**Curricular Optimization Task Force Recommendation #1**

**September 2021**

In response to the administration’s desire to increase the student-faculty ratio to 11.5:1, the CLA Faculty charged the Curricular Optimization Task Force (COTF) with “a holistic review of the Rollins curricular model and its delivery” (see attachment 1). This review began in January 2021 and is ongoing, but we have identified a set of initial curricular reforms that will help to reduce staffing pressures across the college, allow students to complete their degree requirements in the requisite four years, and make us more competitive among our benchmark institutions.

*Background*

Throughout this century, Rollins has flirted with a reduction in the total number of credit hours required for graduation. In 2008, a faculty committee reviewing the “architecture of the college curriculum” affirmed our 4-credit hour course model *and* recommended that we require 128 credits (or 32 courses) for graduation (see attachment 2). A second faculty committee—“128 Credit Hour Taskforce Redux”—in 2015 recommended, as their name suggests, also moving to 128 credits and retaining our 4-credit hour course model (see attachment 3). Both committees faced challenges in their implementations of these moves that no longer exist at Rollins currently. The 2008 committee wished to align the reduction with a 3/2 course load for the faculty; the increased student-faculty ratio makes any reduction to our course load impossible today. The 2015 committee noted significant concerns for the Holt School as it bills by semester credit. The Dean of the Holt School, Rob Sanders, who serves on the COTF, argues in the six intervening years our philosophical approach to enrollment within Holt has shifted. He believes, instead, that our current requirement of 140 hinders enrollment because it represents an increased cost of attendance; 128 would be more attractive to prospective students.

Our benchmarking institutions have changed since the 2008 and 2015 reports. The COTF researched those 29 institutions, and 19 have clear credit hour requirements for graduation; the remaining schools employ a unit based system[[1]](#footnote-1). Among the 12 schools reporting credit hours with 4-credit hour classes, Rollins is the clear outlier in terms of total credit hours required for graduation (see attachment 4). **Most require 128**, including Emerson, Rhodes, and Macalester Colleges.

*Recommendation*

Based on our research and a thorough review of related curricular concerns, **we recommend the CLA Faculty reduce the total number of credit hours required for graduation to 128**. This move would have clear benefits to our current scheduling and staffing concerns, as our current CLA and Holt student populations (2191 and 362 students[[2]](#footnote-2), respectively) would take 3 less courses for graduation. Advising would also be easier for many students: those completing all four years at Rollins would need to average 16 credit hours (or 4, 4-credit classes) per semester to graduate on time.

This recommendation, however, does come with conditions. If we wish students to be liberally educated and have the ability to address the issues of today—and tomorrow—from a range of disciplinary perspectives, then we should ensure their time at Rollins is not dominated by any one approach. The Rollins Foundations in the Liberal Arts (rFLA) program requires a minimum of 42 credits (10 courses) of interdisciplinary knowledge; **we recommend increasing the minimum number of elective credits from 16 (4, 4-credit classes) to 20 (5, 4-credit classes)**. This increase will encourage every student to pursue a minor if they wish *or* continue exploring outside their chosen discipline. **We also recommend that no major program exceeds 64 credits**, ensuring that no single discipline requires more than one half of a student’s total credits required for graduation.

The COTF recognizes that these additional recommendations may not come without some consternation, particularly in departments with demanding major requirements. But what has become clear to us in our review of the curriculum is that change cannot come only from outside our major programs. Departments will need to devote more of their faculty in service of general education, and courses within their major will either need to be reduced or the enrollments increased. Future recommendations with regards to course caps and extended course planning calendars are forthcoming.

**Attachment #1**

**Curricular Optimization Task Force Charge**

**Overview:**

Periodic review of the College’s curriculum and its delivery ensures Rollins is able to provide students with an education that is pedagogically sound and fiscally responsible. Article IV of the Bylaws of Rollins College charges the faculty “with all matters pertaining to the order, instruction, and academic discipline of the College, and…primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum of the College.” Article 1, Section 2 of the College of Liberal Arts Faculty Bylaws affirms this responsibility and directs its members to work with appropriate administrators in the implementation of approved curricular policy.

In anticipation of increasing demographic challenges that will result in a smaller student body, appropriate planning is necessary to best optimize our curriculum and ensure a student-faculty ratio that remains consistent and appropriate to our mission. The Executive Committee is charging a task force to carry out this work. The membership includes: Paul Reich (President of the CLA Faculty/Chair), Richard Lewin (Business), Jamey Ray (Expressive Arts), Scott Rubarth (Humanities), Jennifer Queen (Science and Mathematics), Dan Chong (Social Sciences), Anne Stone (Social Sciences-Applied), Jennifer Cavenaugh (Dean of the Faculty), Rob Sanders (Dean of the Holt School), and Ashley Kistler (Associate Dean of Academics).

**Charge:**

The Curricular Optimization Task Force is charged with a holistic review of the Rollins curricular model and its delivery, culminating in a written report, including findings, conclusions, and recommendations that will be reviewed by Curriculum Committee and additional governance committees as appropriate. Topics to be considered include, but are not limited to:

1. Course enrollments and their alignment with pedagogical approaches
2. Extended course planning calendars that include faculty sabbaticals
3. Number of credits required in a major
4. Streamlined pathways for degree completion
5. Caps on initial credit hour registration for students
6. Number of credit hours required for graduation
7. Course management guidelines for department chairs, the Dean’s office, and the Registrar

**Attachment #2**

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**Attachment #3**

128 Credit Hour Taskforce Redux

Report, December 2015

Committee Work

The committee, consisting of Gabriel Barreneche, Steve Booker, Gloria Cook, Mario D’Amato, Margot Fadool, Meribeth Huebner, Toni Holbrook, Karla Knight, Caroline Nason, Tim Pett, Paul Stephenson, and Claire Strom, met biweekly during fall 2015.

Accomplishments

* Members first determined that Rollins undergraduate programs should not transition to a standard 3-semester-hour class basis unless a new, compelling reason developed.
* Second, members developed an effective way of justifying the 4-semester-hour standard course basis and refined the current mechanism for assessing actual student hours worked per course. At the time of this writing, these recommendations are under review by the appropriate faculty governance committees.

The committee then considered moving the Rollins undergraduate degree to 128 hours. Members’ observations appear below.

Moving to 128

* It should be fairly easy for the A&S|CPS undergraduate programs to move to 128 credits for the bachelor’s degree. Only two A&S|CPS majors, Chemistry and Education, currently have too many credit hours to fall under 128 requirement.
* Chemistry could chose to adopt a model used in other schools where some of the classes required for graduate education are offered separate from the chemistry major. Theoretically, this will work. However, since the bulk of our chemistry majors intend to attend graduate school, it is somewhat disingenuous.
* Education has already developed a plan to move to 128. If required by the College they would eliminate courses in teaching the arts and teaching physical education. In addition, students would receive less credit hours for completing the mandatory student teaching semester.
* Once the majors are adjusted, the transition to 128 becomes solely bureaucratic and technological and should be easy to accomplish within one year.

Pros

* Pedagogically, the most important advantage of transitioning to 128 hours is that students will be able to take four (4) courses a semester to graduate. Hopefully, doing so will allow all Rollins College instructors to more realistically expect the 7.5 hours of weekly outside-of-class work that is intended for every course meeting 150 minutes per week and receiving four (4) semester hours of credit.
* Moving to 128 hours puts us in line with our peer and aspirant schools (see attachment).
* Reducing the number of credit hours to graduate might help to improve our four- and six-year graduation rates.

Cons

* Moving to 128 will be difficult for the Holt School, which bills by semester credit hours (see attached report).
* Adding one or two required careers classes (at one or two credits each) will be much harder at 128 credits than at 140.

Other Observations

* Originally, it was assumed that moving to 128 would allow the College to reduce its use of adjuncts. This would save money, which, it was argued, would pay for the implementation of the 5+ faculty load model. Unfortunately, the real effect of the reduction on staffing needs is much less clear, being confounded by factors including course releases, the new general education system, and the number of courses and number of students in any given major.
* Moving to 128 might make us more competitive in terms of admissions, nearly all of the College’s peer and aspirant institutions have degree requirements in this range (see attached) however, the Admissions Office has no data to support this assertion.
* The new rFLA curriculum reduced the number of classes required for graduation by three (3.5), approximately 14 semester hours. This reduction was intended partially to encourage students to explore, or add minors or second majors. If we reduce the number of courses to graduate by three (3), that argument is moot.
* Some departments have reduced the number of classes needed to complete their majors. This should allow students more freedom to explore other academic areas, even if we transition to 128. However, the reduction is not universal.

**Attachment #4**

**![Table

Description automatically generated]()**

1. 20 of our 29 benchmark group use the same credit hour system (or equivalent) as we do for our standard courses: 4 credits. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. These enrollments numbers are as of this document’s creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)