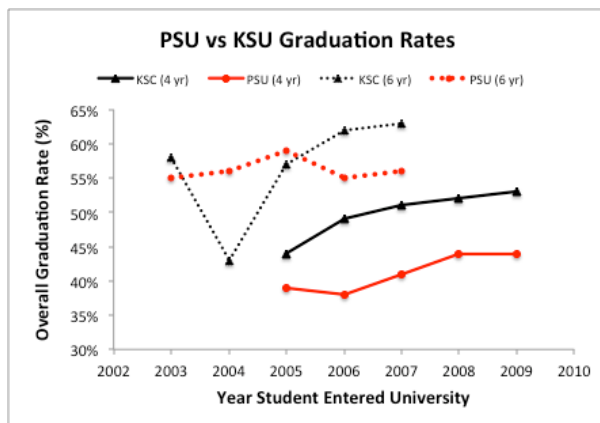
The 2008 Task Force visited three institutions that had made the move to a 4 credit curriculum and reported their findings at that time. None of that data, however, provided information concerning student success before and after the move to 4 credits. We (the current Task Force) contacted those institutions to see if they had new data regarding student success but, just like in 2008, all information provided from those three institutions was anecdotal.

Because we are part of the USNH system with Keene State College, one of the 3 institutions that the 2008 Task Force visited, Provost Bernier was able to provide us with graduation rate statistics for both KSC and PSU. The following tables show the latest available four year and six year graduation rates for both institutions. The four year graduation data for the cohort entering in Fall 2010 and graduating in Spring 2014 were not yet available. Similarly, the six year graduation data for the cohort entering in Fall 2008 and graduating by Spring 2014 were also not yet available.

Four Year Graduation Rates		
Fall Entering Cohort	KSC	PSU
2005	44%	39%
2006	49%	38%
2007	51%	41%
2008	52%	44%
2009	53%	44%

Six Year Graduation Rates		
Fall Entering Cohort	KSC	PSU
2003	58%	55%
2004	43%	56%
2005	57%	59%
2006	62%	55%
2007	63%	56%

We have also included a chart of the above data to show that the trend for graduation rates for both institutions is generally upward. Graduation rates at Keene (black) and Plymouth (red) after 4 years (solid lines) and 6 years (dashed). The years denote entrance year.



KSC transitioned all students to a 4 credit system in 2007. This shows that a trend toward higher graduation rates began before the transition to a 4 credit model and may reflect other factors. PSU's rate was improved over the same period.

But some members of the Task Force have pointed out that KSC made the move to a 4 credit curriculum in Fall 2007 for all students (not just incoming students). This means that students entering in Fall 2005 and graduating in Spring 2009 would have completed 2 years in a 3 credit curriculum and 2 years in a 4 credit curriculum. Those entering in Fall 2006 completed 1 year in a 3 credit curriculum and 3 years in a 4 credit curriculum and students entering in Fall 2007 would have done all 4 years in the 4 credit curriculum. The four year graduation rate for first-time, first year students entering KSC in 2005 was 44% but that rate jumped to 49% for students entering in 2006 and continued to increase for students entering in Fall 2007. A look at the six year graduation rate shows a similar increase (from 57% to 62%) for students entering in Fall 2006 (and, therefore, spending most of their time in a 4 credit curriculum).

The members of the Task Force disagree about how to interpret these data. Some members feel that the data tell us nothing about the relationship between a 4 credit curriculum and graduation rates. Other members feel that these data show a correlation (although not a causal relationship) between a student spending at least 3 years in a 4 credit model and increased graduation rates and that it should be noted as well that the gap between the graduation rates at KSC and PSU has grown over the period shown (from 5% to 9% for the four year graduation rate and from 3% to 7% for the six year graduation rate). Of course, we cannot conclude that KSC's 4 credit curriculum is the cause of this increased gap.

We also did a literature review to see if we could find any data about the impact of a 4 credit model on student success and were unable to find any such studies. Finally, we contacted George Kuh, who administers the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), for data concerning student engagement at institutions before and after such a switch and again, we were unable to obtain any statistical data.

### **Financial and Faculty Workload Impact**

Provost Bernier told us that, for a number of reasons, she and the President would like the entire faculty to have a 3-3 teaching load. However, it would cost over \$3 million per year to do this if we remain in a 3 credit model. (The details of that report are available on request.) Therefore, moving the entire faculty to a 3-3 teaching load in a 3 credit model is not going to happen in the foreseeable future. In addition, the reallocation of faculty time for scholarly activity is expensive. Provost Bernier writes:

“There are currently approx. 57 fewer classes taught due to reallocated time (faculty teaching 3/3 or 3/4 load). If these faculty taught a full 12 credits (3/3 load with courses @ 4-credits each) the savings would be approx-  
**\$222,000/year**”

Given the current budget situation and the proposed budget prioritization process, scholarship reallocations are likely going to go away whether we move to a four credit model or not. It is simply too expensive given the current budget situation. So the only way to move the entire faculty to a 3-3 load is to have each of those 3 classes be 4 credit classes so that the standard teaching load remains at 12 credits per semester.

### **Curricular Revision Challenge**

The majority and minority reports from the 2008 Task Force both made claims about the level of difficulty and the kinds of challenges that making a switch to a 4 credit curriculum would involve. We decided fairly early on that we would need to check these claims. In addition, as we were discussing the implications of moving to a 4 credit curriculum, implementation issues kept arising as potential questions. We therefore decided that we needed to try to implement parts of the curriculum so that we could present actual implications rather than imagined implications. We each began with our own degree programs to determine how easy or difficult it would be to convert it to a 4 credit curriculum. All of us were able to come up with a 4 credit version of our degree program with about four hours (or less) of work. We discovered the following by undertaking this exercise:

1. These curriculum revisions must be done by the faculty most familiar with the programs. Only they have the expertise to determine how the program learning outcomes might be able to be repackaged.

2. There are a variety of ways to undertake such revisions. Some may start completely over with the learning objectives for the program and build new courses that address the objectives in new ways. Others may start with the existing program and determine which courses could be combined so that all learning objectives continue to be addressed.
3. Some of the degree programs will be easier to convert to 4 credits than others.
4. Some degree programs will require that the number of credits to graduation be increased from our current 120 to 128, which is the number of credits a student would earn if s/he took four 4-credit classes per semester for eight semesters. Other degree programs may not need the number of credits for graduation to be increased.
5. Looking at a department's curriculum with fresh eyes for new purposes can lead to positive questioning of why the curriculum is designed the way that it is. At least one member of the Task Force discovered things in his department's curriculum that he and his colleagues may want to change regardless of whether we move to 4 credits or not.

Having gone through this exercise with some of our own programs, we now plan to visit other departments and engage in a similar activity so that we have some experience with which to comment on the ease or difficulty with which these curriculum revisions can be undertaken.

We are in the process of looking a variety of ways in which the General Education program might be changed so that it continues to meet the objective of the program while not increasing the number of credits required for Gen Ed. We intend this exploration to be simply informational and it does not take the place of the Gen Ed committee working to change Gen Ed should the faculty vote to move to a 4 credit model.

We are also in the process of creating a new time schedule to accommodate 4 credit classes. Our assumption is that seat time will be proportionately increased for the standard 4 credit class. That is, our standard classes require 50 minutes of seat time per credit or 150 minutes per week for a 3 credit class. Therefore, we assume a standard 4 credit class will require 200 minutes of seat time per week. Of course, there will continue to be some 4 credit classes that require more seat time just as there are some 3 credit classes now that require more than 150 minutes of seat time per week. We also assume that some departments might want to teach some of their classes using a hybrid model where some seat time for a class is replaced by online and/or out-of-class work.

### **Future Work**

We are trying to add more members to the Task Force since we believe as many voices as possible should be added to the conversation. We have asked several members of the faculty to join us and as of the writing of this report, none have joined us. We encourage additional members to join us in this important work by contacting any member of the Task Force and volunteering your time and energy. We encourage input into our investigation from all members of the faculty, even if you don't have time to actually serve on the Task Force. Any information or suggestions can be sent to any member of the Task Force for inclusion in our work.

We are examining ways in which the Task Force can help each academic department to look in some detail at the challenges and opportunities they would face if we were to move forward with a 4 credit curriculum. Once we determine the best way to move forward with that task, we will be contacting each department to begin that conversation.

Finally, we are continuing to fill in the gaps in information that we identified earlier in this report.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the 4 Credit Task Force:

Susan Buchholz-Jones—Nursing

Lisa Doner—Environmental Science and Policy

Cathie LeBlanc—Communication and Media Studies

Ann McClellan—English

Sam Miller—Atmospheric Science and Chemistry

Paul Mroczka—Music, Theater, and Dance

Robyn Parker—College of Business Administration

Justin Wright—Mathematics

Jayne Yahr—Art

## APPENDIX B

### Credit Model Task Force

#### Majority Report

March 2008

**History:** During the 2006-2007 academic year a Credit Model Working Group (CMWG) came together to discuss the matter of converting from a 3-credit model to a 4-credit model at Plymouth State University. The working group was comprised of faculty representatives from a variety of departments but not all departments. Participant perspectives of the working group included opposed, uncertain, neutral, and in support of changing to a 4-credit system. All departments and perspectives were invited to participate by exploring current research, philosophies, and trends in higher education related to credit models, credit hours, contact hours, and other course-based approaches. The CMWG accumulated ten signatures and requested the Steering Committee create a task force with representatives from every department to investigate the issue further.

#### Original Charge:

- investigate the pros and cons of switching to a 4-credit or non-credit-hour system
- investigate various credit model systems
- investigate the pros and cons of various curriculum delivery systems
- investigate the impact on students, faculty, curriculum, departments, and university resources (financial, human, and physical space).
- Present recommendations (whether it entail a change of credit systems or not) to present to the faculty by the March faculty meeting

The Credit Model Task Force (CMTF) convened in October 2007 with faculty representatives from 14 departments, including one student representative appointed by the Student Senate.

**Task Force Members:** Ann McClellan (Chair, English), Annette Holba (Communications & Media Studies), Robert Miller (Education), Phil Lonergan (Art), Helen O'Brien (Social Work), Deborah John (HHP), Holly Oliver (Music, Theater, and Dance), Christian Roberson (Computer Science), Dennic Machnic (CEAPS), Natalya Vinogradovna (Math), John Kulig (Psychology), Stephanie Halter (Criminal Justice), and Bob Egbert (Social Science); Student Representative: Derek Birch.

We will report our findings at the March 2008 Faculty Meeting and will ask for a full Faculty vote on this issue at the April Faculty meeting.

In order to address chronic problems of faculty and student intellectual fatigue, improve faculty hiring and retention, and enable students to be more productive and deep learners; to distinguish PSU from other



institutions and align PSU with the rest of the USNH system; and to allow for a greater degree of faculty-student interactions characteristic of elite institutions, we investigated several possible approaches to the way in which PSU structures faculty and student course loads:

1) a full course load for faculty should be six courses per year; a course load for a full-time student should be eight courses per year. Course credits should not be linked to contact time.

This proposal could be achieved by converting all current 3-credit courses to 4-credits without extending contact times, and making a full-time student's course load be 16 credits instead of 15.

2) In addition to 1 above, we could also move to a "course credit" model, in which each course counts for one credit, whether it is in foreign languages, math, secondary education, or biology, etc.

3) We could also convert to a 4-credit (course credit model or regular credit) system and tie credits to contact time.

4) We could let individual departments make a decision on how they will count courses and credits. There is some precedent for this (see 1 under MODELS), and while logistically this might be difficult because of dramatic differences among departments in how a teaching load and credits are counted, a certain amount of variability already currently exists at PSU in any case.

5) We could leave the current system in place.

In order to achieve the desired result in either of these models, students should be PREVENTED (except with Dean approval) from taking more than four four-credit courses in a semester.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

*It is the majority opinion of the Credit Model Task Force that PSU change from the current credit model system that offers 1, 2, 3 and 4-credit courses to a 4-credit model system that offers 1, 2, and 4-credit courses with the 4-credit course being the standard across the curriculum. Students would take sixteen credits per semester and faculty would teach three courses each semester (six courses per year). Each course would require a minimum of 180-200 in-class clock minutes per week with additional learning experiences to be determined by the department offering the course.*

*The committee further recommends an implementation team be assembled with sufficient release time, a timetable for implementation be developed, and an ongoing assessment of the change to a 4 credit model be conducted.*

*The committee also recommends that the Chief Financial Officer be consulted to provide financial models to support this proposal.*

**Rationale:** After a systematic review of the current literature regarding this shift and after meeting with three other institutions (two of which are PSU comparators) that have already changed from a 3-credit model to a 4-credit model it is the majority opinion of the CMTF that we support the change to a four credit model system. This is a majority opinion of the taskforce. The issue did not receive a unanimous vote. We do not suggest that there are no disadvantages to changing credit model systems but there are

significant advantages that outweigh perceived disadvantages. This proposal presents both sides of the issue as fair representation of perspectives.

## IMPLICATIONS

- 1) Faculty will have a more reasonable teaching load, which will not be inconsistent with many other teaching institutions.
- 2) Students will be expected to take 4 courses most semesters, which according to most professors' self-proclaimed standards, equals 50 hours of work per week, in addition to whatever work or work-study the student may have.
- 3) Because course loads have been reduced and standardized within a consistent block schedule, scheduling problems will be eased.
- 4) Common meeting times will be more easily created and maintained.
- 5) Expectations of students will rise because of increased focus and more time-on-task for individual courses.
- 6) Potentials for collaborative learning will be enhanced by longer class periods and the possibility of more in-depth out of class learning like service learning projects, outreach, and field research.
- 7) Potentials for research, experiential learning and service learning will be enhanced.
- 8) Coherence in student programs will result (as reported by UMF about Wagner College).
- 9) Course credit systems or 4-credit courses will allow for great variety in alternative schedules (e.g. modules, experiential learning, service-learning, etc.)
- 10) Course compression: some departments may decide to compress some courses from two semesters to one because students will be taking fewer classes overall, or faculty will have to redesign courses and content coverage to meet current needs.
- 11) Course loss: some courses will be lost, as majors are rethought. A course major might become an 8 course major as opposed to a 12 course major, with some of the material from the 3 lost courses folded into the remaining 8.
- 12) Majors might have to be reconceptualized.
- 13) All (or most) course descriptions would have to be revised, and all (or most) syllabi will have to be revised.
- 14) The increased academic expectations and seat time may result in a loss of some students who may choose a less rigorous academic environment.
- 15) Conversion will require at least one year of thoughtful deliberation with release time and additional resources for those facilitating the shift, which will result in additional financial demand on the institution.

- 16) Reviewing equivalencies for transfer credit will be initially time consuming, but not impossible.
- 17) Faculty inertia will be difficult to overcome.
- 18) The relationship between the General Education and major courses will have to be rethought in order to insure that the proportion of general education courses and majors remains similar.

## **OUR RESEARCH PROCESS**

**Regarding the Three vs. Four Credit Question:** While no research data is available specifically comparing three vs. four credit courses, the Task Force read and evaluated related data on credit models, the relationship between courses/credits taken and student academic achievement, the philosophy and pedagogy of credit models, accreditation, seat time, possible connections to technology related pedagogies, etc. We have included a list of relevant sources and links at the end of this document. In addition, our investigation and this document relies heavily on the work done by the 2006-7 Credit Model Working Group and our comparator institutions at Keene State College, St. Joseph's College, and the University of Maine-Farmington (See acknowledgements at the end of this document). Much of the information used here was taken from resources provided by these institutions, all of which are available either online, as links, or at the library.

### **Report on the Credit Model and Seat Time**

This report is part of the larger effort to investigate ideas pertaining to the credit model and seat time in higher education. The focus of this inquiry was originally designated as seat time. However, it became apparent that seat time should not be considered separately from the credit model, as the two concepts have a long-standing history and connection.

Questions that propelled this inquiry:

- What is the credit hour?
- What is the purpose of the credit hour?
- How is seat time related to the credit hour?
- What is the current conceptualization of seat time in US higher education?
- What are the advantages of changing from a 3-credit model to a 4-credit model?
- What are the disadvantages of a credit hour system?
- What is the current discussion/climate/research pertaining to credit hours in higher education?
- **What is the credit hour?**

The credit hour initially developed as a common unit of measurement designed to measure student learning and faculty workload (Wellman and Ehrlich, 2003). Prior to this adaptation to higher education, the credit hour was designed by college admissions departments to translate high school work for college admissions assessment (Shedd, 2003a). The credit hour has been described as a business model of

measurement applied to document intellectual productivity (the first inherent problem with the credit model system).

- **What is the purpose of the credit hour?**

Historically, the credit model was a tool of measurement utilized to make a business decision in the modern era. Today, the credit model remains a business tool that is designed to function as a unit of standard measurement but many institutions do not define what it is or what it means to the student or faculty. As a result, there is a nebulous understanding of its purpose and relevancy for many individuals and institutions (Shedd, 2003b).

Ehrlich (2003b) tells us that measuring faculty contact hours by the credit model system initially allowed administrative offices to equally assess learning outcomes across disciplines, which could be described as comparing apples and oranges in educational approaches. This system worked as a common language and worked well in the modern historical moment when the 50 minute hour, meeting three times per week, dominated higher education. But as instruction became more varied in all dimensions this application of the credit hour as a metric unit of universal measurement has become more arbitrary. Thus, one question that is now being asked is, since the way we learn has changed so much does this render the credit model anachronistic?

- **How is seat time related to the credit hour?**

Seat time is one way of measuring learning across disciplines-according to administrative departments. Traditional educational approaches to higher education have been based upon the lecture model – or the teaching/professing paradigm. Seat time refers to the amount of time a student sits in a class. This measures how much time a student is supposed to be in class but it cannot measure any learning outcomes – some argue that to measure learning outcomes we must not be wed to the idea of ‘putting in time’ or meeting the bottom line. The relationship between seat time and learning is spurious (at best) and one does not automatically correlate to the other. Yet, from a business perspective seat time does provide some standard unit of measurement that tells part of the story. Even with this problem noted in higher education literature, the credit hour is becoming an influential lever of institutional policy, perhaps because of the ease it allows in connecting financial accountability to students or hours taught.

Increased seat time should no longer be a measurable outcome for any reconceptualization of the credit-hour models. Seat time is out of date and with the advent and proliferation of new technologies, online courses, and distance education, the traditional credit hour, and thus the concept of seat-time, has become obsolete (Shedd, 2003b).

- **What is the current conceptualization of seat-time in US higher education?**

Institutional habits about use of time are less flexible than for recording student learning (Shedd, 2003b, p.29). By being married to the concept of seat time, we lose the ability to be flexible in our assessment of learning. Because disciplines vary in nature there should be a variety of measurements designed to assess learning. But there is an overwhelming focus on the concept of ‘seat-time’ which propels “sameness” (Shedd, 2003b, p. 30). The idea of “sameness” allows for the business/practical side of higher education to measure apples and oranges and come up with one bottom line. However, Shedd (2003b) argues the idea of “sameness” in assessment approaches across disciplines is not a realistic and appropriate measurement tool.

Dr. Vilma Concha-Chiaraviglio (2003), of Meredith College in North Carolina, does not use seat time to assess foreign language competency. Students must pass a competency exam not related to any required seat-time. Watkins and Scholsser (2003) argue that technology has changed the way we should conceptualize seat-time. Castner (1993) suggests we should rethink seat time to a Mastery level. Mizell and Centini (1985) suggest that technology has already reshaped the notion of seat-time. The date of their claim is interesting because we are 20 years beyond that time of Mizell and Centini and still talking about the need to shift how we think about seat time.

Is there a shift or trend in higher education that represents a new way of thinking about seat-time? Technologies are forcing the issue. While there is not a massive exodus away from seat-time as a form of measurement, it still is predominant at most institutions primarily because it is easier to pragmatically negotiate issues of measurement, transfer, and graduation.

- **What are the advantages of changing from a 3-credit model to a 4-credit model?**

Some studies argue (Ehrlich, 2003b) that 3 credit systems suppress innovation in teaching/learning because the 3 credit system is married to the lecture paradigm (Shedd, 2003b). Ehrlich (2003b) suggests that moving to a 4-credit model or away from the credit model in general (especially one that is married to seat-time) can invite innovation in teaching, such as:

- o Interdisciplinary teaching
- o Team teaching
- o Supervising students with service learning
- o More experimentation with technology

Ehrlich also suggests that teaching 4 courses a semester gives little time for this kind of innovation and little time for faculty to engage research. The argument that research can enhance teaching is well established in the research literature in higher education (Rice, 2002; Taylor and Rafferty, 2003; Ramsden, 1992; Hutchings, 2003, Brown, 2005). Additionally, the idea that teaching and research is mutually exclusive is ludicrous as well. Studies show that teaching and research are partners – both complementing the other (Brown, 2003; Boyer, 1992). In fact, without research, there is a risk for college/university teachers (public intellectuals) to become anachronistic if research is not in some way a part of one's teaching experience.

- **What are the disadvantages of a credit hour system?**

Changing to a different model (either a 4-credit model OR any other reconceptualization of a model that actually does measure learning outcomes) will be time consuming and cause curricula to be reworked (overhauled in some cases). Faculty will need to repackage individual course preps, departmental course requirements, and people will simply have to change their routine. Additionally, the issue of seat-time will mean different things to different departments, making assessment more challenging from a business perspective, however, more accurate from an intellectual perspective.

The credit model was a tool designed “for another time” and it was based on a mechanical system from the industrial era (Wellman and Ehrlich, 2003), yet it is still used as a measurement of classroom time today. A credit model counts ‘time’ not learning outcomes. It has become embedded in regulatory systems in higher education in the US (Wellman and Ehrlich, 2003).

- **What is the current discussion/climate/research pertaining to credit hours in higher education?**

Currently, there are institutions questioning the value and relevancy of the credit model in the postmodern era of education (Ehrlich, 2003b). These studies report on the varying approaches by other institutions and the currency of reconceptualizing the credit-hour model. The challenge of using a business approach to measure intellectual growth and then basing the whole of the intellectual system upon that business oriented approach seems inadequate, inappropriate, and incomplete.

The National Center on Higher Education Research has suggested that “a fundamental shift may be under way in the realm of faculty workload, a shift that cannot be accommodated by the credit-hour metric, at least without significant modifications” (Ehrlich, 2003b). Changes in higher education that are calling for a revisiting of the credit-model include:

- o Class size (an increase due to the commercialization of higher education)
- o Technologies (reshaping ‘time’ and how teaching/learning happens)
- o The shift from professing paradigm to a learning paradigm – where learning outcomes are privileged – not teaching strategies.

Ehrlich (2003b) argues that one of the problems currently facing the academy is the idea that faculty workload is often defined in relation to class size and class size is often impacted by credit hour and the number of seats available in a particular class. As a result of thinking about faculty workload related to credit-hours, innovation is seriously restricted or impeded (Ehrlich, 2003a). Some argue that the credit-model system alone impedes instructional innovation (and simply makes faculty unwilling to change or rethink approaches in their curriculum).

This report should be considered in conjunction with the Report on the Credit Model submitted by Robin Bowers, April 2006, for the English Department.

#### Sources for the Credit Model Report on Seat Time

- Boyer, E. L. (1992). Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate. *Issues in Accounting Education*. 7(1), 89-91.
- Brown, R. B. (2005). Why link personal research and teaching? *Education & Training*. 47(6), 393-407.
- Castner, K. (1993). Moving from seat time to mastery: One district’s system. *Educational Leadership*. 51(1), 45-47, 50.
- Concha-Chiaraviglio, V. (2003). Towards communicative competency: Matching teaching and testing. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Foreign Language Association of North Carolina, (ERIC: ED493183).
- Ehrlich, T. (2003a). The credit hour as a potential barrier to innovation: Lessons from innovative institutions. *New Directions for Higher Education*. 2003(122), 31-43

- Ehrlich, T. (2003b). The credit hour and faculty instructional workload. *New Directions for Higher Education*. 2003(122), 45-55.
- Hutchings, P. (2003). *The scholarship of teaching and learning in communication: A few words from the Carnegie academy*. *Communication Education*. 52(1), 57-59.
- Mizelli, A. P., Centini, B. (1985). *The electronic classroom*. Paper presented at the Annual Florida Instructional Computing Conference (5th, Orlando, FL, January 28-31, 1985).
- Ramsden, P. Moses, I. (1992). Associations between research and teaching in Australian higher education. *Higher Education*. 23(3), 273-295.
- Rice, R. E. (2002). Beyond scholarship reconsidered: Toward an enlarged vision of the scholarly work of faculty members. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. 90, 7-16.
- Shedd, J. (2003a). The history of the student credit hour. *New Directions for Higher Education*. 2003(122), 5-12.
- Shedd, J. (2003b). Policies and practices in enforcing the credit hour. *New Directions in Higher Education*. 2003(122), 13-30.
- Taylor, I. J. Rafferty. (2003). Integrating research and teaching in social work: Building a strong partnership. *Social Work Education*. 22(6), 589-602.
- Watkins, R., Schlosser, C. (2003). It's not about time: A fresh approach to educational equivalency. *Tech Trends*. 47(3), 35-40.
- Wellman, J. (2005). The student credit hour: Counting what counts. *Change*. 37(4), 18-23.
- Wellman, J. V., Ehrlich, T. (2003). The credit hour: The tie that binds. *New Directions for Higher Education*. 2003(122), 119-122.

\*\*Many of these articles came from *New Directions for Higher Education* vol. 2003, issue 122. This is an issue devoted to the credit model in higher education. While this is not an exhaustive list of the essays, it is representative of the entire issue theme and most significant to our questions.

In addition to our research on the history of the credit hour and seat time, UMF included similar (yet more dated) research in their report:

“As early as 1974, Vargas argues that the credit hour is an anachronism. The credit hour model indicates only the amount of exposure not the amount of learning. This traditional model rewards faculty who stay

in lecture mode thus providing a disincentive to faculty to be creative in their teaching. In addition, five assumptions served as the basis for the awarding of credit hours (Bradbury, 1982): Learners start at the same place in terms of their incoming knowledge and skills, learning results only from classes taken, learning can be assessed quantitatively by hours spent in class per week, learning can be assessed qualitatively by the grade given, and graduation is a function of credits earned. There is no evidence to suggest that these assumptions are true. Furthermore, Lewis (1961) suggested that formal class-hour requirements had already become flexible back in the 60s with the introduction of independent studies, credit by examination (CLEP, AP, etc.), and comprehensive examinations. Other credit hour variations include correspondence/TV/computer courses and credit for travel abroad (Grose, 1979). Both Vargas (1974) and Grose (1979) urged universities to focus on output or competency (i.e., learning to some criterion) rather than input (number of hours spent in the classroom). Munson (1990) indicated that a “course unit” system is more representative of amount learned rather than time spent.

The key to the credit hour question seems to be the balancing of responsiveness to students with academic integrity (James, 1999). James felt that such responsiveness would work best when faculty are not constrained by departments and academic “Territories.” He indicated that three things are needed to facilitate change in the structure of a university’s curriculum: job assurance and adequate training in new educational methodologies, rewards for faculty creativity and innovation, institutional support for academic experimentation even if some experiments fail. In addition, Bradbury (1982) identified four specific problems that need to be addressed in a change to innovation in course structuring: Defining full-time student status, defining faculty workload, defining academic credit, coming up with a new funding formula” ([UMF 2001 Proposal WebSite](#)).”

UMF also references a parallel study (Duby and Schartman, 1997) done at two Michigan universities which connected the credit hour load of first semester students to GPA, retention, time to degree and “negatively related to debt accrued.” Specifically, Duby and Schartman found that students taking 16 rather than 12 credit hours performed better; thus, “the researchers believed that the number of credit hours represented commitment to education” (UMF 2001 Proposal Website). In his report to the CMTF, PSU’s Scott Mantie corroborated that the average PSU student is taking less than 15 credit hours per semester (See link at end of document).

**Ultimately, while the research groups at our comparator schools (Keene, St. Joseph’s, UMF) recommended changing from a traditional ‘credit hour’ system to a “course unit” system, every school ultimately went with a four-credit system in order to insure equity within courses and majors, to standardize seat time, and to facilitate transferring credit for students both into and out of the university.**

**Comparator Institutions:** We did not do this research alone. UMF had completed substantial comparator research before switching to 4-credits, which was influential for our decision as well. UMF talked with Academic officers (present and former) from 13 institutions, which were COPLAC, private, or other public schools and found several features common to nearly all:

- 1) Faculty and student workloads motivated the change.
- 2) Institutions who had changed to a four-credit model would never return to a three-credit model.
- 3) Time was needed to implement the change ranging from one to three years.
- 4) No official assessments of the impact of change had been done.



5) No research data regarding differential effectiveness was available.

**Models:** UMF found a wide variety of models in their research, although no two two schools had exactly the same model. Some options are these:

- 1) Mix of 3 and 4-credit courses (Fort Lewis, Randolph Macon)
- 2) Each department decides on how to count courses (Fort Lewis)
- 3) Flat rate tuition an important aspect of the change (Ohio Northern, Wagner, Fort Lewis, Univ. of Minnesota-Morris, New Century College, Susquehanna, Wartburg, Elon)
- 4) Course credit system (Wartburg, Wagner, New Century College [an odd mix of course credits and regular credits])
- 5) Credits not tied to contact time (UM-Morris, Colby); some institutions are very tied to contact time (Fort Lewis, Elon), and others seem to have a more fluid relationship (New Century, Randolph Macon).

In addition, PSU's Mary Campbell identified the following institutions using a 4-credit model:

- Boston University
- Bucknell University
- Clark University
- Drew University
- Keene State College
- New York University
- Susquehanna University
- Tufts University
- University of New Hampshire
- University of the Redlands
- University of Southern California
- University of Tampa

Members of the PSU Task Force visited three regional colleges and universities that had recently made the shift to four credits in order to gather additional anecdotal, experiential, and assessment research (DVD recordings of these visits are available on reserve at the library).

### **Summary of Visit to Keene State College**

**Date of Visit: January 15, 2008**

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, Ann McClellan, John Kulig and Phil Lonergan of the Credit Model Task Force visited Keene to learn more about their experience moving to a 4 credit model. This is an overview of Keene's

experience based on conversations with VPAA Emile (Mel) Netzhammer and faculty member Gregory Knouff (Chair of History) and materials they provided us (See PDF attachment). Keene undertook a study of the switch to a 4 credit model upon the suggestion of their administration in 2004. A four credit model was approved by the faculty in 2005, and after a two year implementation plan the curriculum was changed in the spring of 2007.

This is an overview of Keene's 4 credit model:

- While no one issue precipitated the shift from a 3 credit to a 4 credit model, nearly everyone believed the main benefit was the opportunity for students and faculty to focus on fewer topics. In their model, students were expected to enroll in 4 classes, and faculty teach three<sup>1</sup> per semester.
- Their model assumes that the switch to 4 credits entails more than just an increase in in-class time and more than a simple increase in coverage. They expected the revised classes to be qualitatively more rigorous as well. They increased in-class time by 50%, rather than the 33% expected if in-class time increased proportionately with the increase in credits. Some details of their implemented model are as follows.
  - Most classes meet only twice a week (M and W, or, T and R), for 110 minutes each (220 minutes per class per week)<sup>2</sup>.
  - Very few classes meet on Friday
  - The few remaining M W F classes meet for 75 minutes each time (225 minutes per class per week)
  - Some classes meet once per week

The benefits and difficulties of the switch, as explained to us were as follows

- Benefits
  - The faculty was invigorated by the change. One faculty member, who had applied for early retirement, withdrew his application.
  - Parents liked the reduced number of classes and emphasis on depth.<sup>3</sup>
  - Enrollments rose right after the curriculum was advertised (their target was 1125, and they ended up with 1301).

---

<sup>1</sup> Keene's union contract stipulates no more than two preparations, though they can choose to do more if they chose.

<sup>2</sup> Note that even the advocates of the 4 credit model on the PSU Task Force are not advocating such a drastic and disproportionate increase in in-class time.

<sup>3</sup> Keene also changed their Gen Ed program recently

- Retention between the spring and fall semesters was 81% (the usual rate is 75%).
- The yield of admitted students has increased.
- It is reported that recruiting faculty is easier.
- The number of students per class has stayed the same.
- Accreditation has not been a problem.
- Even departments which had opposed the plan, such as education, made the switch successfully.
- Costs
  - The implementation process was a lot of work.
  - Class length has been difficult for some students and some faculty (Keene increased seat time 50%; they told us it would have been better increasing it proportionally, or 33%).
- Miscellaneous
  - Some students opted to take 5 classes this year, even though only 4 is expected, which resulted in course cap issues, the number of sections/courses offered increasing, and unexpected increased short term costs.
- In an effort to make the transition easier, the administration committed to ‘student friendly’ policies that support transitioning students in their work to graduate on time.

### **Summary of Visit to St. Joseph’s College, Maine**

#### **Date of Visit: Friday, January 28, 2008**

On January 28, 2008, Ann McClellan, John Kulig and Dennis Machnik of the Credit Model Task Force visited St Joseph’s college in Maine to learn more about their experience moving to a 4 credit model. This is an overview of their experience based on conversations with Daniel Sheridan (VPAA during the transition to the 4 credit model), David Roussel, Registrar/Assistant to the VPAA, and two faculty members.

St. Joseph’s is a relatively small Catholic college just outside Portland, Maine, and has a balance of liberal arts & sciences programs (40%) and professional programs (60%). The SAT scores of the students are very close to average (a little over 1000 combined Verbal and Math).

St Joseph’s college undertook a study of the 4 credit model in October of 1998, and after approval by the faculty in the spring of 1999, implemented the plan in 2000.

#### Rationale for their change:

The VPAA and some faculty members were concerned about the faculty workload (12 credit hours, 4 classes), some describing their job as similar to that of a high school teacher. Some faculty also wanted more time to pursue scholarship. The administration also wanted to see more scholarship among the faculty. The administration also wanted to be able to deliver their programs with more economy. They

also believed that students of “average” ability could “wrap their head” around 4 topics much easier than 5 courses.

The transition and a few details:

- Each department was asked to sketch out what their program would look like under a 4 credit plan, and the General Education program was slightly revised.
- In the 4 credit system, their General Education program consists of 13 classes for a total of 58 credit hours (the Foreign Language requirement consists of two, three credit classes, all others are 4 credit).
- Majors were permitted up to 11 required classes.
- During the transition period, students were permitted up to 20 credits without overload fees. Currently it is 19 credits.
- Departments did very little “repackaging” of courses (combining content from one course into another), as a few classes dropped down to 2 credits with most others increased to 4.
- Their class schedule has MWF classes meet for 65 minutes each ( $65*3 = 195$  minutes) and their MW and TR classes meet for 105 minutes each ( $105*2 = 210$ ). A majority of their classes meet only twice a week.
- It takes 128 credits to graduate (32 classes if all are 4 credit)

The benefits as reported to us:

- Faculty scholarship has increased (the administration initiated a bonus system that boosts base salary for publications. As to whether it was the increased scholarship was due to reduction in classes or the bonuses, it was reported to us that these two changes were initiated at about the same time, and they made the switch to 4 credits to allow the faculty to do more scholarship).
- The number of students being taught by an instructor is lower.
- Time to graduation did not increase
- The graduation rate increased, first year retention increased to 80%, and they found it easier to recruit students.
- Parents were pleased with the increased focus permitted by only 4 classes a semester
- There is no talk amongst the faculty about returning to a 3 credit model
- The former VPAA ended the meeting by claiming that there are several ways to get faculty teaching load down to 3 courses, and this was the easiest and least expensive way to do it.

There were no drawbacks to the 4 credit model, as reported to us.

Aside: The people at St. Joseph’s college did not mention a difficult transition (as was the case at Keene). Two possibilities: St. Joseph’s had its departments sketch out curriculum changes as part of the process of studying the plan. Also, St. Joseph’s seems to have a simpler curriculum.

## **Summary of University of Maine, Farmington (UMF)**

**Date of visit: Friday, February 8, 2008**

Attended: Phil Lonergan, Ann McClellan, Annette Holba

DVD of discussion will be available later next week after we receive it from UMF (at Library)

Department/Faculty representation from UMF: Natural Science, Biology, Early Childhood Education, English, Political Science, Special Education, Math/Computer Science, Music, Biology, Provost/Anthropology.

Conversation to change from a 3 credit system to a four credit system began in 1995. Faculty went to the Provost in 2000 with their discussion. Reasons:

- Students seemed “scattered” with taking 5 courses each semester
- Faculty were “scattered” teaching 4 courses each semester
- Faculty felt they had to water down courses so students could succeed
- Concerns over quality of education
- Faculty felt students and faculty were engaging “fragmented lives”
- Faculty desired to reduce fragmentation
- Studies show that there are advantages/benefits to student and faculty in a 4 credit system (referred to research obtained through the National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE] \*Please note that UMF was included in NSSE 2006 annual report on Engaged Learning: Fostering Success for All Students)

Issues since implementation:

- General Education Program and Electives impacted by switch minimally
- Teacher certification programs presented challenges because of the state’s course mandated (rather than standards-based) curriculum, but they are working through them
- Increased contact minutes from 150 to 180-200 (range offers open discretion to faculty)
- Increased degree credits from 120 before implementation to 128 across all disciplines after implementation
- Transfers from community colleges – accommodates/adjusts per course – this creates flexibility in elective courses
- Required curriculum revision across campus
- Flexibility and innovation in scheduling courses (fewer conflicting class periods)
- Sciences made only few adjustments to course contact time and schedule
- Education Department developed innovative schedule blocks
- Classes reconceptualized pedagogically

- Initially Math Department felt advantages of the switch were vague and untestable but since implementation there are no concerns (they now support the change to 4 credits)
- No difference to students except night courses run later (6:15pm-9:45pm)
- They added their own constraints by adding a common time

#### Benefits:

1. Culture change – students stay on campus on weekends due to more active involvement with campus life. Feels like a residential campus instead of a commuter campus.
2. Students more focused and calm (not scattered and fragmented as in the 3 credit model)
3. Faculty first year of transition was busy – attention to advising
4. Benefits to faculty research as more undergraduates become involved
5. Administrative support – 10 new faculty lines

#### Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Why the proposal to switch to four credits? Why would this be a good move for the university?*

The investigation into a four-credit system initially arose from faculty discussions about academic quality and providing a stronger academic experience for students. A previous PSU working group found that at other institutions concerns about student and faculty workload drove the switch to four credits. The assumption of the Credit Model Task Force is that a move to a four-credit system would increase academic standards and intellectual rigor by providing us an opportunity to rethink the entire curriculum and raise our expectations for student learning and intellectual engagement. We determined the following reasons, institutionally, for recommending this change:

A) As a regional comprehensive university, the shift to a primarily four-credit system will allow us to better achieve our institutional mission to “prepare well-educated graduates, offer ongoing opportunities for graduate education and professional development and extend to communities partnership opportunities for cultural enrichment and economic development” (PSU mission). The increased focus as well as seat time will provide students with the time and attention needed to better learn and retain information learned in and out of the classroom. Because they will be taking four classes (rather than five or six), students will have more time and interest in engaging in professional internships, service learning projects, and field research activities.

B) Central to our mission as a university is service to the community. A shift to a four credit model will allow us to further develop and extend our reach into the community across many levels. With increased focus within courses faculty will have greater flexibility to involve students in research, community outreach, volunteerism, community service, internships and field experiences.

C) In addition to creating ways to provide a stronger and more rigorous academic experience, the switch to four credits may improve retention and may provide students with a clearer path to graduation by requiring fewer courses of them. A move to a four-credit system would also align PSU with the USNH system, make us more competitive as a quality choice for students in New Hampshire, and may help us better fulfill our regional comprehensive university identity. Finally, a switch to four credits and a 4/4

workload for students would more closely match the PSU experience with the experience students find at nationally-ranked private liberal arts colleges.

D) A shift to a four credit system will contribute to our university's mission to foster a climate of academic excellence and high quality. No one denies the significant work that went into the recent General Education revision, and many critics of the four-credit model note that we have not had time to assess the effectiveness of the program. Rather than a negative, however, this is a positive reason why moving to four credits at this time is so beneficial. Much of the hard work in revising the curriculum has already been done; a shift to four credits will allow the faculty to further refine and examine the General Education curriculum as well as introduce revised major curricula across the institution. While admitting that the change required a lot of work, faculty members at the institutions visited felt invigorated by the change and revision of curriculum.

E) The change to a primarily four-credit system will allow us to better achieve our goal of student success. While many factors influence retention and time to degree, a primarily four-credit system allows us the opportunity to improve student retention and reduce students' time to degree. Reducing students' time to degree completion is one way to decrease student indebtedness. **At Keene, retention and enrollment rates increased following the change to a four-credit system.** Additionally, a four-credit system would allow us to attract nontraditional students balancing the demands of school with family and work.

F) Moving to a primarily four-credit model would make us not only a more attractive university for students and parents (as found at comparator institutions), but also for faculty. UMF reported they became the 'first choice' for new faculty recruits and that the quality of their new faculty dramatically increased within the first year of the new curriculum. This would enhance our abilities to compete with other institutions, attracting and retaining faculty who are experts in their field, committed to student success and the mission of the university.

G) PSU institutional researcher Scott Mantie raised several significant issues in regard to the connections between scheduling and campus 'culture.' For example, Tuesday/Thursday and Monday/ Wednesday formats may mean that on Friday, no classes are scheduled (e.g., Keene). Without significant weekend programming, students may see this as an opportunity to regularly leave campus. Of course, the so-called "open" days could be rotated or be midweek in order to alleviate current concerns about enrollment and attendance in Friday classes. Conversely, if well planned, "open" days could be time where the field, lab or outdoor experience portions of class are applied. UMF actually found their campus culture enriched by the four-credit model because students used the library more; they were engaged in outside-of-class activities with faculty like conferences, concerts, museum trips, etc.; and students had more time and interest in planning and developing on campus activities—both curricular and extra-curricular.

Mantie also reported that four-credit scheduling may provide access to academically pragmatic students (i.e. non-traditional, working/commuting) who must organize their schedules around coming to campus as infrequently as possible because of work/life obligations. Also, four-credit hour scheduling may permit larger blocks of time made available for student groups to meet.

H) Lastly a shift to a predominately four credit system will allow us to maximize and use most efficiently the physical and technological resources that we currently have. If managed properly, a four credit system could free up classroom space which under the current system is in short supply. Faculty and departments would have the flexibility to increase or develop online components or learning modules for

courses instead of increasing seat time. This not only may enhance learning opportunities, but provide a flexible course delivery medium for students and faculty.

2. *How about our students? How will the four-credit switch benefit them?*

The primary gain for students would come from a stronger academic experience and increased expectations. Reducing student course load while increasing academic rigor in each course would allow students to study topics in depth, giving them an opportunity to better focus their academic energies. Students will take fewer courses under a four-credit model; however, this does not necessarily mean less breadth or content. Faculty will be encouraged to re-conceptualize their courses to include more content, to bridge between two previously existing courses within one new course, and/or to provide more depth on a specific topic. As experts in their fields, faculty will determine the best way to deliver a quality education to their majors. It is impossible to learn everything, four-credit proponents argue. But it is possible for students to get a quality education, including solid grounding in a discipline, so that they themselves develop the skills and intellectual curiosity they need to pursue knowledge on their own. A four-credit curriculum, under which full-time students would have only four subjects to concentrate on at one time, would allow students the learning space to get the benefits of that education. Each course would have greater impact from having less competition for the students' attention, and for having more contact time and homework time for course material to sink in. Greater depth in each course, it is argued, would help students make the transition from passive, superficial acceptance of course material to active, creative connection making. Moreover, with added time to spend in each course on developing strengths in writing, public presentation, research, and technology, students would enter the workforce or graduate school better prepared for the diverse and changing demands of the 21st century economy. The increased focus should lead to a more satisfying experience for students while improving on the skills current students gain from a PSU education. Lastly, this increased focus should lead to more successful time to degree and less debt for our students (See Scott Mantie's report to the CMTF in the "Comparators" resource list at the end of this document).

3. *This can't be all good for students. Are there any drawbacks for them?*

Since students would take thirty-two rather than forty courses under the four-credit model, they would have fewer opportunities to explore different disciplines or add curricular options like minors, second majors, coaching certificates, etc. It is important to note, however, that even though, the total number of elective courses for each student would be reduced, the *proportion* of electives to required courses would not. In programs with majors in the 36-52 hour range, this would not be a significant problem, because students would still have as many as ten or eleven elective courses beyond general education. In other programs, we might try to create more flexibility for students by limiting the size of majors and by allowing students the opportunity to create options for themselves within the general education program. We may want to consider limiting the size of majors in part to respond to this concern.

4. *OK, so the switch to four credits might strengthen academic quality at PSU. But what's in it for me as a faculty member?*

A) The first benefit that faculty should notice is the reduced course load (3/3 vs. 4/4). Even for FT faculty who teach 1- and 2-credit courses, under the 4-credit model, the number of unique courses any FT faculty would deliver per semester would be reduced. While the implementation would increase work for faculty during the implementation process, the overall benefit will be a reduction in number of courses per semester per FT faculty once the 4-credit model is fully implemented.



This shift does not imply a reduced workload, however. Overall, the number of student credit hours generated per faculty member should remain approximately the same. The CMTF recommends that the administration address the issue of workload separately from the credit model question.

- B) Faculty members will be able to work more intensively with fewer students to generate the same number of credit hours (See tables on p. 20). The reduction in course load combined with increasing academic expectation will hopefully create a more satisfying and balanced workload for faculty.
- C) The reduction in course load will allow for many additional benefits, similar to the benefits to the university. An increased focus on academic rigor and standards combined with fewer classes will create increased opportunity to work one-on-one with students (collaborative research, service learning) outside of the classroom as well as increased time for one-on-one feedback (through more elaborate comments on papers, assignments, homework, office hours, etc.).
- D) The reduction in course load will allow for better advising of students in different ways. While the initial shift will be demanding in terms of advising since faculty will need to create individualized plans for students in the transition period, ultimately the shift may ease advising and scheduling constraints overall. First, faculty may have more time and energy to devote to advising rather than just course scheduling once a semester. Second, restructuring of programs of study required with adoption of a 4-credit model may simplify advising through fewer courses required for graduation. Third, simplification of programs may allow faculty to utilize a developmental advising model rather than a scheduling task model.
- E) The switch to a four-credit system will also allow faculty to review and rethink their current curriculum within their respective departments. For departments who recently totally redesigned their curriculum for the new Gen Ed, a new credit model should be able to be adopted without dramatically shifting underlying philosophies.
- F) Focusing on three rather than four courses during the semester should allow faculty to better focus their academic energy (that is, you will have fewer things to think about in the shower) and create opportunities for increased student interaction, increased ability to innovate in classroom, and increased scholarship and research.
- G) Reduction in unique course preps and number of students per faculty member per semester under a 4-credit model will support intra-institutional faculty service. A 4-credit model may allow for the inclusion of service-learning activities within courses thereby supporting the institutional commitment to local and regional community service by faculty and students. Block scheduling and fewer courses may allow for more flexibility in scheduling committee meetings and organizing university service (i.e., fewer 7am or 5pm meetings).
- H) A 4-credit model will encourage greater depth within a program of study and support engaging students in the construction of knowledge through undergraduate student scholarship. Faculty scholarship, for FT faculty pursuing externally or internally funded research/scholarship/creative endeavors, will be supported at .33 FTE (one(1) 4-credit course) in contrast to .25 FTE (one(1) 3-credit course) for research/scholarship/creative endeavors.
- I) While we in no way deny the creativity and excellence currently occurring in PSU classrooms, greater breadth within a course may encourage creativity and collaboration within departments and across disciplines. Implementation will require cooperation within and across departments to structure learning environments that value open and regular communications that are the foundation

of trust, shared goals, and professional norms among teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members.

5. *Wouldn't this mean larger intro and gen ed courses?*

Possibly, but not by a significant number. The problem of having either too many introductory courses, or courses that are significantly larger, will likely only occur with courses that service other majors or the general education program. If the demand for a course is not going to decrease under a four-credit model, then the same number of students will need the course. This means that the number of sections of a particular course will stay the same, even as the total courses taught by that department decreases, or if fewer sections are taught, each section must be larger. The only way to avoid this is through a change in the demand for these service courses. General Education requirements could change, either to a matrices system where upper level courses in General Education are emphasized, or simply in a change in the distribution requirement that would lower demand for introductory courses. Finally, in cases where there is no alternative but to keep the same demand for a course as present, there will need to be an effort to create positions or adjunct possibilities in order to assure that these demands do not adversely affect program offerings or a professor's ability to teach a variety of upper level courses. Faculty will be asked to develop curriculum outlines that will enable us to anticipate and address problems in this area.

**Keene State College found they did not need to increase class sizes in order to move to a four-credit system.** Kirsti Sandy, a professor in the KSC English Department, said in an email: "We did not have to increase our cap for any course, as we had open seats at all levels each year."

In a previous review of the three- vs. four-credit models, PSU's Ed Wixom developed the following paradigm:

- Ø MYTH: Changing to a 4-Credit System (4CR) means that class size would need to increase.
- Ø FACT: Changing to a 4CR would *not* increase class size.

3CR/Current System:

Professor Art Wood's Schedule:

Number of Students per Class	Total Credits per Class
25	75
25	75
25	75
25	75
100 Total Students	300 Total Credits Taught

*Remember, 100 students need 1500 credits per semester. 1500 credits/75 credits per class=20 classes per semester. That's 5 full-time faculty members teaching four classes each.*

4CR:

Professor Art Wood's Schedule:

Number of Students per Class	Total Credits per Class
25	100
25	100
25	100
75 Total Students	300 Total Credits Taught

*Remember, 100 students need 1500 credits per semester. 1500 credits/100 credits per class=15 classes per semester. That's 5 full-time faculty members teaching three classes each. Thus, the SAME NUMBER of students are served (they receive the same number of credits) under the 4CR as the 3CR.*

In another model, it appears as though we will need to increase class sizes, but perhaps only minimally. For instance:

Example A: 20 Students

3 Credits	4 Credits
20 Students per class	20 students per class
5 Classes Each	
100 Seats Needed	80 Seats Needed
Each Faculty Member = 80 Seats	Each Faculty Member = 60 Seats
Need: 1 Faculty + 1 Adjunct to meet need	Need: 1 Faculty + 1 Adjunct

Example B: 1000 Students

3 credits	4 Credits
5 Classes each	4 Classes Each
5000 Seats Needed	4000 Seats
Each Faculty = 80 Seats	Each Faculty: 60 Seats
Need: 62 Faculty + 2 Adjuncts	Need: 66 Faculty + 2 Adjuncts

Example C: 4000 Students

3 Credits	4 Credits
5 Classes Each	4 Classes Each
20,000 Seats Needed	16,000 Seats Needed
Each Faculty = 80 Seats	Each Faculty = 60 Seats
Need: 250 Faculty	Need: 266 Faculty + 2 Adjuncts

However, raising the cap by a very small number (i.e., 2), makes a significant difference. If we compare our current model at 20 students per semester at three credit per course with 22 students per semester at four credits per course, we find the following:

Example D: 4000 Students

3 Credits	4 Credits
5 Classes Each	4 Classes Each
20,000 Seats	16,000 Seats
Each Faculty: 80 Seats	Each Faculty: 66 Seats
Need: 250 Faculty	Need: 242 Faculty + 1 Adjunct + 6 extra seats

Moving from 80 students per semester to 66 reveals a significant impact in the number of students taught, thus affecting faculty workload. Not all PSU classes average 20 students per course; some are much higher and some are lower, thus allowing for an evening out of enrollment numbers. It is possible that class sizes will not have to increase at all. There are some courses, like Composition, which most likely will require more sections, thus more faculty. The Credit Model Task Force recommends the administration and implementation team commit to hiring new tenure-track faculty to meet these needs, in addition to those five new positions Provost Bernier has already committed to in the coming years.

6. *What would it mean for PSU to move to a four-credit curriculum? How would our approach to teaching and learning change under the new system?*

Our first assumption is that our aim in moving to a four-credit system would be to **increase academic standards and intellectual rigor** by focusing student work each semester on four subjects instead of five. This is an opportunity to raise our expectations for student learning and intellectual engagement. Because students would be taking fewer courses, the new system would tend to favor depth over breadth, requiring that students do more intensive work in fewer areas each semester. The same calculation would apply to each major program: most students would take fewer courses in the major, but the expectation would be that these courses would be more substantial and more demanding than the courses we currently offer under the three-credit system. In some programs, the new system might require a reconfiguration of existing courses, with the same material being presented in larger, more sustained course-blocs. In others, faculty might make a decision to cover fewer areas but to cover them in a more detailed and rigorous fashion, on the assumption that in-depth application of disciplinary approaches and methodologies is a more pressing pedagogical goal than broad coverage. In either case, individual courses would need to change and grow to meet their new role in the major. In relation both to the major program and to the student’s work for the semester, then, individual courses would have to meet a substantially higher burden of expectations for student learning under a four-credit system.

Clearly, this burden cannot be met by an increase in class time alone—although the proposed new policy on class meeting time would provide for such an increase. Far more important, in our view, is the assumption that **the credit-hour increase from three to four should require a proportional increase in faculty expectations regarding student work**. Thus, as a rule of thumb, a four-credit course should require 33% more student work outside the classroom than a three-credit course. In most cases, the implications of this additional expectation regarding student work outside of class would require thorough revision of current three-credit courses rather than the addition of a few small requirements.

In designing four-credit courses, faculty will want to ask themselves what goals they have for student learning and growth in these courses and across the program and how the opportunity for additional

student work in and out of class might further those goals. To help in this process, we offer three possible conceptual models for four-credit courses.

**Model 1: Combination of Theory and Practice.** Currently, faculty in foreign languages, the natural sciences, and mathematics offer four-credit courses in which students apply theoretical knowledge in a practical setting—the language resource center and the science laboratory, respectively. Along these same lines, many education courses currently include field work in the public schools. On the model of these disciplines, faculty might design discipline-appropriate modules for some courses, in which students would have the opportunity to put theoretical or abstract knowledge into practice. Such modules might include, for example, laboratory work in economics or psychology, studio work in the visual and performing arts, archaeological or sociological field work, service learning, or intensive hands-on research projects.

**Model 2: Intensive Work on General Education Skills and Intellectual Abilities.** Our general education program defines the development of student abilities in writing, research, presentation and technology as crucial features of a PSU education. The four-credit model might allow faculty to concentrate more explicitly on developing these abilities in appropriate disciplinary contexts. In developing four-credit courses, faculty might (for example): require more intensive writing, with greater use of re-writes and conferences to enable genuine growth in writing; devote class time to multiple public presentations and the development of presentation abilities; incorporate creative, original research projects, with support from the instructor at various stages; or improve student learning about technologies ranging from data manipulation programs to presentation software.

Within this model, student writing has a special place, since research has consistently shown that frequent “low-stakes” writing assignments enable cognitive development and improve intellectual understanding of content. The most widely-used writing-to-learn activities include assignments which allow students to record, explore, reflect, test informally, relate course materials to personal frames, and discover what they do or don’t understand. Not surprisingly, these kinds of assignments also lead indirectly to improvements in polished (“high-stakes”) writing. Thus the incorporation of additional writing assignments in our courses would both help students to grow as writers *and* improve their grasp of course materials. The four-credit model offers us an unusual opportunity to incorporate a wide range of writing assignments in our courses, and, indeed, to make writing-in-the disciplines activities a distinctive part of undergraduate education at PSU.

**Model 3: Expanding Course Content.** Finally, in some cases, our four-credit courses might define their departure from the three-credit model primarily by virtue of their expanded content—that is, by virtue of the amount and complexity of the material they ask students to engage with. For example, a four-credit course might offer opportunities for in-depth knowledge and understanding of its subject by incorporating unusually long (or unusually complex and demanding) reading assignments, by covering a wide range of topics and concepts, by treating multiple examples, or by consistently making detailed and nuanced conceptual distinctions. In some programs, revised courses might incorporate material from other, dropped courses; in others, courses might expand their content to do justice to topics that were only superficially treated under the three-credit model.

These models are abstractions, and they obviously do not exhaust the possibilities for developing four-credit courses. Faculty may choose, in developing new and revised four-credit courses, to combine features of all three models or to structure courses in a completely different way. Nevertheless, we offer these models as examples of the structures faculty might use as they imagine their new courses *and* of the kind of criteria the Curriculum Committee might use in evaluating course proposals under the new

system. In each case, we should be asking, “How does this new course break with the standard three-credit model? In what ways does it raise expectations for students? How does it demonstrate increased academic standards and intellectual rigor?”

7. *How would this affect the classroom crunch?*

As long as the percentage reduction in slots available in a new schedule grid (which would have longer periods) is not greater than the percentage reduction of course sections offered (we would offer fewer sections under this model), there should be no impact on the availability of classrooms. The Credit Model Task Force has prepared a sample schedule grid (see appendix at end of document) that demonstrates that it would easily be possible to offer an adequate number of slots. The earliest possible implementation date for a four-credit curriculum would be Fall, 2009

8. *What will the policy be on class meeting time?*

The Task Force recommends a standard of 180-200 minutes per week in class. This is based on research from other institutions; a majority of four-credit institutions have class meeting times ranging from 150 to 180 minutes, while a few meet 200 minutes or more each week. The task force engaged in cross-disciplinary discussions on this issue, and 200 minutes per week emerged as the best alternative. However, the task force recognizes that different disciplines or courses have different needs. Some disciplines or courses emphasize out of the classroom activity, time for individual research, and conferencing more than others; some require as much time in the classroom as possible. If faculty believe they need to meet for more than 180 minutes for a particular course, that will be possible, either through a 200 minute class meeting time schedule, or through the use of labs. In fact, many departments do this currently. For example, the Art department has been teaching two-hour three-credit courses for years and is now moving to three-hour four-credit courses in 2008-9. Also, some current four-credit Physics classes meet for 225 to 300 minutes per week. The issue under debate is credit hours, not necessarily contact hours, and we trust our colleagues to determine the most appropriate periods to meet their needs within the standardized schedule blocks provided.

9. *Is it four credits or nothing? What about 1-, 2-, 3-, and 5-credit courses?*

In order to maintain the integrity of the four-credit model for both students (four courses per semester) and faculty (three courses per semester), we should try to avoid five-credit and three-credit courses. However, academic programs might want to explore creative ways to link separate two-credit courses; this would work best if two half-semester experiences could be linked. Academic credit would still be available for band, chorus, etc., possibly as a one- or two-credit option.

10. *How will switching to four credits impact our education majors/teacher certification requirements or other departments subject to external accreditation bodies?*

Jane Wellman’s article, “Accreditation and the Credit Hour” analyzes three types of accrediting bodies and their input on credit hours: regional, national, and specialized. She concludes that, for the most part, regional agencies “leave it to the institution and specifically to the faculty of the institutions to determine the appropriate basis for the awarding of credit” (Wellman 66). National agencies mention more specific measures in determining credit measurement, and, in fact, “time measures are most common” (Wellman 66). The specialized accrediting agencies “make the least mention of credit units” (67). What was most interesting about Wellman’s conclusions, however, was the following statement: “In evaluating what this analysis means in terms of the project’s research hypotheses, a particular interest was to understand if external oversight of the credit hour by accrediting agencies either provides a layer of external validation

to the credit-hour system or becomes a barrier to academic reform. The answer is a qualified no” (Wellman 67). Instead, Wellman emphasizes that the majority of the agencies are focusing on ‘learning outcomes’ rather than ‘time-based measures’ in their analysis (67).

The Task Force in no way denies that this transition will be more difficult for some departments than others; however, certification requirements are not an obstacle to moving to a four-credit system. Certification requirements are changing and the curriculum, both in education and in the arts and sciences, will be changing to reflect the new certification requirements regardless of whether or not a four-credit system is adopted at PSU. In education, standards-based and performance-based systems encourage exactly the kind of curricular thinking and creativity this transition proposes. Rather than be limited by specific course requirements, faculty can design courses and curricula that best meet how they define an educated person in their field. Thus, this may be an opportune time to rethink the entire curriculum in the way that a switch to a four-credit system will require. As we think about how we might revise our courses we must keep in mind how the revised courses will enable our students to meet new state and other external requirements.

11. *Will students have to pay more for the same education? And how will this impact university revenue?*

As of right now, the Task Force has no intention of changing the graduation requirement from 120 hours, but this could be something the Implementation Team considers, at the faculty’s request. Generally across higher education 120 credit hours is the minimum for graduation; many institutions require 128; some require as much as 136. Since PSU students pay a flat rate for tuition (i.e., the same price for 12-17 credit hours), the price of tuition should not increase because of the four-credit shift. However, tuition rates are subject to modification annually, and they depend on numerous factors that fall outside the four-credit debate. It is impossible to conclude how a four-credit system would affect overall institutional revenue. By itself, this is not the definitive variable. Tuition rates and the USNH allocation formula are the most important variables. Arguably if a four-credit system were to increase our distinctiveness in ways that are consistent with our mission and contribute to improvements in institutional quality (e.g., as measured by student retention and graduation rates), then PSU would benefit financially and qualitatively.

12. *How would we handle transfer students?*

All institutions, including PSU, regularly negotiate the difference between three- and four-credit courses when reviewing transfer applications, so this shouldn’t be a problem. When consulted, Mary Campbell confirmed that “Students coming to our three-credit institution with four-credit courses are not disadvantaged.” Faculty would continue to make judgments about how courses from other institutions map onto our curriculum. In general, students transferring in three-credit courses in areas which match our four-credit requirements would be given credit for meeting the *requirement* but would only receive three credits toward graduation. (This currently happens already with students who transfer in a three-credit course that meets a four-credit course in our curriculum). Transfer students would still have to meet all credit hour requirements for the major and for graduation; as a result, they would in some cases have additional elective courses in the major or in their program as a whole. **All three registrars from KSC, UMF, and St. Joseph’s, including PSU’s Mary Campbell, stated transferring credits from a three-credit to four-credit curriculum or vice versa was not particularly problematic.** In fact, UMF stated that transferring into a four-credit institution actually increases the likelihood of students having the freedom to take additional electives, thus alleviating any perceived loss of breadth in the curriculum.

13. *What about students who transfer away from PSU to a school with three-credit courses?*

Just as students transferring into PSU might gain some elective flexibility, students transferring away from PSU to a three-credit institution might *lose* some elective flexibility, since four-credit courses taken at PSU would likely only satisfy a three-credit requirement at the new school. However, this is not likely to create serious problems; we currently deal with students transferring to PSU from four-credit institutions all the time, and they adapt to our curriculum without difficulty (Mary Campbell cited ENGL 401 First-year Writing from UNH satisfies our composition requirement as an example).

14. *How would this change affect PSU students who start out under a three-credit system but finish under the four-credit system?*

Most of our comparators stated converting students' remaining requirements under the three-credit curriculum into four-credit equivalents as tiring and time consuming, but not impossible. Advisors will need to meet with students to design individualized graduation plans mapping out under the new curriculum. While this will be initially demanding, once departments and the General Education Committee establish these guidelines and programs for transition students, it will become easier to apply these plans to remaining students. St. Joseph's College and UMF recently went through the switch to four credits and both provide excellent resources for PSU when undergoing this task.

15. *This sounds like a whole pile of work. Will there be any resources for faculty development?*

Yes. The Four-Credit Task Force has discussed this issue with Provost Bernier, who has committed to support equal to that provided for the general education transition. While it was not possible for them to commit to specific dollar amounts, they recognize the need to support course development grants, faculty workshops, departmental retreats, compensated summer work, etc. The administration recognizes a need to prioritize discretionary funds toward this effort. In addition, they will aggressively seek support from the USNH System (as we link our curriculum reform efforts to their interest in the implementation of the Strategic Plan) and from foundations. Potential grant proposals are also possible.

16. *I've heard that the administration is just waiting for the faculty to rubber stamp the 4-credit system, so isn't this a done deal?*

This is not a done deal. If faculty do not approve moving to a four-credit system, it will not happen. We have been assured that the administration knows it cannot engage in major curricular change without faculty approval. What they ask is that we do our best to fairly and fully consider the proposal and not dismiss it out of hand due to a desire to simply maintain the status quo.

For its part, the Credit Model Task Force hopes that all faculty take time and think of what the four-credit model might mean for PSU students and faculty, discuss it with colleagues, keep an open mind about controversial issues (class meeting time, etc.), and choose what is best for the future of PSU. Toward that end, we have designed a process which is intended to engage faculty in a number of discussions and activities throughout the next month to insure that the April 2008 proposal reflects what faculty believe is the best possible curriculum model for PSU. If the faculty vote does not support the four-credit proposal, it will not be implemented. Thus the faculty should feel empowered both in the process of considering this proposal and in choosing whether or not to implement it.



## Conclusion

### Relevant Links and Additional Research

#### History of Credit Models

<a href="#">The History of the Student Credit Hour</a> by Jessica M. Shedd	<a href="http://virtual.parkland.edu/todtreat/presentations/cetl03/shedd2003%20history%20of%20credit%20hour.pdf">http://virtual.parkland.edu/todtreat/presentations/cetl03/shedd2003%20history%20of%20credit%20hour.pdf</a>
<a href="#">Brief History of American Academic Credit System: A Recipe for Incoherence in Student Learning</a> by John Harris	<a href="http://www.samford.edu/groups/quality/BriefHistoryofAmericanAcademicCreditSystem.pdf">http://www.samford.edu/groups/quality/BriefHistoryofAmericanAcademicCreditSystem.pdf</a>

#### Philosophy and Pedagogy of Credit Models

<a href="#">The Student Credit Hour</a> by Jane V. Wellman	<i>Change</i> , Jul/Aug2005, Vol. 37 Issue 4, p18-23, 6p, 3c; (AN 17540325)
<a href="#">Reexamining the Sacrosanct Credit Hour</a> by Jane V. Wellman & Thomas Ehrlich	<a href="http://chronicle.com/weekly/v50/i05/05b01601.htm">http://chronicle.com/weekly/v50/i05/05b01601.htm</a>
<a href="#">The Credit Hour as a Potential Barrier to Innovation: Lessons from Innovation Institutions</a> by Thomas Ehrlich.	<b>New Directions for Higher Education, n122 p31-43 Sum 2003.</b>
<a href="#">The Credit Committee Report, University of Richmond</a> , 2006.	<a href="http://provost.richmond.edu/committees/credit_report2.pdf">http://provost.richmond.edu/committees/credit_report2.pdf</a>
<a href="#">Credit Hour Loads and College Onset and Subsequent Academic Performance: A Multi-Institutional Pilot Project</a> by James Duby and Laura Schartman.	<a href="http://www.eric.ed.gov/">http://www.eric.ed.gov/</a>

#### Seat Time

<a href="#">Performance, not seat time, focus of new NCTE standards</a>	<i>Reading Today</i> , Aug/Sep2000, Vol. 18 Issue 1, p14, 4/5p, 1bw; (AN 3464224)
<a href="#">Moving from seat time to mastery: One district's system</a> by Kevin Castner & Lorraine Costella	<i>Educational Leadership</i> , Sep93, Vol. 51 Issue 1, p45, 4p, 1 chart, 4bw; (AN 9311240406)

<p><a href="#">5 Dirty Little Secrets in Higher Education</a> by Laura Palmer Noone &amp; Craig Swenson (see Secret #5)</p>	<p><a href="http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0161.pdf">http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0161.pdf</a></p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

### Accreditation Issues

<p><a href="#">Accreditation and the Credit Hour</a> by Jane V. Wellman (see below for brief summary)</p>	<p>New Directions for Higher Education, Summer2003 Issue 122, p57, 13p; (AN 10467004)</p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

### Comparator Institutions

<p><a href="#">University of Maine 4-Credit Site</a></p>	<p>A great site describing the UMF conversion from 3- to 4-credits. See especially sections on <a href="#">defining the 4-credit course</a>, <a href="#">faculty debates</a>, <a href="#">letter from Theo Kalikow</a>, and curricular outlines by major. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.</p>
<p><a href="#">Keene State College English Department 4-Credit Proposal</a> (Word doc)</p>	<p>85-page proposal to change the English Department curriculum from 3- to 4-credit model (implemented in 2003): Thanks to KSC English Dep't Chair Mark Long for sharing this document.</p>
<p><a href="#">Keene State College Assessment</a></p>	<p>Document prepared by English Department after departmental implementation of 4-credit system: Thanks to KSC English Dep't Chair Mark Long for sharing this document.</p>
<p><a href="#">Comparisons: Some Four-Credit Schedules from Public and Private Colleges</a></p>	<p>From the UMaine Farmington site, a look at a number of schools and how they handle seat time and scheduling.</p>
<p><a href="#">PSU Comparators</a></p>	<p>A document prepared by Phil Lonergan for the CMWG: a brief look at credit models at our official comparator institutions.</p>
<p><a href="#">Three vs. Four Credit Hour Study</a></p>	<p>Scott Mantie, Associate Dean for Institutional Research &amp; Assessment, reported to the CMTF on time to degree and retention issues in November, 2007.</p>

## Connections with Technology-Related Issues

<a href="#">For Quality and Cost Effectiveness, Build a Hybrid Program</a> by Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti	Distance Education Report, 11/1/2004, Vol. 8 Issue 21, p1-7, 3p; (AN 14967144)
<a href="#">Teaching Time: Distance Education Versus Classroom Instruction</a> by Diane M. Bender, Jeanneane B. Wood, & Jon D. Vredevoord	American Journal of Distance Education, Jul2004, Vol. 18 Issue 2, p103-114, 12p, 5 charts; (AN 13713210)

## Other Relevant Links

<a href="#">The Carnegie Unit: What Is it?</a>	Carnegie Foundation site that explains the history of the unit and the foundation's current position.
<a href="#">Carnegie Units</a>	A provocative chart about the Carnegie Unit.
<a href="#">How the Student Credit Hour Shapes Higher Education: The Tie That Binds</a>	A useful book, available at Lamson Library. Read an excerpt <a href="#">here</a> .
<a href="#">Measuring the Credit Hour</a>	A blog entry by a Seton Hill University professor.
<a href="#">Faculty Workload: An Integrated Model</a>	A site from Arizona State University. See especially " <a href="#">The Integration of Faculty Responsibilities and Institutional Needs</a> " (Krahenbul) from this site.
<a href="#">Faculty Workload Studies: Perspectives, Needs, and Future Directions</a>	A 1998 survey by Katrina A. Meyer (George Washington U), from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.
<a href="#">Lives In The Balance: Compensation, Workloads And Program Implications</a>	2003 article by Donna Euban for the AAUP.
<a href="#">School Districts Can Now Offer Different Calendars</a>	NHPR Report: "New rules recently passed by the State Board of Education could open the door for districts to have year-round school, an extended school day, or even a shortened school week."
<a href="#">The University System</a>	An article by PSU professor Joe Monninger, written for the Valley News, regarding faculty workload and equity issues.

<a href="#">Report to the PSU English Department on 4-Credit Courses</a> by Robin Bowers	<a href="http://oz.plymouth.edu/~rderosa/Bowers.pdf">http://oz.plymouth.edu/~rderosa/Bowers.pdf</a>
<a href="#">Sample Scheduling Grids</a>	Two sample scheduling grids from the UMF website.

**Acknowledgments:**

The Credit Model Task Force would like to acknowledge the assistance of the many people who helped with this research and report, including:

**The 2006-7 PSU Credit Model Working Group**

Ann McClellan	Phil Lonergan
Anette Holba	Cynthia Vascak
Kylo-Patrick Hart	Robin DeRosa
Marcia Schmidt Blaine	Scott Mantie
Bob Egbert	Steve Kahl
Barb McCahon	Rebecca Noel
John Kulig	

**Thanks to all of the PSU Faculty who Participated in the 2006-7 Four-Credit Discussion**

Pat Cantor	Michelle Fistek
John Kulig	Terry Downs
John Krueckeberg	Bob Heiner
Duncan McDougall	Dennis Machnik
Kathleen Arecchi	Marcia Schmidt Blaine
Eric Hoffman	Joel Funk
Scott Coykendall	Cynthia Vascak
Annette Holba	Scott MantieSt
Ann McClellan	John Kulig
Robin DeRosa	Paul Fedorchak
Steve Kahl	

### **Additional PSU Administration and Faculty**

Sara Jayne Steen, President

Julie Bernier, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost

Scott Mantie, Associate Dean for Institutional Research & Assessment

Ann Thurston

Gale Beckwith

Alice O'Connor

### **Keene State University**

Emile Netzhammer, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost

Greg Knouff, Professor and History Department Chair

### **St. Joseph's College**

Dan Sheridan, former Dean and VPAA

David Roussel, Assistant to the VPAA

### **University of Maine-Farmington**

Allen Berger, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

Mary Schwanke, Professor of Biology

Christine Darrohn, Associate Professor of English

Paul Gies, Associate Professor of Mathematics

Karen Barrett, Associate Professor of Rehabilitation Services

Dan Buckley, Professor of Biology

Plus additional faculty members from Soc

## APPENDIX C

### Credit Model Task Force Minority Report

March, 2008

“In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. But in practice there is.”

--Yogi Berra

**Position Overview:** We are not in favor of PSU converting to a 4-credit curriculum. We are unconvinced by the arguments we have heard from those who favor the change. There seems to be a lack of hard evidence to support their claims. With regard to a number of the rational arguments that have been made, counterarguments in favor of the present model seem equally strong or stronger. The evidence is not compelling and the task of implementation would be enormous, so enormous it seemed beyond the scope of the present task force, so enormous, the majority of that task force has proposed another will be needed to grapple with it. We think it would be ill advised for the faculty to approve this change without knowing what it would mean “in practice.” Our reasoning is explained in more detail in the section below entitled Rationale.

We do believe that the faculty needs to make a decision about this issue and needs to commit to leaving it decided for a reasonable period of time. In our memory, this issue has been debated at least 4 times (usually for a year or two at a time) during the past 15 years. Each time progress on development and revision of academic programs comes to a halt pending resolution of the issue. A reasonable period of time between reconsiderations would seem to be 7 years. Why 7? It takes 2 years to make significant curriculum revision. Once implemented, such major changes need a minimum of 5 years before assessment is complete (4 years for the first cohort to run through the program and 1 more year for the assessment data to be interpreted.) Therefore we offer the following alternative resolution.

**Resolution:** That the Faculty of PSU reaffirms its commitment to the present credit model, which regards 3-credit courses as the norm, but allows for exceptions (1-, 2-, or 4-credit courses) when sufficient justification is provided, and resolves to reconsider this issue no sooner than 7 years from today.

#### Rationale

- 1. Lack of real evidence.** The arguments made in favor of the 4-credit curriculum are based on few actual data. The evidence is mostly anecdotal and comes from a few examples of institutions with such a curriculum that are either dissimilar to us or for whom the change is so recent that no long-term assessment data are yet available. PSU has committed to become a culture of assessment. We believe that making this great a change on such weak assessment data would deny that commitment. The task force sought to find stronger evidence and failed to do so. At the suggestion of the Provost we asked the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment to

find graduation rate and retention data from appropriate comparator institutions that represent the 3-credit and 4-credit models. He was unable to do so.

- a. Universities usually have the 3-credit curriculum.** The problem seems to be that virtually all of our comparator institutions have had and continue to have 3-credit curricula. Of our 16 official “comparator” institutions, 13 have a 3-credit system, 2 have recently converted to 4-credit, and 1 uses a quarter system. As part of an effort to answer our questions about how changing to a 4-credit curriculum would affect our transfer process, Director of Curriculum Support Mary Campbell, examined the curriculum models of each of the 182 institutions who call themselves “universities” from which PSU students have brought transfer credit since the year 2000. She found that 171 (94%) have a 3-credit curriculum and only 11 (6%), a 4-credit curriculum.
  - b. Liberal Arts Colleges more often have the 4-credit curriculum.** It is our impression that the 4-credit curriculum is more common in liberal arts colleges, where fewer requirements and fewer standards for professional accreditation allow for more flexibility in what students study, and where, in particular, depth may be valued over breadth. We think it is significant that all three of the institutions the task force visited to gather anecdotal evidence about the process of converting to the 4-credit model pride themselves on their liberal arts orientation. The University of Maine at Farmington calls itself on its masthead “Maine’s Public Liberal Arts College.” Keene State College claims a similar niche here in New Hampshire. St Joseph’s College on its website makes much of its status as a “small, Catholic, liberal arts college.” We question the extent to which we can generalize from any of these schools to PSU.
  - c. Further reasons to question generalizations from the three visited schools.** Those three schools, anecdotes from which are the primary evidence the majority presents, differ from PSU in other important ways. All three have considerably simpler curricular offerings. PSU offers 96 major/option combinations. Keene, which in many ways such as size (about 4,600 undergraduates vs. 4,200 at Plymouth) is the closest comparator, offers only 63. Farmington has fewer than half the number of undergraduates we do (2,000) and offers just over half as many major/options: 50. St. Joseph’s is a school of only 1,062 students offering only 38 majors. Our greater curricular complexity is bound to add to the task of implementation.
- 2. Questionable arguments about direct effects.** The rational arguments that have been made in favor of the change to a 4-credit system seem weak to us:

  - a. Student workload will be reduced.** Students will take 4 courses each term instead of 5. Thus they should be better able to manage their time. We seriously doubt that it is the number of courses students must balance that overwhelms them. It may be the number and length of assignments. But everyone is assuming that 4-credit courses will have proportionally more work than 3-credit courses: either more assignments or assignments with more depth. (Unless that is the case the change will result in an overall watering down of the PSU education, and no one wants that.) We are not convinced that this change would reduce overall student workload.
  - b. Faculty workload will be reduced.** This argument has the same flaw as the one about student workload. Though faculty will be teaching 3 courses at a time instead of 4, if

seat time is increased proportionally for 4-credit courses, faculty will be preparing the same number of class hours per week. If number and length of assignments are increased, they will be grading the same amount of student work. We acknowledge that each faculty member will be teaching fewer students, and that there will be some savings of time and attention in having to get to know and respond to fewer individuals. We see reduction in faculty workload as modest at best. We fear, however, that others will regard that very real problem as resolved if this change is made. We were alarmed to hear Provost Bernier say to the task force that solving the faculty teaching load problem is on hold pending resolution of the 4-credit issue, and that if we adopt the 4-credit curriculum, she will regard that as the solution to the problem. If we do not, she will seek other solutions, such as negotiating teaching load (versus scholarship and service load) with individual faculty members or a gradual movement toward a four-three (as opposed to a four-four) annual teaching load—those struck us as better permanent solutions.

- c. Four-credit courses will have more depth.** We believe greater depth can only be achieved by sacrificing breadth. For example, within a particular major, a department might decide to divide the content and skills it has been teaching in 3-credit chunks into 4-credit chunks. If all the content and skills are still to be taught, depth remains constant. Greater depth in some content can only be achieved by leaving some other content out. If within a major greater depth is achieved by converting all 3-credit courses to 4 and requiring the same number of courses, then students would indeed study the major more deeply, but would sacrifice the breadth of taking courses outside the major, since the number of such course would be reduced.
- d. Less complex sets of requirements yield fewer advising/scheduling errors and result in faster time to graduation.** This may be the strongest argument in favor of the 4-credit curriculum as no one can deny that keeping track of which 30 courses must be taken to graduate has to be simpler than keeping track of which 40 courses must be taken. We would note, however, that the challenge of the current curriculum does not rest so much with the number of courses that must be taken as with the complexity of the rules for what combination of courses is required. There is no guarantee that the 4-credit curriculum will include fewer complex and confusing rules. There is nothing to stop the faculty from working to simplify the present curriculum, except, of course, that such efforts seem to be on hold pending discussion of the 4-credit curriculum.
- e. “Errors” can more easily be corrected with the 4-credit curriculum.** If students typically take 4 courses a semester, (32 courses over 8 semesters), and need only 30 courses to graduate, they have two extra course slots that could be used to repeat courses failed or correct advising/scheduling errors without the student falling behind. This is a strong argument in favor of the change, but it presupposes that majors will require only the minimum 120 credits (recently reduced from 122 by action of the faculty). That seems unlikely. As departments struggle to restructure their majors to fit the new model, particularly those which are designed to match accreditation standards for content (the very ones that are often already larger than the university minimum), the temptation will be great to go above the minimum number of credits, particularly given those two extra course slots. We note that when Farmington converted to 4-credits, they raised the number of credits required for graduation from 120 to 128. Perhaps they found they



couldn't fit all requirements into 30 courses? Whatever the reason, they chose to give up this possible advantage to the 4-credit curriculum.

- f. **The “Magic Number 4.”** The weakness of the arguments that have been made in favor of the 4-credit curriculum become apparent to some of us when we ask, “Then why not a 6-credit curriculum?” If faculty teaching three 4-credit courses is better than faculty teaching four 3-credit courses and if students taking four courses is better than students taking five courses, wouldn't it be even better if we had 6-credit courses? Faculty could teach two and students could take three. No one is proposing that. At what point does the advantage of fewer courses and more depth become a disadvantage? The number 4 seems quite arbitrary to us.
3. **Questionable arguments about secondary advantages.** We also question several of the arguments that we hear made that a move to a 4-credit curriculum will have positive side effects.
    - a. **This will force the faculty to revisit and revise the entire curriculum.** It is true, as noted below, that every major program and most courses will have to be revised. But we question the assumption that will necessarily be done in a thoughtful way that will result in streamlining of requirements and reduction of complexity. We fear that in order to get this enormous task done in a reasonable timeframe, it will have to be done in something less than a thoughtful and reflective way. It is probably the case that each department believes each of its current requirements is necessary and will be unlikely to jettison any content. Some of us hoped that introduction of the New General Education program—with its reduction in the possibility of double counting--would force departments to streamline majors. Some departments did do that with some majors. It seems unfair to require those departments to go through that process again 3 years later. It seems unreasonable to expect that those who resisted then, will be any more willing now. We predict a more likely outcome of this curriculum revision will be an increase in the size of majors, as departments struggle to fit everything they now require into fewer courses.
    - b. **The new curriculum will encourage innovative student-centered teaching. Longer class periods will encourage methods that go more deeply into the subject matter.** We cannot think of any kind of teaching method that could not also be incorporated into the present curriculum. As noted above, a trade-off for greater depth is inevitably lesser breadth. Longer meeting times are not necessarily associated with better learning. In our experience even 75-minute classes can challenge the attention span of both students and faculty particularly when content is high-level and abstract. We understand that a number of students and faculty at Keene found the adjustment to longer classes challenging.
    - c. **The 4-credit curriculum will give departments greater flexibility to vary seat time.** One possibility is that departments could schedule 4-credit courses up to a maximum of 200 minutes per week (proportional to the 150 minutes for which 3 credit courses are now scheduled), but might choose in some courses to meet for less time and expect students to do more of the work on their own. We recognize that seat-time is a complicated issue currently under much discussion and reconsideration particularly in light of the growing popularity of on-line courses. We would not go so far as to defend the position that seat time is perfectly correlated with learning. But we are apprehensive about the wisdom of reducing seat time on the assumption that students will do more of

the work on their own. Surveys of PSU students (such as the one conducted by Student Affairs and published in the 2006 *Viewbook*) seem to reveal consistently that students spend considerably fewer hours per week studying than faculty believe they do. Many of us who have been teaching for many years perceive the challenge of getting students to do out of class assignments—especially reading—as ever increasing. Some of us feel that seat time is our best opportunity for teaching, and are apprehensive indeed about making it optional.

#### 4. New problems that would be created by a 4-credit curriculum.

- a. **Reduced flexibility in the size of courses.** Though 3-credit courses are the norm in the present system, some courses are 1-, 2-, or 4-credits. In the new system only 4-credit, 1-credit, and 2-credit courses would be allowed. We acknowledge that this restriction would allow for more efficient use of classroom space, and more standardization of meeting times, which might reduce scheduling conflicts for some students. We also recognize that because of these logistical problems, the present system is pretty much at its limit in terms of how many 4-credit courses can be fit in among the 3-credit ones. That said, we have to value the greater flexibility of the present system. Our colleagues from the Mathematics and CEAPS Departments have presented compelling arguments that some of their content is better taught and better meets the needs of students when packaged in 3-credit courses and other, in 4-credit courses. In addition there seem to be special problems associated with converting courses, which in the present system are 4-credit because of inclusion of a 1-credit lab component. There seems to be resistance to raising credit for such courses above 4, but refusing to do so fails to acknowledge that their present status as 4-credit courses is for reasons entirely different from those being proposed as advantages to increasing the size of other courses. If those advantages are real, then there is at the very least the inequity of denying them to those faculty and students whose subject matter requires laboratory work.
- b. **Transfer issues.** Given that the vast majority of students who transfer into PSU come from institutions with the 3-credit curriculum, evaluation of transfer credit is going to be more complicated. Mary Campbell states, “Students coming to our three-credit institution with four-credit courses are not disadvantaged. We transfer courses at the value awarded by the transfer institution (converting quarter credits or other units to semester hours). A four-credit transfer course satisfies our three-credit requirement (e.g., ENGL 401 First-year Writing from UNH satisfies our composition requirement) and the student has one credit of free elective towards the total number of credits required for the PSU degree.” On the other hand, in cases of some of our 4-credit courses (e.g., BU1150 Financial Accounting and some of the science courses that include a lab), departments have been reluctant to accept a 3-credit transfer alternative. We would certainly have to get beyond that. However, if we do, Mary Campbell worries, “that a transfer student with a three-credit course (e.g., Psychology) would not have the same preparation as a PSU student who took the course (e.g., PS 2010) as four credits (assuming that the four-credit course has more content). Therefore, the student may not be as prepared to take a course for which PS 2010 is the prerequisite, impeding the progress in the PSU major/degree and affecting the grade point average.” In addition we currently have articulation agreements with the NH Community and Technical Colleges and a number of other two-year schools, which specify how their associate programs can be applied to certain of our

4-year programs. All of those institutions have 3-credit curricula. All of those agreements would have to be renegotiated.

- c. Electives and Minors.** As noted above, we suspect that the size of majors is likely to grow if we convert to a 4-credit curriculum. Although there may be cases where four 3-credit courses can be deconstructed and reconstructed as three 4-credit courses, we predict there will be many cases where a current 3-credit course seems to stand by itself in the present major and where the only solution seems to be to expand it to a 4-credit course. (The alternative might be to reduce it to a 2-credit course, but in our experience, most faculty resist dropping content from courses, and find it much easier to add content or depth.) The present General Education program was designed to be as small as it can be and still meet accreditation standards, and we are assuming the new 4-credit Gen. Ed. program would be the same size. Thus any increases in major requirements would necessarily come out of the number of credits available to students for electives and for minors.
- 5. Implementation tasks.** There follows a list of the curricular change tasks that will have to be accomplished to implement the 4-credit model. We think the work will be staggering, easily the largest set of tasks ever undertaken by our faculty. This is ironic given that concern with faculty workload was one of the motivations for this whole discussion!

  - a. Restructuring of every major, option, and minor.** It is our impression that every major, every option, and every minor at PSU requires one or more 3-credit courses. Therefore every one of these will have to be revised.
  - b. Restructuring of almost every course.** The majority of PSU courses are currently 3-credit. All will have to be revised. Those that are part of the General Education program will have to be reviewed by the General Education Committee as well as the Curriculum Committee.
  - c. The General Education program will have to be revised.** This will not be a simple matter. The simple solutions that we have heard proposed ignore the fact that there is a small range of sizes that are small enough to suit the faculty and large enough to suit our accreditors, or ignore the principles on which the program was based, principles that were derived from a two-year process of assessment and research. Revising the program, which is only 3 years old, at the very least ignores the principle that was supposed to be its greatest strength compared with the old program: that future changes would be based on assessment data. We understand that the folks at Keene who were visited by members of our task force commented that we seemed to be doing things backwards: that the credit-model question should have been resolved before the Gen. Ed. program was revised. In fact, it was. The faculty had just failed to accept the last recommendation a group had made that we move to a 4-credit curriculum the year before the General Education Task Force was formed. During the third year of its work when the credit model question was again raised, the General Education Task Force suspended its works pending clarification of the credit-model question and only resumed when assured by the Provost that our credit model would not be changing. Those are among the reasons our resolution contains the statement that this time the decision should stay made for at least 7 years.

**6. Implementation Costs.** We have heard the argument that there will be no costs associated with a change to a 4-credit curriculum. We trust such statements merely express that after some period of years with the new curriculum in place, the same number of students will be earning the same number of credits in courses taught by the same number of faculty—everything will equal out. Surely no one could believe that there will not be costs associated with implementation, and, in fact, the majority has acknowledged this in its resolution. As we have argued above, implementation will take considerable time and effort. Those costs would seem to us to be magnified coming as they would at this time of concern about faculty workload. Surely the institution would have to provide some incentive for at least some of this time and effort: released time from other duties, honoraria—these were provided to support implementation of new General Education, and that was a simple task compared with this one.