

## Profs protest curriculum revamp

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Professors are beginning to protest revamped course requirements that critics say could cut jobs and leave graduates without the broad education teachers say ought to be part of the college experience.

Each of the state's 35 public colleges and universities has a core curriculum, a set of courses that students are required to take, usually in the first two years of college.

At the University of Georgia - where faculty and administrators recently revised the school's own core curriculum - students must take a prescribed number of credit hours in areas such as English, math and science, though they do have some choice about how they meet those requirements.

Chancellor Erroll Davis last year appointed a group to overhaul core course requirements systemwide, saying Georgia schools should graduate students better able to compete in the global economy.

But years before any concrete changes would go into effect, nearly 300 University System of Georgia professors have signed an online petition objecting to the way a group appointed by Davis has begun to revamp the curriculum.

According to the petition, proposed revisions likely would mean students would graduate with less knowledge of American history and society, and at the same time have little understanding of globalization. The revisions also could be out of step with the courses students are required to take in high school, "waste millions of taxpayer dollars" and could make it harder for students to transfer between schools in the system, according to the petition.

### TEACHERS CHOOSE

Faculty members largely have been shut out of the planning so far, an exclusion that in the end actually might threaten the accreditation of Georgia colleges, say critics like George Rainbolt, head of Georgia State University's philosophy department.

Accrediting agencies require that college faculty have the final authority about what students are taught, but so far administrators have run the revision process, Rainbolt said.

"Faculty input was limited to tinkering at the margins. All the major issues were decided," Rainbolt said after the university system e-mailed two proposed models for a new core to faculty across the university system.

The models came out of a two-day February retreat in Athens, where a group of faculty and

administrators led by Georgia College & State University President Dorothy Leland gathered to talk about the upcoming changes.

"It looked like it was a done deal," agreed Jeremiah Alberg, chairman of the department of foreign languages and literature and a professor of philosophy at Carrollton's University of West Georgia.

As of Saturday, more than 300 professors had signed the petition, which questions whether the curriculum even should be revised.

Some are worried about losing their jobs - if the core curriculum calls for fewer social science courses, the university may not need as many sociology instructors, for example.

But tinkering with the core curriculum also is messing with the very heart of what a college is - the knowledge, skills and values the school aims to teach its students, said Alberg, who wrote the online petition with Rainbolt and Augusta State University English professor Walter Evans.

"The core curriculum is sort of the heart of a liberal education for our students," Alberg said.

"What is it people need to learn about Western culture? What are the big questions about the meaning of life? What's right and wrong? That's why it's important."

The state system revised its core requirements a little more than a decade ago as the university system switched from quarters to semesters, and the University of Georgia is in the final stages of its own core curriculum revision.

## REWORKING UGA

UGA faculty and administrators revised the university's core to make it tougher after a 2005 task force concluded that "a culture of low expectations has been allowed to take root in the University," and that students were not studying enough.

Students will face the new, more stringent requirements this fall.

The systemwide changes won't be completed before 2011 or even 2013, and likely won't force UGA to undo its changes, said UGA crop and soil sciences professor William Vencill, chairman of the executive council of UGA's University Council and a UGA representative on the steering committee that's revising the system's core.

Between now and then, faculty at all the schools will have their say in shaping the new requirements for the system, he said.

Vencill says he does not expect to see sweeping changes come out of the core revision.

The Athens retreat wasn't meant to set a firm direction, but to get participants thinking about

what students should learn - what Alberg called the essentials of a college education.

But some of the participants may have missed that intent, Vencill said.

"We just had a brainstorming session for two days. Maybe it was a little naive. I think maybe people overreacted," Vencill said.

Vencill's not surprised to hear strong opinions - college professors get passionate about teaching students, he said.

Vencill repeated what he tells his students about the core curriculum, which also is sometimes called "general education."

"Taking courses here is like building a house, and general education is like a foundation. You can have the greatest roof, but if you don't have a good foundation, it's liable to fall down," Vencill said.

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