

To: The Fort Lewis College Board of Trustees

From: The Fort Lewis College chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

Date: January 24, 2014

Re: The proposal to move Fort Lewis College to a three-credit course model

The faculty members of the Fort Lewis College chapter of the American Association of University Professors are concerned about the recent administrative proposal to move the entire Fort Lewis College curriculum to a three-credit model without faculty consent. Our concerns about this proposal are driven by two main precepts:

- (1) All attempts to change the curriculum need to be grounded on the principle of balanced and communicative shared governance between the faculty and the administration; and
- (2) All changes to the curriculum ought to be guided by what is in the best interest of students.

We request that the Board not make a decision about the proposal to move the entire curriculum to a three-credit course model until a fair and thorough procedure has been implemented for reviewing this proposal that allows for a) adequate faculty involvement in decisions regarding courses and the structure of programs that so deeply impact students; and b) a thorough review of the impacts that these proposed changes would have on student learning, as compared to the current system.

1. The principle of shared governance and its application to this situation:

We believe that the proposal to implement changes to the curriculum without faculty approval is a violation of the principle of shared governance. There is nothing in our current situation that justifies making an exception to this principle.

The principle of shared governance between the administration and the faculty is widely accepted and endorsed. In general, the principle entails that all stakeholders ought to be allowed to participate in discussions of issues that impact them. However, the best versions of shared governance (and the ones endorsed by the AAUP) do not assume that all stakeholders should have equal authority on all matters. Rather, authority is divided according to expertise. In many instances, the AAUP supports the idea that the president (or provost) should exercise the highest decision-making power, after considering the views of all stakeholders. However, the AAUP holds that in some instances she or he ought to defer to those with expertise on a particular issue. With regard to academic matters, especially regarding the curriculum, it is the faculty who has this expertise. For this reason, the AAUP, together with the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), endorse the following statement on decisions regarding the curriculum:

The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process.

The AAUP does recognize that sometimes faculty decisions regarding the curriculum can justifiably be overridden, but only in very exceptional cases:

On these matters the power of review or final decision lodged in the governing board or delegated by it to the president should be exercised adversely only in exceptional circumstances, and for reasons communicated to the faculty. It is desirable that the faculty should, following such communication, have opportunity for further consideration and further transmittal of its views to the president or board. Budgets, personnel limitations, the time element, and the policies of other groups, bodies, and agencies having jurisdiction over the institution may set limits to realization of faculty advice.

The University of Iowa chapter of the AAUP offers the following helpful interpretation of the AAUP document on shared governance,

The delegation of primary responsibility to faculty in academic matters is founded upon the assumption that faculty are not merely employees, but professionals with special training and knowledge, and thus distinctly qualified to exercise decision-making authority in their areas of expertise.[...] While the stakeholder conception of shared governance affords equal weight in all realms of decision-making to every voice save that of the president, the classic conception of shared governance grants some voices more weight than others, depending on the type of decision. Thus, even though the president and board may possess final authority, the *Statement on Government* asserts that they should routinely concur with faculty recommendations made in areas of faculty responsibility and that they should reject faculty decisions in those areas only in "rare instances and for compelling reasons which should be stated in detail." In short, when it comes to academic matters, a faculty decision should normally be the final decision.

The proposal to shift a large number of courses from four to three credits will create massive changes to the content of courses and to the structure and content of programs. Under the principles of shared governance, enacting such a massive change to the curriculum should ideally be done after consulting the faculty and obtaining their agreement. The faculty have already considered the benefits (and potential drawbacks) of the gradual shift to four-credit courses in great depth when these changes were made. Detailed reasons for these changes were provided at the time (see appendix A). Further, at three different times in the last decade, the faculty has considered the move to an all three-credit model. **Each time, the faculty has voted against this proposed change to a three-credit model.** Most recently, the faculty senate voted in December 2013 in favor of the report prepared by the 3-4 Credit Hour Task Force, which recommended a) keeping the mix of three- and four-credit courses, and b) addressing the concerns related to the mix seriously and separately. The vote was 12 in favor, 3 opposed, and 4 abstentions. The administration's proposal clearly goes against this strong majority vote. Further, the administration is attempting to enact this proposal without consultation with or approval by faculty. The Provost with the President and Deans at her side revealed the proposal for the first time in late December, making it very clear that in doing so she was only informing department chairs about the document she intended to present to the Board of Trustees, not asking for faculty approval, nor even

showing any openness to the idea that faculty feedback could be incorporated. According to the AAUP principle of shared governance, the administration should only attempt to override faculty decisions in this way in very “exceptional circumstances.” We believe **these are not exceptional circumstances** that would merit such drastic action (for reasons outlined below). **In short, we believe this is a clear violation of the principle of shared governance and thus could be subject to corrective action by the AAUP.** While some faculty members favor the change to a three-credit model, we suspect that there are no faculty members who are willing to give up the important principle of shared governance.

2. Educational opportunities and integrity at a small, public liberal arts college

The administration’s proposal involves three major changes: (1) adjusting teaching assignments for lab sciences, (2) shifting classes that are currently four credits to three credits, and (3) creating opportunities for reassigned time for scholarship for certain faculty. This document will focus on the second proposed change, though all of them are important. We suspect only the second change will have a significant, negative impact on students. As educational professionals we strongly believe that the primary principle that should guide the evaluation of this proposal is what is in the best interests of the Fort Lewis College student body. While there are, no doubt, some benefits to students to moving to a three-credit model, these benefits are outweighed by the greater benefits of maintaining the current mix of three- and four-credit courses (both types of benefits are discussed below). Further, we do not believe that the Provost has presented any arguments for changing to a three-credit model that make this such an exceptional circumstance that overriding faculty control of the curriculum is justified. In this section, we examine the arguments both for retaining a mix of three- and four-credit courses as well as the arguments for changing to a three-credit model.

(1) Arguments regarding the benefits of maintaining a mix of three- and four-credit courses:

- a. Weighing the benefits of three- versus four-credit courses for students is often about weighing the benefits of gaining breadth versus depth in a particular subject matter. Sometimes breadth is more important: having students exposed to more courses, with more topics. Sometimes depth is more important: having students dig deeper into a course topic. **It is clearly the case that faculty who have expertise in the disciplines are best equipped to judge whether breadth or depth is more significant for students on a particular academic topic.** Allowing faculty to choose three- or four-credit course models for their own programs allows for faculty to apply this expertise in a way that benefits our students by enabling a fruitful balance of breadth and depth across the curriculum.
- b. It is the judgment of faculty in many programs that **many students do better studying four subjects in greater depth than studying five subjects in less depth.** A four-credit standard allows students to do this while maintaining a load that will ensure their graduation in four years. Fort Lewis College faculty are not alone in this judgment: **90% of the top 50 liberal arts colleges in the nation have adopted a four-credit model**, indicating that the collective judgment of the best educators in

the nation concur with us.¹ Further, as the only designated liberal arts public college in Colorado, Fort Lewis has good reason to differ somewhat in its curriculum from other state colleges. The aim of a liberal arts institution is to encourage self-reflection and personal growth in its students, to deepen and broaden their conception of the world and of human experience. We *should* be different from the other state colleges to the extent that our aim differs to some extent from theirs. We want the education at Fort Lewis College to be distinctive, not merely a copy of other state colleges. Our curriculum is designed to impart this transformative experience to our students; those who value Fort Lewis as a liberal arts school value this distinctive quality of our curriculum. In the FAQ distributed on 1/23/14 via email to FLC students, the administration stated that "it is fair to assume that if CU-Boulder students can get quality learning from their three-credit courses that FLC students would be able to do so too." But the undergraduate experience at CU-Boulder pales in comparison to that at FLC. One of the reasons why we have our own Board of Trustees is that we do not strive to be like the other Colorado schools; we believe that we offer a higher quality educational experience to our students.

- c. One of the hallmarks of a Fort Lewis College education is what the President has called "a liberal arts education that works." Accordingly, **FLC faculty have developed many signature courses that have enabled our students to engage in active, problem-based, and community-based learning far beyond what many undergraduates experience at other institutions.** Shifting all four-credit courses to three-credit courses would create impediments to the delivery of these courses and the programs in which they are offered. Here are just a few examples:
 - i. For anthropology majors, a reduction in senior research seminar hours from four to three would remove the possibility for many of conducting hands-on, empirically based work. Much of this work necessitates (as it did not a decade or so ago) obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, requiring multiple drafts of proposals and significant approval wait times before research can begin. What is more, for those in anthropology who teach rich sociocultural and archaeology courses that span more time, space, social issues, and involve more engaged work than ever before, a reduction of fourteen hours of instructional time would remove significant lecture and interactive learning time.

¹ University of Rhode Island. "Reasons for Shifting from a Three-Credit Curriculum to a Four-Credit Curriculum." 2005. <http://www.uri.edu/facsen/documents/2FourCreditSystem.pdf>

- ii. The Psychology Department's Research Methods course is one of the few across the nation in which undergraduates conduct and present their own experiments, including at professional conferences. Switching this course to three credits would essentially do away with the students' own research proposals as there would simply not be enough contact hours to work with them, obtain IRB approval, collect data, and so on. Another signature FLC psychology course that students rave about is called "Motivational Interviewing (MI) Practicum." This innovative course trains undergraduate psychology majors in an emerging and evidence-based counseling model (MI) and then gives them the opportunity to actually use and apply this model in individual peer consultation sessions with freshman-level students at FLC who have been caught with alcohol or marijuana in the dormitories. A three-year study on the impact of this course has shown a 20% reduction in recidivism for alcohol and marijuana violations on campus compared to the alternative sanction of "campus service." If FLC changed entirely to a three-credit course model, this MI course could not be taught, as there would not be sufficient weekly contact hours to complete the training, schedule Peer Consultations, and conduct clinical supervision of these MI students.
- iii. The Sociology Department is a program that has had all four-credit courses for twenty-four years. This model has allowed the department to engage in extensive community engagement culminating in the Sociology Block Program where students take a block of sixteen credits and engage in an extensive internship. These internships have been invaluable to community partners and have resulted in numerous job opportunities for Sociology graduates. This forced move will greatly disrupt the Sociology Block, perhaps harming a program that has been named by the Center for Civic Engagement as a model program.
- iv. Fort Lewis College has achieved significant faculty line expenditure savings by encouraging faculty members to design and deliver courses that count towards fulfillment of credits in multiple programs (see Appendix A). These courses need extra instructional time to cover the multiple disciplinary theories, histories, and intentions. Examples of such courses currently at four credit hours are: Anth 364 Topics in Indigenous Latin America (counts towards degree programs in Anthropology, Native American & Indigenous Studies, and Ethnic Studies); Anth 358 Native American Gender Issues (counts towards Anthropology, Native American and Indigenous Studies, and Gender & Women's Studies); Sociology 383 Gender & Society (counts towards Sociology and Gender & Women's Studies). By eliminating fourteen credit hours' worth of instruction time,

the effectiveness of many of these interdisciplinary courses would be greatly compromised.

- d. Taking fewer courses in depth, rather than more courses with less depth, creates a better learning environment for students with disabilities.** Many students registered with the Office of Disabilities require (a) use of the Testing Center to allow more time for exams; (b) a computer program read assignments to them, resulting in additional time and effort needed to complete and comprehend reading material; (c) additional time on writing assignments, requiring extra help from the Writing Center or Disability Services. It benefits these students to have the opportunity to focus on fewer classes in depth, so that they have time to do all of this extra work for each course. Additional courses will likely entail additional texts, exams, and papers, even if it does not increase their classroom contact hours. In addition, many students with disabilities, as well as non-traditional, first-generation, and ESL students need additional time to process new information. Taking fewer courses in more depth allows them to do this more effectively.

(2) Arguments for moving to a three-credit model and responses:

In this section we address the four justifications for moving to an all three-credit model offered by the administration. These are: a) HLC accreditation; b) transferability of courses; c) scheduling; and d) workload inequity.

a. HLC accreditation

The provost has repeatedly stated that our current mix of three and four-credit courses has been put into place without the needed approval of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). She further suggests that a massive change in our curriculum to an all three-credit model would not require approval by the HLC. We faculty take both of these claims very seriously, but we do not yet see how these claims are consistent with written HLC accreditation documents and previous HLC (North Central) reviews. Interestingly, the FAQ distributed on 1/23/14 via email to FLC students makes no mention of the HLC at all and instead merely mentions that CCHE would support (but does not require) our move to a 3-credit model. It's important to note that HLC raised absolutely no concern about our having a mix of three-credit and four-credit courses at the previous review. The change since the last review is not large; we moved from 62% four-credit courses to 72% four-credit courses in the last decade (see appendix B). Further, even if the increase in four-credit courses requires HLC approval, it is not clear that this is best solved by moving to an all three-credit model. **The faculty would like an opportunity to speak directly with HLC representatives about this issue.** Unlike the previous provost, this provost has asked that the faculty not contact HLC directly, but allow her to be the primary or only contact. This is a major concern to faculty. During

the previous accreditation cycle, the HLC liaison came to campus about a year before the site visit. She met with the steering committee, with administrative groups and with interested faculty. The faculty found it valuable to work directly with the liaison. We would like to invite our HLC liaison to campus again this time. The purpose of the visit would be an opportunity for each accreditation team to meet with the liaison to gain insight about their specific criterion. This can only make our process better. In addition, while the HLC represent visits FLC, a group can present to him the background on how we have come to our current credit mix (Appendix A) and get his recommendations about how we handle this in terms of HLC policy about institutional change. Rather than going around faculty to resolve this problem, the administration should be involving the faculty in finding solutions.

b. Transferability

Administrators have suggested that state statutes mandate that Fort Lewis College move to a three-credit standard. The statutes alleged to support this claim are Colorado Revised Statutes 23-1-108 (7), 23-1-125 (1-5), as well as CCHE Policy I, L. It is important to note that there is no statement in these statutes that Colorado public institutions should adopt a three-credit model. Each of these documents concern the unimpeded transfer of gtPathways course credits between public institutions in Colorado to ensure that a student can satisfy the general education component of a bachelor's degree within 60 credits and earn the degree within the 120 credit limit. The fact that Fort Lewis College is the only public college in Colorado with a mix of both three and four-credit courses does pose some challenges for students transferring from or to other Colorado public colleges and universities. While we take the issue of ease of transferability seriously, we also believe Fort Lewis College is already in compliance with the statutes and policies²:

The statewide transfer agreements and institutional transfer guides are in place to assure a timely graduation for students who transfer to or from other state colleges. Students who transfer three-credit courses into FLC get full credit for every credit they take elsewhere. All students transferring into Fort Lewis College who completed gtPathways courses at other institutions are given full credit for having completed those requirements. Also, starting in Fall 2013, faculty agreed that students who transfer in courses approved as equivalent to FLC courses required for the student's major but carrying fewer credits will not have to "make up" the missing credit(s) unless the transfer student is trying to satisfy major requirements with a total number of credits

² Some people have cited a letter from Ian Macgillivray of the State of Colorado Department of Education as evidence that a move to the three-credit model is required for compliance with state statutes. However, a careful reading of the letter shows that he only states that the change to a three-credit model would be in compliance with state statutes. He (rightly) fell short of claiming that our current model is out of compliance.

fewer than forty. Further, it is not the case that students lose any credits when they transfer from Fort Lewis College to other state institutions. Rather, the students are given three credits for the corresponding three-credit course at the other institution (as well as to whatever requirement it fulfills) and the fourth credit counts as an elective, included in the 120 total credits required for graduation. **Thus, no credits are lost by transferring students either from or to FLC.** The only loss to students is that students transferring out of the institution will have used more of their elective credits than they would have if they had started at another Colorado institution. This is not a violation of the state statutes. The idea that we should restructure our entire curriculum (without faculty input or consent) in order to accommodate this very minor issue for a portion of our transfer students misplaces priorities.

c. Scheduling

There are scheduling difficulties created by having a mix of three- and four-credit courses in one institution. Some of these scheduling difficulties are significant, causing students to have to enroll in slightly overlapping classes. **We believe that many of these scheduling difficulties can be relieved by implementing a new uniform schedule.** In 2011, Dr. Paul McGurr created five different models for resolving some of these scheduling problems while maintaining a mix of three and four-credit courses, most of which involve starting courses earlier and ending them later (see appendix C). We faculty are willing to teach earlier and later in order to resolve scheduling problems because we believe it is in the best interest of students. Some faculty members may also be willing to offer courses on Saturdays, an experiment that has never been tried at Fort Lewis College and that may well directly benefit many students, particularly those who work or are in the “non-traditional” category (i.e., older, with families, etc.). We recognize that, on any of Dr. McGurr’s proposals, there may still be some scheduling challenges. However, the proposed schedule changes would reduce overlapping significantly. Further, it is likely that some scheduling problems will remain in a three-credit model, simply due to number of contact hours associated with lab courses. Thus, we do not believe scheduling concerns justify moving to a three-credit model, nor do they add up to a sufficient reason to override faculty control over the curriculum.

d. Workload inequities

We as an institution should be very concerned about the workload problems faced by faculty in all departments. Further, we should be especially concerned about the inequitable workload burden placed on faculty in certain disciplines who routinely teach three classroom courses and two labs per semester, resulting in more course preparation, more students, and more contact hours than other faculty. That is unfair and unreasonable. Further, it is not in the best interest of students to have frazzled and overworked faculty. **Therefore, the AAUP supports the change to a two-course, two-**

lab model for faculty in the sciences, if the faculty impacted also are supportive of that change and believe it will address their workload concerns.

However, we would like to emphasize that moving to a three-credit model is not required in order to implement this change. Moving to an all three-credit model will not reduce the workload of faculty in three-credit disciplines teaching three courses and two labs per term. They are already on a three-credit model. **The administration's proposal to solve their workload problem (moving to a two-class, two-lab model) does not in any way depend upon moving other departments to a three-credit model.** We could implement this proposal with the current mix of three- and four-credit courses. Thus, the issues are entirely unrelated. Using the notion of solving the problem as a reason for moving to an all three-credit model is simply a red herring.

What is more, moving to an all three-credit model will create additional workload problems for faculty in departments with four-credit models. This change would result in an additional course preparation and would increase the number of students each faculty teaches in a semester by 33%. The more students that faculty teach, the more difficult it will be to establish the personal relationships with students that are a hallmark of our liberal arts institution. Further, this increase in workload would be on a faculty that already feels stretched between teaching, service, and research as was discussed and addressed in the Report on Faculty Retention and Recruitment. No doubt these devoted faculty members would be willing to work even more overtime hours if they believed it was in the best interests of our students. However, for reasons outlined above, this change is not clearly in the best interest of the vast majority of FLC students.

Finally, it is worth noting that *it may be less costly to implement the two-lecture, two-lab model for faculty in the sciences if we do NOT move to a three-credit model.* The administration's proposal to move to a three-credit model is accompanied by a proposal to provide three credits of release time to faculty for research. According to the administration's proposal, "a very conservative maximum cost to creating a pool of release time would be \$500,000." What would happen if we kept the three- and four-credit mix of courses and funneled all that money into supporting the reduced workload of faculty in the sciences? The current average salary for tenure-track science faculty is \$53,240. Including benefits rounds this number to approximately \$70,000. So \$500,000 could establish seven additional tenure-track science faculty lines. **The workload issues in the sciences could be addressed directly with these funds.** Fort Lewis College has lost 34 tenure/tenure-track faculty positions since the 08-09 academic year. That is a 20% decline in the number of professors available to students. Let's use our available funds to hire tenure-track faculty and re-establish ourselves as a student-focused institution.

Conclusion

The proposal to shift to a three-credit course model without faculty approval is a violation of the principle of shared governance. The concerns about accreditation, transferability, scheduling and workload can be resolved without ignoring or overriding faculty control of the curriculum. Indeed, they are best resolved by providing additional opportunities for the administration and faculty to think creatively together about solutions to these issues. What is more, the proposed shift is not in the best interest of Fort Lewis College students. As described above, there are many benefits to students associated with offering a mix of three- and four-credit courses. We should not be willing to give up these benefits unless a very careful impact study has been done demonstrating that doing so will result in even greater benefits for the students. This study has not been conducted and these benefits have not been demonstrated.

We therefore respectfully request that the Board not make a decision about the proposal to move the entire curriculum to a three-credit course model until a fair and thorough procedure has been implemented for reviewing this proposal that allows for a) adequate faculty involvement in decisions regarding courses and the structure of programs that so deeply impact students; and b) a thorough review of the impacts that these proposed changes would have on student learning, as compared to the current system.