

PREFACE

THE CORE CURRICULUM: THE MISSION AS FRAMEWORK

Undergirding the core curriculum at Prairie View A&M University are the major tenets of its mission. It is a land-grant university committed to teaching, research and service. A more salient feature is the commitment to provide a high quality education to students from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. While the University admits and graduates an impressive number of students whose parents, grandparents and/or siblings are college educated professionals with solidly middle class life styles, it is important to note that the vast majority of the students come from low income families. Annual incomes below \$15K are not uncommon. In fact, forty percent come from families whose annual income is below \$20K. By contrast, beginning salaries of 2002-2003 bachelor's degree recipients ranged from \$30K to \$42K. Some graduates in nursing, engineering, computer science and accounting earn initial salaries of over \$60K. Clearly, the University raises expectations and produces success.

Containing the major lower level liberal arts courses taken by all students, the core or general education component of the undergraduate curriculum may very well be the determinant of how well graduates perform in the out years. Will they be promotable? Will they qualify to lead in education, the arts, business, nursing, engineering, architecture, biological sciences, computer engineering, drama, music, or other areas? In the March/April 2003 issue of *Trusteeship*, William G. Durden posited the following relative to the significance of liberal learning for persons other than the wealthy:

Liberal education is not defined by practicality or the immediacy of occupational goals--which would do little to change prejudice, bias or authority. But a liberal education is ultimately useful; it gives students the strong sense of self and habits of mind and action to become leaders.

And . . . minority, first-generation, immigrant otherwise disenfranchised students most desperately need an educational environment that builds identity and gives them the confidence even to attempt leadership (p.26)

The extent to which the undergraduate degree recipients are successful academically, personally, and socially will likely impact how their siblings, parents/guardians and family in general will be able to advance educationally and cycle out of circumstances that reduce life chances. Attachment 1 is the Core Curriculum Table for Prairie View A&M University. It displays the core courses by core component, exemplary outcomes, and Texas Common Course Numbering System (TCCNS).