New York University
Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee

Advisory on the Morse Academic Plan
April 17, 2007

In fall 2006 the Provost charged the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee
to begin a University-wide discussion of the liberal arts requirements and to look, in
particular, at the differences between the Morse Academic Plan (MAP) and the General
Studies Program (GSP) core. He requested that, after completing its examination, the
committee advise him on whether or not to ask the faculty of these two schools to
reexamine the issue of general education.

The main goals of the MAP have included the staffing of all lectures with full-
time faculty, the maintenance of faculty oversight and quality control over the courses,
and the assurance of some degree of commonality and coherence in the general education
that students receive. The MAP has generally managed to achieve these limited but
important goals, and the committee recommends that any modification or replacement
of the MAP preserve these positive features.

It has been twelve years since the MAP went into effect for CAS students, and
even though the flexibility that was built into the program has brought about significant
changes (e.g., allowing more departmental courses to fulfill MAP requirements), only a
more thoroughgoing and systematic review can deal with some of the challenges that it
faces. Among these is, at the operational level, the ongoing challenge of sustainability—
of securing from departments a reliable supply of appropriate faculty and TAs so that the
program can supply the large number of seats required every semester. To put it another
way, the curriculum needs to be more closely aligned with departmental teaching
resources. An additional challenge is presented by the close resemblance of the curricula
of the MAP and of the GSP core, though the modes of delivery are necessarily very
different; the challenge here is to make these two curricula appropriately distinctive,
in keeping with the two schools’ different characters and missions. At the same time, there
is an opportunity for some cross-fertilization, as knowledge of what works in one area
may benefit the other. Finally, and very importantly, the need to serve large numbers of
non-CAS students in the MAP has made it very difficult to build an intellectual identity
and sense of community in CAS. In this regard it may be useful to find out from the other
schools what they consider appropriate general education components for their students
and to identify other components that could be aimed specifically at CAS students and
help them develop a stronger College identity.

The committee discussed the pros and cons of various general education options.
One would be a more assertive core that aims to provide students with a common body of
knowledge and skills required for enlightened citizenship. Another would be a system
that puts the teaching of intellectual methods and tools before the imparting of specific
content and that might be more of a distributional requirement than the current MAP. The committee is not recommending any one option, but it notes that the FAS faculty are researchers and that it would thus be desirable that the College’s general education reflect this reality.

For all these reasons, the committee voted unanimously at its meeting of March 22 to advise the Provost to ask the FAS Deans to call for a review, in the appropriate venues, of general education in CAS and its relation both to general education in GSP and to other elements in the CAS curriculum such as departmental courses and major requirements. In addition, the committee voted at its meeting of April 16 to recommend that the Office of the Provost lead discussions with the Deans of the other undergraduate schools about their general education requirements, taking into account various possible options for curriculum design and delivery.