

Executive Summary

In response to the demands and expectations of a 21st Century world and workplace, this white paper provides reasons why Catawba College should adopt the idea of a liberal education as its institutional philosophy. A liberal education entails a broad range of knowledge, intellectual and practical skills, and individual and social responsibility fostered and developed in all academic programs, including general education and majors, and from the freshman to senior years. This educational philosophy should serve as a guiding compass for the institution's learning outcomes, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and faculty development.

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An Institutional Philosophy of Education at Catawba College

In their afterword regarding *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree*, the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U, 2004) contends that faculties must take “primary responsibility for outcomes, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment because all these elements comprise teaching and learning.” Further, AAC&U proposes that when college faculty take on this responsibility, it is incumbent that “collectively, an institution’s faculty should discuss, agree on, and make transparent the broad outcomes of undergraduate education. In this process, *faculty members should look to institutional mission for distinctiveness, to the future for relevance, and to the national consensus forming around the importance of liberal learning for anchorage*” (Emphasis added, 25).

The President’s Ad Hoc Committee reviewed numerous documents and surveys (see appendix for complete listing) to arrive at the following statement of an institutional philosophy of education for Catawba College:

Catawba College is an institution that provides a liberal education rich in personal attention. This education is based on common qualities—a broad range of knowledge, intellectual and practical skills, and individual and social responsibility—and is fostered and developed in all academic programs, including general education and majors, and from the freshman to senior years. With these common qualities, Catawba graduates are prepared for the demands and challenges of personal and professional life in the twenty-first century.

An Education In, and For, the Twenty-First Century

Demands

The demands of the twenty-first century require that college graduates meet high expectations and be ready for an ever-changing world. It must be accepted as a reality that the first profession college graduates enter most likely will not be the same profession that they retire from; instead, citizens of this century must evolve and intentionally grow throughout their career. The fact that Americans who graduate with a college degree at the beginning of the

twenty-first century will experience at least ten job changes in the first two decades of their careers demands that their skills and capabilities guarantee flexibility and mobility (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). AAC&U notes that the “new economic reality is that narrow preparation in a single area—whether that field is chemistry or information technology or history—is exactly the opposite of what graduates need from college. Study-in-depth remains an important part of the overall pattern of college learning [but] students deserve to know that focusing only on one specialty is far from enough” (2007, 17). In a recent survey, a majority of employers believe that higher education “should place greater emphasis on a variety of learning outcomes,” such as “knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative learning” (Hart Research Associates 2010, 1-2).

Expectations

In confronting this changing environment, citizens of the twenty-first century must “learn to sift and deploy knowledge of many kinds: knowledge about human life as part of the natural world, about how human societies have come into being and function, including their institutions and their technologies, and about how various peoples and groups understand their own lives” (Sullivan and Rosin 2008, 3). In order to fully participate and appreciate the challenges that they will face, today’s college students need a comprehension of basic knowledge and the exposure and application of that knowledge to questions and issues confronting them, all helping to make “sense of their place” in an ever-changing world (Sullivan and Rosin 2008, 3). To be a participant in this environment, knowledge of the human experience—the cultural, physical and natural aspects —must be essential in any twenty-first century college student’s experience.

Along with understanding and applying a broad range of knowledge, college graduates need a core set of skills and capabilities that will transfer from one professional setting to another to build a meaningful career. No matter the profession, employers demand particular competences: communication skills, critical and creative thinking skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, teamwork and leadership skills, decision-making based on ethical consideration, and the ability to seek and work with information in a variety of formats (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2010; Hart Research Associates 2010). Along with these intellectual and practical skills, employers seek individuals who take both personal and social responsibility for their

actions, are civically engaged, understand local and global perspectives, comprehend and apply intercultural knowledge, and have a commitment to lifelong learning.

Therefore, college graduates must be broadly knowledgeable, equipped with critical skills and capabilities, and possess the fundamental values that employers seek and that will provide graduates with the necessary foundation for not only a meaningful professional life, but a meaningful personal life as well. The committee contends that these expectations can be accomplished best through a liberal education.

Liberal Education

A liberal education is “a comprehensive set of aims and outcomes that are essential for all students because they are important to all fields of endeavor” (AAC&U 2007, 4). A liberal education unifies the ideas of liberal arts education and professional education into one overarching educational philosophy; it draws on the strengths and distinctive aspects of both the liberal arts and professional studies in preparing today’s college students for success in their future pursuits. By intentionally combining and merging the qualities and characteristics of what Catawba College has often thought of as liberal studies and career preparation, a Catawba liberal education will prepare graduates who embody common hallmarks: knowledge of the cultural, natural, physical, and societal dimensions of our world; proficiency in communication; ability to think critically and creatively; ability to apply analytical and problem-solving capabilities; possession of moral and ethical reasoning in their decision-making; and knowledge of what it means to be a citizen at the local and global level. These can be viewed as the broad key learning outcomes of a liberal education, which ultimately is a Catawba education.

Outcomes:

As a liberal education relates to Catawba College, the following *key learning outcomes* should be embraced and cultivated **across the entire educational experience** of each student.

KNOWLEDGE of Human Culture and the Natural and Physical World (focused by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring):

- Arts
- Humanities

- Languages
- Mathematics
- Sciences
- Social sciences
- Integration of learning

INTELLECTUAL AND PRACTICAL SKILLS (practiced and developed extensively across the curriculum):

- Communication skills
- Critical and creative thinking skills
- Problem solving and analytical skills
- Quantitative literacy skills
- Information literacy skills
- Teamwork and leadership skills

INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

- Civic knowledge and engagement at the local and global level
- Moral and ethical reasoning
- Intercultural knowledge and application
- Foundational skills and propensity for lifelong learning

(AAC&U *College Learning for the New Global Century*, 13).

Design

A liberal education's design is explicit, particularly by focusing on knowledge, skills, and values identified throughout all curricular (and, where possible, extracurricular) activities in a student's Catawba experience. One can think of liberal education as being all-encompassing of all academic activities of Catawba students; knowledge and skills should travel with Catawba students throughout their educational experience at the institution and throughout their lifetime experiences to help them develop a permanent sense of learning.

At the heart of a liberal education is the marriage of the best of two educational philosophies: the liberal arts and professional preparation. Both bring distinctive and relevant characteristics to

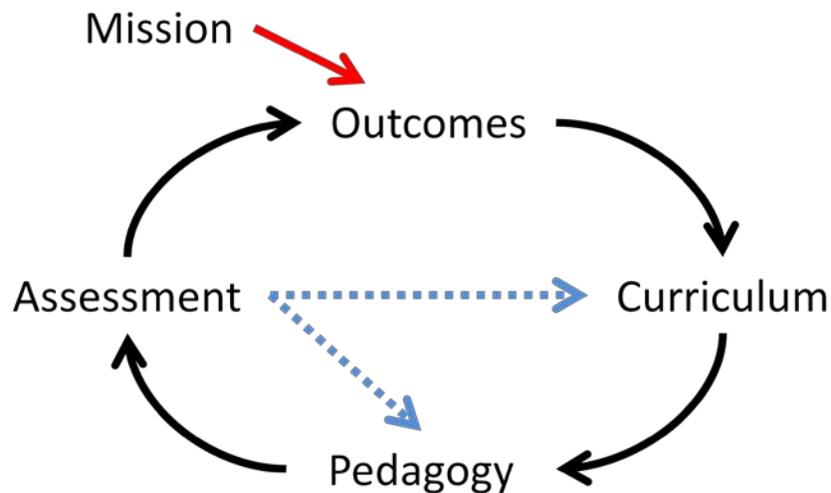
create a holistically-educated college graduate who is prepared to confront the challenges of the twenty-first century. Both the liberal arts and professional studies should focus jointly on the core skills that college graduates must have and that future employers seek in the college graduates: broad-based knowledge, communication skills, critical and creative thinking skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, teamwork and leadership skills, decision-making based on ethical consideration, and the ability to seek and work with information in a variety of formats. The terms “liberal arts” and “professional” must be reframed into a combined effort to fully achieve the outcome of a liberal education.

One can use the term “liberal arts,” which can be understood to encompass the arts and sciences, to stress breadth and invite wide-ranging inquiry through various academic disciplines and methodologies to understanding knowledge. As Sullivan and Rosin (2010) describe, the aim of teaching the liberal arts is to develop an “ability to assume responsibility for [one’s] purposes and identity” (2). Similarly, the term “professional” derives from a focused program of study that prepares students for career opportunities, as well as for graduate or professional school training. Again, Sullivan and Rosin contend that professional education provides students with “access to the actual practices, as well as the purposes, of the profession” (2). Both approaches should be grounded in the idea that the intellectual foundations of a challenging liberal arts education and meaningful professional education are essentially the same. Knowledgeable and effective citizens are as much in need of broad intellectual perspectives, analytical skills, and problem-solving strategies as are most professionals. This educational philosophy insures versatility in one’s personal and professional life, endeavors to keep pace with changes in the social, technical, and cultural environments of the twenty-first century, and “erases the artificial distinctions between studies deemed liberal (interpreted to mean that they are not related to job training) and those called practical (which are assumed to be)... Quality liberal education prepares students for active participation in the private and public sectors, in a diverse democracy, and in an even more diverse global community” (AAC&U 2002, 25-26).

Specifically, this statement of educational philosophy proposes that the essence of a liberal education should be found within the following critical areas of a Catawba education: in our curriculum, evident in the content knowledge, skills, and values promoted; in our pedagogy; in our assessment framework and practices; and in a well-managed and adequately-supported

faculty development program that facilitates improved teaching and scholarship about teaching, as well as the more traditional scholarly and disciplinary engagements of the faculty.

As noted by AAC&U's reflections on taking responsibility for undergraduate education, the overarching structure of an undergraduate education derives from the learning *outcomes* that develop into the *curriculum*, that are delivered through *pedagogy*, which is *assessed* to provide feedback to the learning outcomes. One can think of this process in a circular structure (see AAC&U 2004, 6):



Faculty Obligations

Along with this model for creating and conceptualizing an undergraduate education, AAC&U contends that faculty must develop “a shared language that speaks to local concerns, clarifying the meaning and implications of the goals, and building ownership of the concepts” (AAC&U 2004, 5). Owning and being committed to the learning outcomes “are the bases for converting the statement of learning outcomes into educational reality. Without ownership and commitment, implementation becomes difficult and haphazard” (AAC&U 2004, 5). It is essential, therefore, that all academic programs share in the responsibility for the implementation of the broad learning outcomes and mirror the processes of the model in their programs. This means that “faculty members are expected to employ teaching practices that advance the desired learning outcomes; to assess how well the curriculum and instruction succeed; and then to make adjustments for still greater success” (AAC&U 2004, 5).

In order to achieve this vision of a Catawba education, the faculty must endorse and obligate themselves to achieving the idea of a liberal education. It is all too typical across colleges and

universities that faculty obligations have tended to be narrow and focused, whether it is to their discipline or their commitment to general education or major studies. This is reflected in the traditional educational division of labor, often pitting general education against the major and the traditionally-defined liberal arts disciplines against the professional disciplines. While the “balkanized approach to general education still prevails among most faculty members, students, and advisors” and a “vision of a self-contained major continues to dominate the undergraduate curriculum,” we must recognize and acknowledge that “*it is impossible for faculty in any discipline to defend the inability of their graduates to perform*” the key outcomes of a liberal education (AAC&U 2004, 11, emphasis added). Therefore, it is imperative that all faculty recognize, promote, and own a liberal education.

Liberal Education and the Curriculum

In considering the curricular aspects of a liberal education, it must be emphasized that the characteristics of a liberal education—that of broad-based knowledge, communication skills, critical and creative thinking skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, teamwork and leadership skills, decision-making based on ethical consideration, the ability to seek and work with information in a variety of formats, and individual and social values—be embodied and continuously reflected upon within all academic experiences and encounters by Catawba students. For this institutional philosophy to truly succeed and prepare Catawba graduates for a meaningful life after their collegiate experience, all academic programs—whether general education, majors, minors, electives, the arts and sciences, or professional programs—must employ purposefully the common characteristics of liberal education. As noted in the report *College Learning for the New Global Century*,

“The LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise) National Leadership Council recommends, therefore, that the essential aims and outcomes be emphasized across every field of college study, whether the field is conventionally considered one of the arts and sciences disciplines or whether it is one of the professional and technical fields ... General education plays a role, but it is not possible to squeeze all these important aims into the general education program alone. The majors must address them as well” (4).

In order to adequately realize these characteristics, it must be the educational philosophy of every academic program on the Catawba campus to develop and nurture these qualities within all

students. While there will be distinct and disciplinary learning outcomes for each academic program to fulfill, the incorporation and inclusion of a liberal education must be at the heart of each and every academic program and its related curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

By utilizing the idea of a liberal education, each academic program at Catawba College should focus on important aspects within the curriculum: content knowledge, intellectual and practical skills, and values of individual and social responsibility.

Content Knowledge:

For most college faculty, content knowledge is key: upon spending years in graduate education and further study to develop and hone their knowledge, faculty tend to specialize in particular areas within their disciplines. This has become the natural progression of one's academic career; yet, in the twenty-first century, *specialization is not the preferred outcome* for an undergraduate education. In their recommendations from *College Learning for the New Global Century*, AAC&U urges a “remapping” towards a liberal education “so that all parts of the academy and all fields of study address—in ways appropriate to their subjects—the essential learning outcomes ... To take this step, higher education will also need to break out of the academic categories and silos that were established in the last curriculum revolution, and that still organize the division of labor across most campuses...” (2007, 18). AAC&U goes on to state that

“It is in everyone's interest to create new crosswalks and communal spaces that support educational collaboration across the traditional academic dividing lines between the liberal arts and sciences and the professional fields. But if collaborations are to succeed, they need to be based in shared goals” (2010, 18).

These shared goals should be evident across disciplinary boundaries; this may necessitate the willingness of faculty to expand their scholarly approaches beyond their current specializations. If instructors are to teach students the value of a liberal education, then instructors must model that approach in creative and innovative ways. It should be recognized, as the report *College Learning for the New Global Century* does, that students “will still concentrate in selected fields because, while not sufficient, studies in depth are important. They will certainly need a rich mix of arts and sciences courses in order to learn about the wider world. **The key change is that,**

whatever and wherever they elect to study, each college student will be helped to achieve, in ways appropriate to his or her educational interests, a high level of integrative learning and demonstrated accomplishment across the full range of essential learning outcomes”

(Emphasis in original; AAC&U 2007, 19).

Intellectual and Practical Skills:

The skills within each academic program should emphasize and consciously develop the characteristics of a liberal education. These characteristics—communication skills, critical and creative thinking, analytical and problem-solving approaches, the literacy to deal with multiple forms of information (quantitative, qualitative, literary, factual, among others), teamwork and leadership—should be evident in all academic programs, whether a program is classified as a traditional liberal arts or a professional program. Students should be exposed to these approaches in their general education courses and in their major studies. Faculty must continually raise the level of expectations when it comes to these skills so that students not only hone, but also further refine and sense an increasing level of challenge when it comes to intellectual and practical skills as their academic standing increases from their introductory to advanced level experiences.

Values of Individual and Social Responsibility:

Educational practice has long noted that more than just knowledge and textbook learning occurs during a student’s college education; the best form of an educational experience introduces critical values and ideas and helps students to wrestle with differing ideas and approaches that they will confront in society. The ideal of higher education has emphasized the fostering of personal and social responsibility. We want students who not only contribute, but also can help build their communities. This is evident through the recent movements of service learning, civic engagement, and other initiatives adopted by institutions of higher education. By recognizing the importance of participatory citizens in our democratic republic and our modern world, the promotion of key values—civic knowledge and engagement, moral and ethical reasoning, knowledge of and appreciation of different cultures—is the third critical component of a liberal education’s curriculum. As noted in AAC&U’s *College Learning for the New Global Century*, “every field of study, no matter how ‘technical,’ is a community of practice. For this

reason, no field is ‘value-free.’ Every community of practice is framed by communal values and ethical responsibilities” (2007, 39). Professors who model and teach the kinds of deliberations that address critical and difficult differences, no matter the field or the level of coursework, will enable Catawba graduates to develop the foundational capabilities to deal with future issues and concerns facing our society. This could be done in conjunction with the content knowledge mentioned above.

Liberal Education and Pedagogy

Students’ success in achieving the proposed *key learning outcomes* of a liberal education at Catawba depends significantly on effective teaching throughout all curricular programs. A liberal education must focus on the time and activities inside the classroom and on the interactions between teachers and students, which is how a curriculum is animated and communicated: “However beautifully designed our curricula, the proof is really in our classrooms and on our campuses, and in whether what today’s students learn in these places prepares them to make good decisions for an ever-evolving and complex world” (Carey 2009, 3). In order to effect any kind of change in our institution’s educational philosophy and ultimately our students’ learning, support must be provided to faculty who will play an essential role in that change.

Today's conversation about pedagogy is rich with discussions of both traditional and new strategies to facilitate and enhance learning. From this wealth of pedagogical information and empirically based conclusions, patterns have emerged that show promise of providing a conceptual framework for undergraduate learning which is both contemporary and is within the traditions of liberal education. Therefore, the committee has not attempted, in this document, to distill new principles for effective teaching, since the literature already demonstrates well-developed principles of good practice. Instead, the following established principles (in no prioritized order) represent intentional pedagogical practices that facilitate the implementation of the key learning outcomes. An effective teacher:

- Creates and communicates clear goals and high expectations
- Encourages contact between students and faculty
- Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
- Respects diverse talents and ways of knowing

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- Provides coherent, progressive learning
- Creates synthesizing experiences
- Integrates education and experience
- Creates active learning experiences
- Requires ongoing practice of skills in varied ways and venues
- Connects knowledge with choices and action
- Enables collaborative/cooperative learning
- Fosters civic, intercultural, and ethical learning
- Provides sufficient time on task
- Assesses learning and gives prompt feedback

Empowering learning is challenging and complex as the teacher is required to negotiate not only a body of knowledge, but also an ever-changing and diverse group of learners (Reder, 2007). Effective teachers are able to integrate and synthesize. They also teach purposefully, reflecting on their teaching and making changes as needed. Their teaching is rarely based on only one narrow approach. Communicating clear goals, designing collaborative learning assignments, incorporating active learning experiences, offering prompt feedback, and utilizing higher-order assignments (writing essays, proposing and solving “big questions”—both contemporary and enduring—and making and analyzing arguments) all contribute to student growth in established educational goals. Although these teaching practices may seem obvious, Charles Blaich, the director of Wabash’s Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, maintains that there is great room for improvement in our classrooms: “... a majority of the students at our institutions are not getting ‘high enough’ levels of these teaching practices and conditions” (Reder 2007, 12).

The learning outcomes of a liberal education require a student’s entire college career and the entire curriculum to achieve. Thus the entire faculty must work together to give students a coherent experience in terms of curriculum and pedagogy that achieves these goals.

Based on suggestions from the AAC&U (2002, 33), the following examples represent effective teaching strategies that engage the learning outcomes of a liberal education:

Knowledge

Outcome

Facilitating Strategies

the human imagination, expression,
and the products of many cultures

interdisciplinary and integrated courses on
creativity through the ages

modeling the natural world

student team-designed lab experiments to
answer questions

integration of learning

capstone courses, internships, learning
communities

Intellectual/Practical Skills

Outcome

Facilitating Strategies

communicate well in diverse settings and
groups, using written and oral means

writing assignments of multiple kinds
(expository, creative, and personal writing)
for many purposes; required and critiqued
oral presentations

employ a variety of skills to solve problems

problem-based learning; undergraduate
research; inquiry-based science labs

work well in teams, including those of
diverse composition, and build consensus

planned and supervised experiences in
teamwork, both in class and in off-campus
settings

critical thinking

analysis of text/data; problem-based assignments.

creative thinking

assignments characterized by a high degree of
innovation, divergent thinking and risk taking,
requiring students to synthesize in original and
imaginative ways.

Individual and Social Responsibility

Outcome

Facilitating Strategies

global and cross-cultural communities

drawing on students' diverse experiences to enrich classroom discussion; integrating both foreign and domestic travel experiences into courses; teaching courses worldwide through video-conferencing

active participation as a citizen of service learning; diverse democracy

informed debate on proposed solutions to current social problems

understanding one's self

personal writing that requires self-reflection upon a wide variety of subjects, and that situates the self in relation to others

Liberal Education and Assessment

Trends throughout higher education demonstrate the importance of assessment. As Derek Bok (2006) recently pointed out in *Our Underachieving Colleges*,

“It is true that after much external prodding many colleges have begun to assess how their students are progressing toward various educational goals. Nevertheless, less than one-third of all colleges nationwide conduct comprehensive evaluations to determine whether they are achieving the purposes of their general education program. Higher proportions try to assess student progress toward certain individual goals, such as competence in writing or critical thinking. Still, as one recent review pointed out, ‘just because an institution assessed student learning outcomes relative to a general education goal [does] not mean that the assessment information was used in [planning the curriculum]’. Nor is there much indication that these evaluations affect how professors teach their courses or how departments develop their concentrations.” (316-17)

Assessment is the empirical (qualitative or quantitative) corroboration of the learning stipulated in course or program learning outcomes. A course or program starts with a set of learning outcomes and finishes with an assessment of the results, which can then be used, if necessary, to revise goals, pedagogy, or assessment methods. Assessment thus helps faculty “to deepen

learning and to establish a culture of shared purpose and continuous improvement” and operates at a variety of scales (AAC&U 2007, 40).

Instructors who respond to a student’s body language and modify their approach in the classroom are assessing student learning and reacting to it. Likewise, instructors who analyze student performance on an assignment and alter their course materials the next time they teach the course are assessing student learning. Ultimately, however, while assessment of simple knowledge can be gauged through simple tools, assessment of complex skills requires more complex tools. For example, “The right standard for both assessment and accountability at the college level is students’ demonstrated ability to apply their knowledge to complex, unscripted problems in the context of their advanced studies [in both the major and general education]” (AAC&U, 2007, 40-41).

Assessment is a key element in improving student learning and teaching effectiveness. To be effective instructors, we must have a clear picture of what students learn in our classrooms. Moreover, we must then use that information to improve our approach to teaching – assessment informs pedagogy. If we want to be sure that our students have achieved the learning outcomes described in the liberal education section of this document, we must assess student performance as it relates to those outcomes. While there are many tools we can use to build an effective assessment program – such as course-based assignments, senior projects, portfolios, or outside assessment like the College Learning Assessment – it is the province of individual programs, in conjunction with the APA and GEAR committees, to determine the particulars suggested by this assessment vision. The next major challenge at Catawba will involve determining how assessment is *improving* student learning.

Finally, the faculty at Catawba College should consider the development of effective assessment tools as a part of their professional development. We need not develop these tools in isolation, but rather should benefit from the latest research and techniques of assessment developed and described in published scholarship and at institutions elsewhere.

Liberal Education and Faculty Development

Ideally, faculty development must touch on all aspects of a liberal education, including its outcomes, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. While faculty development has many aspects to it, two traditional aspects are disciplinary scholarly activity and the advancement and

improvement of teaching. Scholarly activity may include writing, conducting research, and participating in professional conferences. Scholarship is essential to remain current in a discipline, to interact with other scholars, and to introduce students to a discipline's professional life. The advancement of teaching is also essential for faculty members, and is an area where the entire faculty can participate in common experiences. One way to undertake this task is for Catawba College to engage more fully in the "scholarship of teaching" (Boyer). The faculty at Catawba College have a long history of leading this type of development. Teaching Matters lunch discussions, the recent semester-long study group on teaching writing, and First Year Experience retreats are all recent examples of faculty development centering on teaching. We strongly endorse the need to bring faculty development to the forefront in future discussions and incorporate this activity for all Catawba faculty if the educational philosophy outlined in this document is adopted and successful at Catawba College. We urge the administration of Catawba College to make the investment of time, resources, and incentives towards this endeavor and to actively support all faculty in their development towards implementing a true liberal education.

President's Ad Hoc Committee

Drs. Michael Bitzer (chair), Julie Chamberlain, Gordon Grant, Jason Hunt, Joe Poston, Rhonda Truitt, with Steve Coggin and Woody Hood (*ex-officio*)

Adopted by the Faculty of Catawba College (50-3) on September 7, 2010

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