



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

November 17, 2010

Mr. John Ed Anthony
Chairman, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees
PO Box 20129
Hot Springs, AR 27903

Re: University of Arkansas

Dear Mr. Anthony,

I write concerning the initiative now underway to eliminate key features of Fulbright College's outstanding core curriculum. Given the public outcry regarding the proposed change, I ask that you and your colleagues, as fiduciaries in whom the state has placed great trust, declare a moratorium until there has been sufficient time to consider the issue thoroughly. It is apparent that the rationale for the faculty vote to weaken Fulbright's general education was, in large measure, based on a misinterpretation of recent legislation. The Board – in consultation with faculty and administrators – has an obligation to make sure that any curricular changes are in the best interests of Arkansas' students before they are implemented.

Under requirements that stood until recently, a student needed to complete 66 credit hours of core and distributional classes to graduate from the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences. These classes ensured that he or she had a sound foundation of knowledge in the disciplines and areas essential for an educated citizen. According to our extensive research, the Fulbright College core curriculum surpassed that of virtually all other colleges in the country; that curriculum placed the University of Arkansas in a league with the United States Military and Air Force Academies, as well as Texas A&M and the University of Texas-Austin. This ranking should have been a point of real pride.

Over the last few months, however, that exemplary curriculum was changed. The Dean has been interested in reducing the core for some time (see May 2, *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*), and once Act 182 was passed, he and Chancellor Gearhart argued that it required a reduction in core curriculum requirements. That is simply not the case. You will see that Senator Madison, who helped to pass Act 182, has stated firmly in the enclosed op-ed that the law does not require a change in the core.

To be clear: Act 182 was designed to support two-year college students who want to attain four year degrees, and so increase the number of degree holders in the state. Specifically, the law sought to ensure the transferability of credits from two-year colleges to four-year colleges. As Senator Madison wrote, the Act did not envision interfering with the prerogatives of trustees to establish degree requirements.

PROMOTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND EXCELLENCE

1726 M Street, NW, Suite 802 Washington, DC 20036
T (202) 467-6787; (888) ALUMNI-8 F (202) 467-6784 info@goacta.org www.goacta.org

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As you know, residents of Arkansas and others have disagreed with the change in the Fulbright College core curriculum. Paul Greenberg, for example, has raised concerns on several occasions about the dumbing down of the curriculum, as has Senator Madison. I have also received communications from alumni and others disturbed by the proposed change.

Although administrators and faculty have addressed the issue, it is the board's ultimate responsibility to ensure a strong general education requirement. Trustees, indeed, have an obligation to make sure that their institution maintains the highest standards and produces well educated graduates. You and your colleagues— successful individuals with a wide range of experience — are well positioned to understand what students should know so that they emerge as educated young men and women when they graduate.

Accordingly, we recommend that you and your colleagues declare a moratorium, ask for full and fair presentations from all sides — and working with students, faculty, and the legislature — ascertain what is in the best interest of students and taxpayers of Arkansas. To allow the College to dumb down its curriculum with nary a question would be a sorry situation indeed.

Here are just a few of the questions you might raise in exploring the subject:

- Are there ways to keep our nationally recognized core intact and address Act 182?
- Would dropping a college wide foreign language requirement be in keeping with the College's namesake, who sought to advance international understanding throughout his career?
- Will changes to the core mean that the Fulbright College will hold students to a lesser academic standard than neighboring schools such as Texas A&M and UT-Austin?
- Are there alternatives to the proposed changes that will not compromise the seamless transfer of community college students and retain the core? (In fact, the faculty could eliminate the distribution requirements, if necessary, and keep the core requirements.)

Arkansas deserves an honest debate with involvement by the trustees. We urge you to take up these issues and await word of your plans to address this serious matter.

Warm Regards,



Anne D. Neal
President, American Council of Trustees and Alumni

Enclosures

Cc: Sue Madison, Senator
Carl Johnson, Vice Chairman, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees
Jane Rogers, Secretary, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees

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Sam Hilburn, Assistant Secretary, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees
Mike Akin, member, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees
Jim von Grep, member, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees
John Tyson, member, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees
Ben Hyneman, member, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees
David Pryor, member, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees
Mark Waldrip, member, University of Arkansas Board of Trustees