To: Undergraduate Council
From: Martha Haun, Sarah Fishman, co-chairs, Core Committee
Date: 1 February 2007
Re: Core Committee Proposal

The Core Committee met 31 January 2007 to draw up its recommendations about Core/Gen Ed assessment. After several meetings and much discussion, we propose the following to the UC for approval.

1. The university should develop or purchase an electronic, web-based system to collect student work generated in courses taken at UH. This electronic repository would store materials we can use to assess Core competencies. We prefer that any system the University invests in be adaptable for multiple purposes. In addition to collecting material for Core competencies, for example, it could also be used by departments collecting capstone materials for Institutional Effectiveness purposes, or by students putting together a professional portfolio, or a writing portfolio. Several existing systems that can do all this are available for purchase. The Core Committee cannot determine whether to develop or purchase a system. We simply request that it include the features listed above, and that it be configured such that the students themselves upload the required materials.

2. The materials collected will be used to evaluate the following Core Competencies on a regular, rotating cycle: Writing, Critical Thinking and Reading. The UH Catalogue description of the three Core Competencies is copied below:

   Reading:

   Reading at the college level means the ability to analyze and interpret a variety of printed materials-books, articles, and documents. A core curriculum should offer students the opportunity to master both general methods of analyzing printed materials and specific methods for analyzing the subject matter of individual disciplines.

   Writing

   Competency in writing is the ability to produce clear, correct, and coherent prose adapted to purpose, occasion, and audience. Although correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation are each a sine qua non in any composition, they do not automatically ensure that the composition itself makes sense or that the writer has much of anything to say. Students need to be familiar with the writing process including how to discover a topic and how to develop and organize it, how to

phrase it effectively for their audience. These abilities can be acquired only through practice and reflection.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking embraces methods for applying both qualitative and quantitative skills analytically and creatively to subject matter in order to evaluate arguments and to construct alternative strategies. Problem solving is one of the applications of critical thinking; it is used to address an identified task.

3. The University recently completed an assessment of undergraduate student writing. The Core Committee proposes that Institutional Effectiveness begin the process of evaluating Critical Thinking, starting with a survey of faculty opinions about what constitutes critical thinking and about the work students complete for courses in each discipline that might be used to assess critical thinking.

4. The Core Committee recommends that "first time in college students" entering UH in the Fall of 2007 be required to upload to their portfolios: a final paper written in English 1304; one writing assignment produced for a Core Humanities or Social Sciences course; a writing or other assignment completed outside of class for a 3000 or higher level course in the student's major.

5. The Core Committee is proposing its preferred method of assessing student learning in the Core. Neither the Core Committee nor Undergraduate Council can properly oversee or manage such assessments. The University will assign to the appropriate offices the tasks of purchasing or developing the system, informing students of the new requirement to post materials to a portfolio, enforcing that requirement, conducting the assessments and reporting findings to the University community. We recognize that faculty may be asked to assist in these tasks as a service to the university.