

**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
LIBERAL ARTS FEASIBILITY STUDY**

**Report and Recommendations by the
Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission**

January 1998

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The Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, initially created by executive order in 1980, given statutory authority in 1981 (SS 240.145 and 240.147, Florida Statutes), and reauthorized by the 1991 Legislature, serves as a citizen board to coordinate the efforts of postsecondary institutions and provide independent policy analyses and recommendations to the State Board of Education and the Legislature. The Commission is composed of 11 members of the general public and one full-time student registered at a postsecondary education institution in Florida. Members are appointed by the Governor with the approval of three members of the State Board of Education and subject to confirmation by the Senate.

A major responsibility of the Commission is preparing and updating every five years a master plan for postsecondary education. The enabling legislation provides that the Plan "shall include consideration of the promotion of quality, fundamental educational goals, programmatic access, needs for remedial education, regional and state economic development, international education programs, demographic patterns, student demand for programs, needs of particular subgroups of the population, implementation of innovative educational techniques and technology, and the requirements of the labor market. The capacity of existing programs, in both public and independent institutions, to respond to identified needs shall be evaluated and a plan shall be developed to respond efficiently to unmet needs."

Other responsibilities include recommending to the State Board of Education program contracts with independent institutions; advising the State Board regarding the need for and location of new programs, branch campuses and centers of public postsecondary education institutions; periodically reviewing the accountability processes and reports of the public and independent postsecondary sectors; reviewing public postsecondary education budget requests for compliance with the State Master Plan; and periodically conducting special studies, analyses, and evaluations related to specific postsecondary education issues and programs.

Further information about the Commission, its publications, meetings and other activities may be obtained from the Commission office, 224 Collins Building, Department of Education, Tallahassee, Florida, 32399-0400; telephone (850) 488-7894; FAX (850) 922-5388; Website - www.firn.edu/pepc.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION PLANNING COMMISSION

***NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY LIBERAL ARTS
FEASIBILITY STUDY***

Prepared in Response to Specific Appropriation 166

January 1998

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In proviso language accompanying Specific Appropriation 166, the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission was directed to examine the feasibility of providing state funding to support the liberal arts program at Nova University. The Commission, in the course of its study, was to examine the program in light of its consistency with the Master Plan for Postsecondary Education.

Commission staff prepared background materials based upon a review of existing reviews of the program, institutional reports of the program's development and progress, and correspondence on file with the Office of Postsecondary Coordination. In addition, Commission staff visited the campus of Nova Southeastern University twice to meet with representatives of the institution, talk with students, and collect additional data concerning the effectiveness of the state-funded program.

Originally conceived as an accelerated baccalaureate degree program with a heavy emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach to the liberal arts, the liberal arts component continues to be reviewed and improved, but the focus is towards service learning and the program has been lengthened to include a fourth year. The SCORE program is a well executed service learning program consisting of required coursework, community service activities, and monthly reflective activities coupled with pursuit of a degree in a specific discipline such as business, education, or the life sciences. The program is not a professional degree track nor does it produce a student with a specific career preparation. Students who participate in the SCORE program do so as an additional component of their educational experience — the main objective for them is the completion of a degree in some professional field or academic discipline. As a result, the state-funded SCORE program is different from others in that it does not directly result in the production of students with credentials in a profession or field in which the state is experiencing a critical shortage or need. The availability of similar opportunities in the public sector, coupled with the fact that the SCORE program does not result in a graduate with a unique profession that would meet the crucial state need test, suggests that continued funding of the program in its current form is not in the best interest of the State.

The recent proposal by Nova Southeastern University to modify its state-supported liberal studies program builds upon the lessons learned from the earlier accelerated program and suggests a useful model for an accelerated competency-based baccalaureate degree. Considerable development work and investment by the institution will have to be made to implement the program. Some policy issues concerning funding in a new curricular paradigm still need to be explored, however, the model, as developed, addresses time-to-degree concerns and educational productivity in promising ways consistent with both the Master Plan and suggested postsecondary curricular reform literature. The institution

should be encouraged to continue to develop the reconfigured accelerated baccalaureate degree program.

Recommendation:

Nova Southeastern University should refocus the state-funded liberal studies/SCORE program consistent with their proposal for an accelerated outcomes-based baccalaureate degree to begin in the Fall of 1999. Students currently enrolled in the SCORE program should be allowed to complete their course of study. Any new students should be admitted under the three-year accelerated outcomes-based baccalaureate degree option.

From the funds in Specific Appropriation 166, the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission has been directed to:

examine the feasibility of providing state funding to support the liberal arts program at Nova University in Specific Appropriation 78. Specifically, PEPC shall examine the consistency with the state master plan for postsecondary education, student demand in the program, capability of nearby state institutions to support students in the program, minority participation, and employer demand.

The study is to be submitted to the Legislature no later than January 1, 1998.

INTRODUCTION

Legislative Charge

Since its inception, the original design and purpose of the liberal arts program at Nova Southeastern University has evolved. Originally conceived as an accelerated baccalaureate degree program with a heavy emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach to the liberal arts, the liberal arts component continues to be reviewed and improved, but the focus is towards service learning and the program has been lengthened to include a fourth year. Through recent efforts, the faculty of Nova Southeastern University have proposed to refine the program further by building on the lessons learned in the earlier accelerated program. The proposed revision would include a movement toward a competency-based accelerated baccalaureate degree that would include specialization in a major field. Service learning would still be addressed but not as a major focus of the state-funded program.

The original accelerated liberal studies program consisted of 45 weeks of study, divided into five nine-week blocks. In the first year of the program, students would undertake an integrated curriculum of core studies organized around five interdisciplinary themes. First year students were to also spend considerable time developing their competence in mathematics and composition. During the second year, students would continue their core abilities program and begin study in their major. In the final year of the program, students would complete the major. The program was conceived as a living laboratory for the use of advanced technologies in the classroom. Further, the intent of the program, at that time, was to provide students with an opportunity to obtain a baccalaureate degree in liberal arts within three years.

A number of benefits to the state were envisioned:

- The direct educational costs to the state and the student would be significantly less than a conventional four-year program.
- Capital outlay costs were projected to be lower since students would only use the building space and facilities for three years instead of four.
- Students in the program would have an advantage over others since they would be skilled in the use of “state-of-the-art” electronic telecommunications equipment and information in addition to the academic skills gained through the degree program content.
- The joint public/private cooperative program would enhance the potential for state educational resources.
- The prominent local demonstration of the effective use of the available educational technology pioneered by Nova was designed to have some carry-over value for the rest of the public education sectors.

BACKGROUND

The Accelerated Liberal Arts Baccalaureate Program

Several other aspects of the original proposal for the program are worth mentioning. The first class was scheduled to begin in August 1988 with an initial size of 300 students. With renovations, existing buildings at Nova would house 1000 students - the projected number of students enrolled for the full three-year program.

The 1987 Legislature provided funding for the establishment and support of an accelerated liberal studies program at Nova University. During the first year, the university received \$980,000 to develop the curriculum for the program and to begin renovations of campus buildings to accommodate the instruction and technology components of the program. Although funding was approved by the 1988 Legislature and later vetoed by the Governor, the institution continued to implement the program. Since students had already been enrolled for the first year and the university had further stipulated that Florida residents would receive state support, enrolled students were supported by the institution for that year of study. Prior to the 1989 Legislative session, a Department of Education review team visited the institution and favorably commented on the progress of the program. During the 1989 Legislative session, funding was again provided in the amount of \$1,309,566 of which \$784,552 was to be used to renovate and equip buildings and computer laboratories. In 1990, the program received an appropriation of \$525,015 for its continued operation. With the exception of the specific funds for renovation of buildings and start-up costs, all funds have been used for student differential scholarships.

During the 1990-91 year, the University delivered a report to the Department of Education on the progress of the implementation and operation of the liberal studies program. As a part of that report, a number of changes in the program, based upon the institution's assessment process during the first two years of operation, were outlined. Perhaps the most important of those changes concerns the institution's decision to expand the program to include a fourth year. The institution would still allow students to elect to pursue a three-year program, however, the report notes that "faculty and students agree that the intensive nature of the core component combined with the rigorous demands of the majors makes it very difficult for students to complete the program comfortably." The report also notes that the creation of additional majors for students in the liberal arts program as well as the general content of the interdisciplinary core components were being considered as the focus for the reform of the general education component for all Nova students.

At that point in its history, this experimental program resulting from a public/private partnership appears to have met most of its identified objectives. The following points should be noted:

- The creation of an accelerated liberal arts curriculum based upon the extensive use of technology for delivery had been completed.
- The use of advanced telecommunications technologies to support the program appears to have proven successful.
- The evaluation report notes that many of the students who started in the program in 1988 were on schedule to graduate in the three-year period.
- The program's structure and experience could be documented and used as a model for other institutions.

Subsequently, changes to the program were made as outlined in the institution's March 1, 1991 report to the Department of Education. The liberal studies program was expanded to a fourth year. The core component of the liberal studies program became the basis for the reform of the institution's general education core thereby providing an interdisciplinary liberal studies approach to all Nova students. Further, the institution acted to open the additional majors created for the liberal studies program to all students as well. The changes in the program structure struck at the very factors that made it unique from a state funding perspective.

- The program is no longer a three-year accelerated liberal studies baccalaureate degree program for all state-funded students and as a result, no significant cost savings in terms of building space or facilities usage can or should be claimed.
- The expansion of the liberal studies core to provide the basis for the reform of NSU's general education core, as well as the additional majors, would appear to offer all of the curricular components for a liberal studies baccalaureate to any NSU student attending the institution.

Funding has continued to the present day. Since its inception in 1987, the Nova University Liberal Studies Program has received a total of approximately \$6.5 million (\$6,575,639) to support the program. With the exception of the 1988-89 budget year when the appropriation was vetoed by the Governor, the funds were obtained through specific legislative appropriations for private college and university scholarships.

The SCORE Program

The liberal studies program had in its interdisciplinary coursework, a focus on social responsibility. In 1993, a service learning requirement was added for state-funded students. With its present structure and focus on service learning, the program has become known as the SCORE (Service for the Community: Opportunity, Responsibility and Excellence for students) program.

The SCORE program focus is on enabling undergraduate students to acquire the requisite skills, sensitivities, leadership, and knowledge that will enable them to identify and tackle community problems. The stated objectives of the program include:

- To identify and examine the various concepts and components of community.
- To demonstrate the link between education and social commitment.
- To promote an understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures.
- To foster a sense of empathy for disadvantaged groups within our local, national, and global communities.
- To promote social consciousness among their peers.
- To instill a lifelong commitment to social engagement and leadership.

The objectives are met through participation in the Nova Southeastern University liberal studies core program and the SCORE program coursework and activities. Participation and completion of the SCORE program means that students must, in addition to the courses in the liberal studies program, complete seven CORE courses, complete one service learning course per year, complete at least 9 hours of service to the community each month, and engage in monthly reflective activities related to their service and community issues. The SCORE program is a structured curriculum made up of the existing interdisciplinary liberal studies courses coupled with required service learning courses. The types of courses included and their sequencing are detailed in Appendix A.

All Florida high school graduates admitted to NSU are invited to apply for acceptance into the SCORE program. Students are selected in a competitive process based upon their past service experiences, their future service goals, and their leadership potential. In the Fall 1997 entering class, the program received 82 applicants from which 27 were selected for acceptance into the program. Student demographic data available for the 1995 and 1997 students returning or newly admitted to the pro-

gram indicate minority students represent 40 percent of all students in those two groups. Data available on student progress toward degree attainment indicate that of 263 state-funded students admitted to either the SCORE program or its state-funded predecessor since 1989, 114 students, or 43 percent, have graduated so far. Seventy-five students (29 percent) are still completing the program. So, approximately 72 percent of the students admitted to the state-funded program have either graduated or are still completing a program of study.

Placement data available for SCORE students are limited. As of this date, eight students graduated from the program in Spring 1996 and an additional twenty-six students graduated in Spring 1997. The University reports that employment projections for South Florida continue to be positive with particularly strong growth projected in the computer-related jobs, health care, teaching, and sales and supervision. While overall employment potential appears high, the focus important for this study concerns the need for graduates of the program and, in particular, the employment of graduates with the specific skills developed by the SCORE program.

Many students in the public educational sector are similar to SCORE students in that they pursue additional learning or experiences in conjunction with their primary academic or professional preparation. Many of these additional activities are operated by the Division of Student Affairs or they may be student/faculty organizations, projects, or activities that complement a student's academic study. A distinction must be made between volunteer activities and service learning. Volunteer activities are those community service projects or activities in which students either alone or in groups donate their time, effort, and financial resources to benefit the community. Such activities are not part of an academic program of study and they do not earn academic credit. In contrast, service learning involves service that is connected to a course, program of study, or project that earns academic credit. Students are required to engage in some type of structured service activity that is intended to enhance the content covered in class. In many ways, service learning closely resembles experiential learning in that students put into practice or observe in an actual community what they have studied. Both types of opportunities exist in Florida, and some promotion and coordination is being conducted at the state level.

Alternatives in the Public Sector

Institutions wishing to utilize service learning as a part of their curricula have some resources and financial assistance available at the state level through the Florida Campus Compact and the Florida Office of Colle-

Statewide Activities

giate Volunteerism. Florida Campus Compact is a membership-based organization that is housed at Brevard Community College. Their reputation is well known as a leader in service-learning throughout the southeast. The Florida Office of Collegiate Volunteerism was created in 1990 as a project of the Board of Regents and received a Legislative appropriation. The FOCV's mission is to promote and encourage collegiate involvement in community service. The Office provides technical and financial assistance to public colleges and universities through grants, advice, and programming to start or support campus volunteer centers and programming. The FOCV's services include site visits, organizing strategies, efficient service program designs, seminars to strengthen campus/community coalitions, grants, awards and legislative advocacy for student-driven service. Since its creation, the FOCV has given more than 57 grants and awards totaling more than \$80,000.

State University System Activities

All of the state universities operate volunteer programs or centers where students can become actively involved in working to better the communities in which they reside. Although student volunteerism has become a popular topic of debate over the last few years, it has a long history as a part of the student educational experience. In addition to volunteer centers, eight of the ten state universities offer service learning courses and programs that provide students with similar experiences to those participating in the SCORE program. State universities were surveyed concerning the number and types of service learning courses and activities offered. The definition of service learning used in the data collection was: "Service-learning is an educational method by which students learn and develop through active participation in service that: a) is conducted in and meets the needs of a community; b) is coordinated with the community and with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program; c) is integrated into the academic curriculum; and d) includes structured time for students and participants to reflect on the service experience." The 1996 survey reports some interesting findings:

- Throughout the State University System, 722 service learning courses were reported.
- The greatest number of service learning courses are at the 4000 level at each institution.
- Courses in the health professions (21.1%) and education (20.4%) utilize service learning more than other academic disciplines.
- The University of Florida offers the most courses with a service learning component (188) followed by the University of Central Florida (146) and Florida State University (122).

- Florida State University offers the greatest variety of service learning courses across the disciplines.

Florida Gulf Coast University will require all degree-seeking students to fulfill a service learning requirement for graduation. Students entering FGCU as freshmen and sophomores will complete a total of 80 service learning hours before their senior seminar; students entering as juniors and seniors will complete a total of 40 hours. Non-degree-seeking students will not be required to complete service learning hours, but they will be invited and encouraged to participate in the structured service learning activities sponsored by the institution. Both Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University offer extensive student volunteer support centers as well as service learning courses within their curricula.

In 1991, Nova Southeastern University modified its accelerated liberal studies program to meet the needs of its students, yet important lessons were learned from the early program's successes and problems. As a result of discussions among the faculty and program administrators, a proposal has been developed to further modify the existing state-funded liberal studies program which, if implemented, would be much more consistent with the goals of the Master Plan and legislative concerns over time-to-degree. Under the terms of the proposal, the institution would graduate a student with a baccalaureate degree in three years by awarding credit for competencies and knowledge the student already possesses. The program would have faculty becoming facilitators of learning and will tailor the educational system to the learner's style and prior learning. Further, it would support the learner through the program with clearly articulated learning outcomes. Educational resources would be used more efficiently since students would only enroll in and consume only those courses or educational units that they need. The actual length of the program for each student would vary depending upon the student's prior knowledge and skills upon entrance and how diligently the student works to demonstrate progress while at the university. Nova Southeastern University is ready to undertake a pilot outcomes-based three-year baccalaureate degree program beginning in the Fall of 1999. With the appropriate support from faculty and advisors, they believe that they can be successful.

Continued Evolution of the Nova Southeastern University Program

The undergraduate curriculum is composed of a general education component and the major field of study. The pilot program would begin with the general education learning outcomes and expand in later years to include the courses which compose the major as well. Beginning with a small incoming group of students, the project would focus on the mastery of clearly articulated general education outcomes through a variety

of approaches, methods, and formats. (The NSU general education objectives are listed in Appendix B.) Students would be offered a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their prior knowledge and skills using Advanced Placement credit, previous college coursework, CLEP and other testing-out procedures, and performance measures designed by NSU faculty members. Based upon an evaluation of each student's prior knowledge and competencies, a learning program would be designed which would allow the student to focus on only those learning outcomes, knowledge, and skills needed. The institution plans to offer a variety of instructional formats including regular courses, units within courses which cover a single or range of competencies, instructional technologies, independent learning experiences, service learning and experiential activities as individuals and in small groups. The focus of the program will be on the mastery of knowledge, concepts, and skills rather than the consumption of courses and credits. A structural diagram of the proposed program is attached as Appendix C.

The State of Florida has a long history of contracting with private institutions for the delivery of educational programs and services where there is critical state need for graduates in a particular field. The accelerated baccalaureate degree in liberal studies was based upon a number of benefits that were attractive. The program provided for a degree in three years, thereby saving the state the costs involved in a four-year traditional program. The Nova Southeastern University model employed and evaluated the utility of advanced computer technologies in the instructional process. Finally, the University developed an innovative curricular design. By 1991, the state-funded program at Nova Southeastern University demonstrated that the aforementioned objectives were or could be met, and by 1993 the program was modified by the institution. In critical ways, the opening up of the liberal studies programs to all students and the lengthening of the program to four years ameliorated the very aspects of the program that made it attractive for state funding. The current focus of the state-funded program on service learning must be evaluated separate from those unique aspects of the accelerated liberal studies program which are no longer applicable.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATION

In general, Florida can benefit from the production of students with baccalaureate degrees. Baccalaureate degree production in 1993-94 for 18-44 age population was 76 percent of the average of the top ten economically successful states. Although this program has been funded outside of the established contracting process, the criteria used for the awarding of contracts is appropriate for use in this instance. The contracting process was designed to provide the state with a cost effective way to provide for the production of college graduates in professions where a critical need exists. With the enrollment and funding challenges facing Florida, state revenues will have to be stretched and attention to the most critical needs must be paramount.

The SCORE program is a well executed service learning program consisting of required coursework, community service activities, and monthly reflective activities coupled with pursuit of a degree in a specific discipline such as business, education, or the life sciences. The program is not a professional degree track nor does it produce a student with a specific career preparation. Students who participate in the SCORE program do so as an additional component of their educational experience - the main objective for them is the completion of a degree in some professional field or academic discipline. As a result, the state-funded SCORE program is different from others in that it does not directly result in the production of students with credentials in a profession or field in which the state is experiencing a critical shortage or need.

A review of similar opportunities offered in the State University System indicates that a student at Florida Atlantic University or Florida International University would be able to follow a very similar path of service

learning and voluntary community service. The universities offer students the opportunity to participate in a liberal studies degree program and both offer volunteer and service learning opportunities. Further, recent actions by the Board of Regents and reports from the state universities suggest that volunteer activities and service learning course offerings will continue to expand. For the most part, student sensitivity to the needs of the local community or increased student volunteerism are desirable outcomes but they are, in this instance, ancillary to the production of graduates with a specific major field of study or profession. The availability of similar opportunities in the public sector, coupled with the fact that the SCORE program does not result in a graduate with a unique profession that would meet the crucial state needs test, suggests that continued funding of the program in its current form is not in the best interest of the State.

The original accelerated liberal studies baccalaureate degree program proposal was, in many ways, an initiative ahead of its time. The institution should be commended for its efforts to attempt the three-year degree track utilizing advanced telecommunications technologies as a support and delivery medium. Similarly, the SCORE program's focus on service learning came at a time when such courses were less widespread. Florida faces intense access pressure due to significant increases in the number of high school graduates over the next ten years. A number of options are under consideration by the Commission which could serve to provide increased access for students. Two such options involve increased utilization of the private institutions and examining the educational system's efficiency to find ways to decrease the amount of time a student takes to obtain a degree. The recent proposal by Nova Southeastern University to modify its state-supported liberal studies program builds upon the lessons learned from the earlier accelerated program and suggests a useful model for an accelerated competency-based baccalaureate degree. Considerable development work and investment by the institution will have to be made to implement the program. Some policy issues concerning funding in a new curricular paradigm still need to be explored, however, the model, as developed, addresses time-to-degree concerns and educational productivity in promising ways consistent with both the Master Plan and suggested postsecondary curricular reform literature. The institution should be encouraged to continue to develop the reconfigured accelerated baccalaureate degree program.

Recommendation:

Nova Southeastern University should refocus the state-funded liberal studies/SCORE program consistent with their proposal for an accelerated outcomes-based baccalaureate degree to begin in the Fall of 1999. Students currently enrolled in the SCORE program should be allowed to complete their course of study. Any new students should be admitted under the three-year accelerated outcomes-based baccalaureate degree option.

APPENDICES

SCORE

EDUCATIONAL AND SERVICE PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS

YEAR	COURSES	SERVICE	REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES
One	CORE 1410 Journey I CORE 1420 Human Nature, Human Behavior CORE 1430 The Living Earth CORE 1440 Other Voices, Other Visions	*Minimum of 9 hours per month at local community or campus service agency *Group service projects	*Monthly reflective essays *Monthly circle discussion groups
Two	CORE 2460 Economic Growth and Development or CORE 2450 Individual and Social Systems One SERV (service-learning course)	*Minimum of 9 hours per month at a local community agency *Group service projects	*Monthly reflective essays *Monthly circle discussion groups
Three	CORE 3470 Ethical Systems One SERV (service-learning course)	*Minimum of 9 hours per month at local, national or international agency *Group service projects	*Monthly reflective essays *Monthly circle discussion groups
Four	CORE 4480 Journey II SERV ____ Senior Project	*Minimum of 9 hours per month devoted to the planning, development and implementation of the Senior Service Project	*Monthly reflective essays *Monthly circle discussion groups (group leader) *Senior Service Project Summary and Program Review

Nova Southeastern University's Ten General Education Objectives

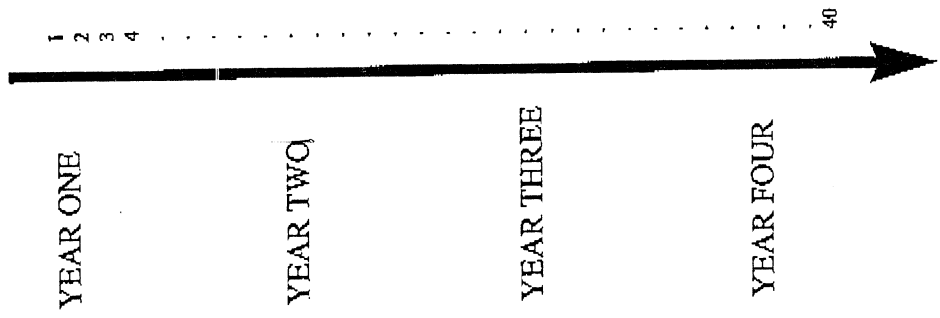
The successful graduate of each undergraduate major should demonstrate his/her ability to:

1. Compose, write, and edit effectively;
2. Promote effective oral communication and argumentation skills;
3. Promote facility with varied research methods and sources for both coursework and career preparation;
4. Foster critical analysis of the roles and ethical responsibilities of the individual in academic, social, and political environments;
5. Apply technological, logical, and scientific models to practical problems;
6. Analyze the complexity of global issues and human rights from historical and multicultural perspectives;
7. Investigate the processes, evidence, and effects of historic change as they affect the individual;
8. Assess technological forces as they affect the environment and prompt individual responsibility;
9. Study the dynamic of economic forces affecting the individual; and
10. Reason critically about basic questions posed by humanities and the arts (i.e., philosophy, literature, film visual and performing arts).

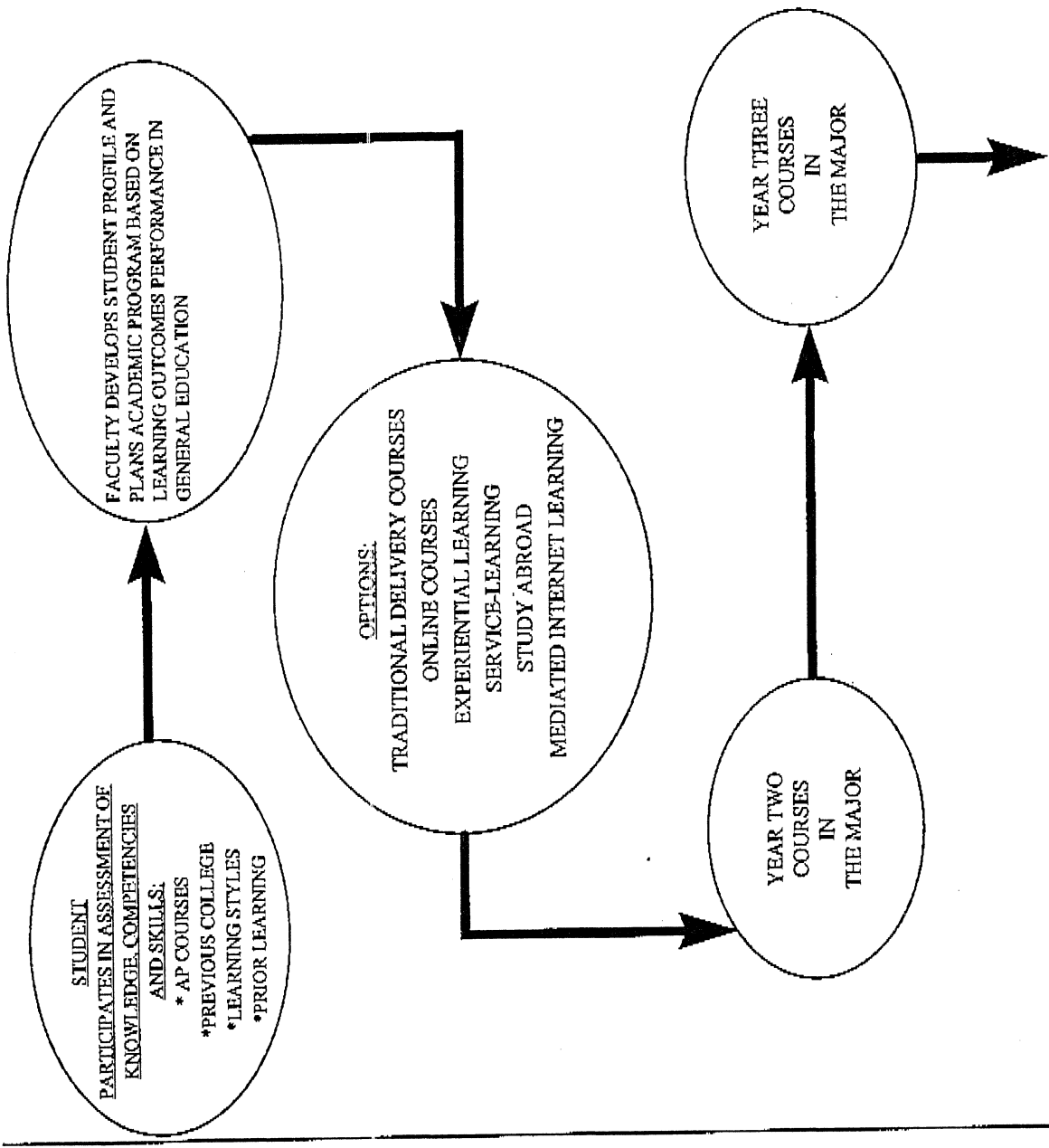
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY PROPOSED PROGRAM

TRADITIONAL FOUR-YEAR BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

STUDENT ENTERS:
ENROLLS IN 3 CREDIT COURSES:



NSU THREE-YEAR BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM



120 CREDITS = GRADUATION

DEMONSTRATED MASTERY OF BACCALAUREATE OUTCOMES = GRADUATION