Memorandum

To: Michael Lightner, Associate VP Academic Affairs, CU System

From: Jeff Franklin, Associate Vice Chancellor, CU Denver

CC: Chancellor Dorothy Horrell, Provost Roderick Nairn

Date: 12 April 2017

Re: Responses to Regent John Carson's questions about core curriculum, 30 March 2017

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1. What is the core-curriculum on each of the three undergraduate campuses?

The CU Denver core is a comprehensive liberal-arts-and-sciences-based general-education curriculum. There are nine Core Areas, which fall into three general categories, as follows:

		Typical hours
A.	Intellectual Competencies	
1.	Composition (college writing)	6 semester hours
2.	Mathematics (quantitative literacy)	3-4 semester hours
B.	Knowledge Areas	
3.	Arts	3 semester hours
4.	Behavioral Sciences	3 semester hours
5.	Humanities	3 semester hours
6.	Natural & Physical Sciences	7-8 semester hours
7.	Social Sciences	3 semester hours
C.	Diversity and Global Learning	
8.	Cultural Diversity (upper-division courses only)	3 semester hours
9.	International Perspectives (upper & lower division)	3 semester hours
	Typical total credit hours:	34-36

This core is similar to that at many other universities across the United States. But, it is uncommon in Colorado because it is a university-wide common core. Every undergraduate, regardless of major, is required to fulfil the core, whether by core-course completion, transfer, or approved prior-learning competency.

The CU Denver core is faculty designed and faculty governed. It originally was designed in 1988-1990 by a faculty governance body charged by the then chancellor. Since then, it has been overseen by the Core Curriculum Oversight Committee (CCOC), the voting members of which consist of two faculty from each of the seven downtown-Denver schools/colleges (and thus CLAS does not dominate) and include non-tenure-track faculty (who teach most lower-division core courses) . The CCOC reviews course proposals submitted by academic units for inclusion in the core, oversees which transfer courses will be accepted for core credit, reviews petitions from

units or individual students for exceptions to core rules, conducts core-course quality control via regular periodic review of the syllabi within each area, and maintains and updates the "CCOC Bylaws" and "CU Denver Core Policies and Procedures."

The number of courses in the core is relatively small by design, about 130 courses as of fall 2016. CCOC policy sets limits on the number of courses in each core area per academic degree program; this maintains equal access and prevents an "arms race" to overpopulate the core. New core courses are proposed each semester, while some are revised or retired. The CCOC website provides submission guidelines and criteria. Applicants must use the "Core Course Approval Sheet and Checklist" and complete the submission form specific to the core area. They must demonstrate that the course is designed to deliver the CCOC core learning outcomes for that core area. In addition, every core course syllabus must show that the course teaches Critical Thinking, and every course in seven of the nine core areas—excepting Mathematics and Natural and Physical Sciences—must teach Written Communication. Review of existing core-course syllabi (one core area's courses reviewed per semester) insures that courses continue to meet high standards or are revised to do so, or else they may be suspended from the core.

Prior to the policy changes concerning gtPathways currently being implemented by the CDHE, all of CU Denver's lower-division (1000 and 2000-level) core courses were submitted to the state for guaranteed transfer review, and all were approved as gtPathways courses. Universities and colleges are now in the process of resubmitting core courses for gtPathways approval.

CU Denver's core demonstrates the commitment of the university and the faculty to the value of a liberal-arts-and-sciences general education, not just for those from certain backgrounds and in certain majors or career paths but for *all* university-educated students. This is a commitment that engineers will be able to think creatively and to work within diverse teams and that artists will have competency in quantitative literacy and the scientific method. It is a commitment that CU Denver graduates will be prepared for the multiple careers that they are likely to have, be able to solve unscripted real-world problems by synthesizing from multiple disciplines and worldviews, and act as informed and critically-thinking citizens of Colorado, the United States, and the global society in which we all live and work.

2. How did the current core-curriculum come to be on each campus? What process was followed to arrive at the core and what process would be followed to propose revisions?

The current core rests on the foundation of the 1988-1990 core. It was designed by faculty and vetted and approved by upper administration and by each school/college that had an undergraduate program at that time: CLAS, Business, and Engineering.

A major reevaluation of the core occurred in 2004-2006. One instigating issue was widely shared concern about the competency of students in writing. A proposal to increase the Composition requirement from one course to two resulted. A second proposal was to introduce the International Perspectives requirement and limit Cultural Diversity to study of race, ethnicity, gender, etc. *within* the United States. The CCOC solicited feedback from faculty in open forums with each of the four schools/colleges that had undergraduate programs at that time (the three listed above plus the newly formed College of Arts and Media). The subsequent campus-wide vote of the faculty approved the revised core as it now stands.

As stipulated in the "CCOC Bylaws," substantial revisions to the CCOC, or the core, "require a majority vote of the faculty in each undergraduate school/college," which now means all seven

schools/colleges. The CCOC, with representatives from all faculties, has the prerogative to make revisions that it judges not to be "substantial."

3. What competencies is the core-curriculum designed to produce in students? How do we determine if the core-curriculum is producing the desired competencies?

Two of the core areas, Composition and Mathematics, are labeled as "competencies." Core courses in those areas only cannot be taken pass/fail nor fulfilled with a grade below C-, which motivates students to cultivate genuine competency in those two areas.

Two other core areas, Cultural Diversity and International Perspectives, are themselves competencies, understood as skills and dispositions that students will need to succeed in university study, careers, and society. They correspond to several of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs), the most widely recognized and used LO competencies across the United States. CU Denver is one of over 1,300 member institutions of the AAC&U. The CDHE is using the ELOs as the foundation for the current gtPathways LOs. If CU Denver were to consider reforming its core from a distribution model to a competency model, it would give serious consideration to adopting the ELOs.

All CU Denver core courses are designed to deliver the competency of Critical Thinking, and all courses in seven of the nine core areas are designed to deliver Writing competency (within the discipline of the course). The core-course submission forms require faculty to stipulate how they will deliver the learning of these competencies, and the CCOC reviews existing core courses to make sure that those competencies are being taught, at least are represented in their syllabi.

All core courses deliver discipline-specific competencies as part of their "content" knowledge. Natural and Physical Sciences courses all teach the scientific method, for example, and all Humanities courses teach close textual analysis and critical interpretation (advanced reading and bibliographical research). All core courses introduce the primary methodology(ies) of their discipline.

This is insured by the fact that core courses are required to teach the learning outcomes (LOs) for the core area to which they belong. Nine teams of our faculty, one per area, wrote the CCOC LOs over the course of a three-year-long, faculty-driven, curriculum-embedded general-education assessment project, funded by Provost Nairn. Nine teams of our faculty who teach core courses, one team per area, worked collaboratively to draft LOs, test them in their own courses, discuss, revise, and repeat. The CCOC then voted to adopt these as the official core LOs.

The gen-ed assessment project also engaged the nine teams of faculty in designing practices and instruments to assess student learning of the core-area LOs and piloted assessments during the first phase of the project. This work now is in the second phase, and Dr. Kenneth Wolf, Director of the Office of Assessment, in collaboration with core-course faculty, continues the work on refining and further testing LO assessment methods for core courses and gathering data for general-education assessment and reporting.

4. What are the consistencies in the core-curriculum across the CU system?

All participate in varying degrees and ways in the Colorado gtPathways program. Beyond that, answering this question is most appropriately deferred to the CU system office, which has the breadth of perspective and purview needed to compare and contrast the three campuses.