

Curricular Proposals and Recommendations

(Approved Unanimously by the Academic Council on April 8, 2003)

Preamble

Every ten years, as part of its strategic planning process, the university undertakes a review of its undergraduate curriculum. Of special concern in this university-wide curriculum review are the courses required of every undergraduate at the university, for this core curriculum as a whole does not fall under the purview of any single department or college. The following proposals and recommendations emerge from the curriculum review process of 2002-03. They did not arise in response to some particular problem or problems with the curriculum, but result from the university's continual effort to review and improve the education of its undergraduate students.

For the purpose of this document, the phrases *core curriculum* and *core requirements* will refer interchangeably to the courses, with the exception of Physical Education, that are required of all students in the university for the receipt of a baccalaureate degree. The university requirements are found in 15.2.a of The Academic Code, and what we are calling the core curriculum or core requirements are listed below in section I of Proposal 2.

The proposals below are intended to supercede any existing policies to the contrary.

Proposal 1: Create Incentives to Increase Faculty Engagement in the Core Curriculum

Central to undergraduate education at Notre Dame is the core curriculum, required of every undergraduate, that is intended to provide a common foundation in learning. Such core requirements are essential to the university's mission to foster "the development in its students of those disciplined habits of mind, body and spirit that characterize educated, skilled and free human beings" (*Mission Statement of the University of Notre Dame*). Developing and teaching such courses of high quality, however, demands of faculty significant time and labor, and faculty can only be expected to contribute such time and effort to the extent it is valued by the university, the colleges and the departments. We strongly urge the Provost, Deans, Department Chairs and any one else in administrative positions of any sort to ensure that time, money, resources and weight in the promotion process be devoted to developing and delivering courses of high quality which fulfill the core requirements. Incentives and support should be offered to individual faculty, departments and colleges to teach such courses well.

Proposal 2: Core Curriculum Committee & Subcommittees

I. The Core Requirements and Designated Academic Units: The following is a list of the core requirements and the academic unit or units which normally offer courses fulfilling that requirement. The latter will be referred to as the *designated academic unit(s)*, or just *designated unit(s)*, for that requirement.

- A. English Composition** – The University Writing Program
- B. Fine Arts** – The Department of Art, Art History and Design; the Creative Writing component of the English Department; the Department of Film, Television and Theater; and the Department of Music.
- C. History** – Department of History
- D. Literature** – Departments of Classics, East Asian Languages and Literatures, English, German and Russian Languages and Literatures, and Romance Languages and Literatures
- E. Mathematics** – Department of Mathematics
- F. Philosophy** – Department of Philosophy
- G. Science** – Departments of Biological Sciences, Chemistry and Biochemistry, Physics, Preprofessional Studies, and the Environmental Geosciences component of the Department of Civil Engineering and Geological Sciences.
- H. Social Science** – Departments of Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology
- I. Theology** – Department of Theology
- J. University Seminar** – A University Seminar may fulfill any of the above requirements for which there is a significant writing component, except Composition. For a particular University Seminar offering, the designated unit will be the one designated for the requirement the seminar is designed to fulfill.

II. Formulation of a Rationale for Each Core Requirement: For each core requirement a brief rationale (roughly 1-2 pages) will be formulated stating the contribution that the required course will make to a student's education. It will state the knowledge, skills, experiences, etc. that students should acquire through the course or courses that will satisfy this requirement. Once rationales are approved, a course which fulfills a core requirement will be directed to imparting to students the knowledge, skills, experiences, etc. specified in the rationale for that requirement.

The rationale will be drafted either by a department or a drafting committee, as specified below for each core requirement. The department or committee will draft the rationale and send it to the Core Curriculum Committee (see section VI below) for comment. The Core Curriculum Committee may make suggestions for possible changes, and the relevant department or drafting committee will make changes as it deems appropriate. The final version will then be sent to the Academic Council for approval. The Academic Council may make changes to the proposed rationale, but only after consulting the relevant department or drafting committee.

The drafting of a rationale for each core requirement will be done by the following bodies:

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- A. **History, Mathematics, Philosophy and Theology** -- The designated department will draft the rationale in a manner determined by the Departmental Chair.
- B. **Fine Arts, Literature and Social Science** -- For each core requirement, the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters will appoint a drafting committee, which will include representatives from each department designated for that requirement. The Dean will also appoint one member of the committee to serve as the chair.
- C. **Science** -- The drafting committee will be chaired by the Dean of the College of Science. The Dean of Science will appoint two faculty members of the designated departments of the College of Science to serve on the committee. The committee will also include the Dean of the College of Engineering and one other member of the College of Engineering appointed by the Dean of Engineering.
- D. **English Composition** -- The Director of the University Writing Program will chair the committee, and will appoint two other members to the committee. The Provost will appoint two other members.
- E. **University Seminar** -- University Seminars fulfill one of the core requirements, and each university seminar will be guided by the rationale for the requirement the course is designed to fulfill. In addition, the Core Curriculum Committee will draft a rationale for the University Seminar specifying the specific educational features all these seminars must have.

III. Core Curriculum Subcommittees: For each core requirement a Core Curriculum Subcommittee (CCS) will be formed. III, (A) - (G) below describes the standard composition of such subcommittees, while IV, (A) - (D) immediately below gives notes on and possible exceptions to the standard composition.

- A. **English Composition:** The Director of the University Writing Program will serve as chair, and he or she will appoint two members of the subcommittee. The Provost will appoint two members from outside the University Writing Program.
- B. **Fine Arts:** The CCS will include the Chair of the Department of Art, Art History and Design; a faculty member teaching Creative Writing in the English Department who is appointed by the Chair of that Department; and the Chairs of the Departments of Film, Television and Theater; and Music. The Dean of the College of Arts and Letters will appoint one of these as chair of the subcommittee. The Provost will appoint two additional members. Since this subcommittee is already inter-departmental in virtue of its *ex-officio* members, it is permissible though not necessary that the Provost's appointees be regular faculty within the designated units.
- C. **History, Mathematics, Philosophy, and Theology:** The CCS will be composed of five members. The chair of the CCS will be the chair of the designated department, and he or she will also appoint two other members of that department. The Provost will appoint two additional members who are regular faculty in departments other than the one designated for the requirement.
- D. **Literature:** The CCS will include the Chairs of the Departments of Classics, East

Asian Languages and Literatures, English, German and Russian Languages and Literatures, and Romance Languages and Literatures. The Dean of Arts and Letters will appoint one of these to serve as chair. The Provost will appoint two additional members. Since this subcommittee is already inter-departmental in virtue of its *ex-officio* members, it is permissible though not necessary that the Provost's appointees be regular faculty within the designated departments.

- E. Science:** The Chair will be the Dean of the College of Science, and he or she will appoint two other members from the designated departments of the College of Science. The Dean of the College of Engineering will also serve on this committee and appoint one other faculty member from the Engineering College to serve.
- F. Social Science:** The CCS will include the Chairs of the Departments of Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology. The Dean of the College of Arts and Letters will appoint one of these to serve as chair of the CCS. The Provost will appoint two additional members. Since this subcommittee is already inter-departmental in virtue of its *ex-officio* members, it is permissible though not necessary that the Provost's appointees be regular faculty within the designated departments.
- G. University Seminar:** The University Seminar will have no independent CCS, but each one will fall under the CCS for the requirement which the particular seminar is intended to fulfill.

IV. On the Composition of Core Curriculum Subcommittees

A. Provostial Appointments: In making appointments, the Provost is urged to consider various factors which would bring the optimal balance of perspectives and skills to reflection on the required courses. Ideal candidates would be those who have some expertise or at least acquaintance with the relevant field or fields, yet who can bring the perspective of another department, college or discipline. The chair of the CCS may make recommendations to the Provost regarding these appointments.

B. Designee Members: In the case of subcommittees described in (B), (C), (D) and (F) above, the Chair of a department may, with the approval of the Dean of the college of that department, designate a member of that department to serve on the subcommittee in his or her place. In the case of the Science subcommittee (E), the Dean of the College of Science and the Dean of the College of Engineering each may, with the approval of the Provost, designate a member of his or her respective college to serve in his or her place.

C. Term of Members: The term of Departmental Chairs and Deans on these CCS's will be for as long as they hold these offices. Those appointed by the Provost, a Departmental Chair or Dean will serve for a three year renewable term.

D. Size and Composition of Subcommittee: With the approval of the Provost, the size and composition of a subcommittee may be altered to achieve the optimal balance of members. However, for any subcommittee it is necessary that the majority of members are from the designated academic units, and the subcommittee is chaired by a chair of a designated department or a designee, or, in the case of science, by the Dean of the College or a designee, or, in the case of English composition, by the Director of the University Writing Program.

V. The Role of the Core Curriculum Subcommittees: Each CCS will seek appropriate ways to enhance teaching and learning in the courses fulfilling the requirement under its purview and to ensure that they accord with the rationale for that requirement. Each CCS has a judicial role of approving or denying approval to courses proposed to fulfill the relevant course university requirement, and the formal process for this approval is described below. However, the CCS must also see its role as providing assistance, encouragement and advice to individual faculty on how their proposed course might more effectively attain the goals specified in the rationale. CCS's, then, are urged to work with faculty to help them improve their courses, and not simply render judgements on them.

Courses proposed to fulfill a core requirement must be approved in one of the following ways:

A. Approval of a Course Proposed by a Member of the Designated Department(s) or Unit(s): These procedures are used by a faculty member with a regular or concurrent appointment in the department, or one of the departments, or another academic unit designated for the relevant core requirement.

1. Normal Procedure for Approval: An instructor, with the approval of his or her departmental chair, submits a syllabus or other appropriate description of the course to the CCS. The deadline for submission will be determined by the relevant subcommittee. The CCS then considers whether the proposed course can be expected to meet the objectives specified in the rationale. The CCS may ask for more information from the instructor, or may suggest ways in which the course might be enhanced and ask the instructor to resubmit the syllabus or course description. The CCS then decides by a majority vote whether the course will be approved. In case of a tie vote, the course is not approved. The CCS is encouraged to work with the instructor to make the course acceptable to fulfill the requirement. However, if the CCS finally does not approve, it gives its reasons in writing to the instructor. Once a course is approved, another instructor from a unit designated for that requirement may teach the course without seeking further approval, provided that the instructor retains the syllabus or course description under which it was originally approved.

2. Exceptional Procedure for Approval:

- a.** A course may be proposed too late to be reviewed by the CCS (as may happen, for example, when a new faculty member is hired, or a visitor offers a course). In this case the chair of the relevant CCS may approve the course for one semester. The chair will inform the subcommittee of his or her decision and the reasons for it. The subcommittee must approve the course before it can be offered again to fulfill the relevant requirement.
- b.** A course taught at another institution may be proposed to fulfill a core requirement by a transfer student or a participant in a foreign study program. The Core Curriculum Committee will be charged to formulate procedures and guidelines for approving such courses (see section VII.C below). Until those procedures are formulated, the Chair of the CCS may approve such courses in consultation with the CCS.

B. Approval of a Course Proposed by a Faculty Member Outside the Designated Department(s) or Unit(s): Faculty without a regular or concurrent appointment in the designated department(s) or unit(s) may propose a course to the CCS as fulfilling the relevant core requirement. In this case, although it is not an absolute requirement, the presumption will be that the instructor proposing the course has a Ph.D. or other appropriate terminal degree which would qualify him or her to teach the course in a manner that would satisfy the relevant rationale. The CCS then decides by a majority vote whether the course will be approved. In case of a tie vote, the course is not approved. If the CCS feels the faculty member is qualified to teach the course, it is encouraged to work with the instructor to make the course acceptable to fulfill the requirement. However, if the CCS finally does not approve, it gives its reasons in writing to the instructor.

C. Review of Previously Approved Courses: An instructor teaching a course in successive semesters will normally make adjustments and improvements in it, and it is not necessary to seek approval from the CCS after each change. However, each CCS will establish a cycle of review for approved courses every three years. For such a review, the instructor will submit his or her current syllabus or course description along with a statement of what changes have been made since it was approved and a brief account of what the instructor has found successful in the course and what challenges remain. In this review the CCS should ensure that the course continues to achieve the goals set forth in the rationale for the requirement, but it should also see the review as an opportunity to enhance instruction. If an innovative component of a course has proven particularly successful, the committee should take note of this and pass the information on to faculty teaching similar courses; if a course has proven unsuccessful in certain respects, the committee should offer suggestion on how to improve it.

VI. Core Curriculum Committee

A Core Curriculum Committee will consist of an Associate Provost designated by the Provost, the chairs of the nine CCSs, the Dean of the First Year of Studies, the Academic Commissioner of Student Government, and up to five faculty members appointed by the Provost which will include representatives from the Mendoza College of Business, the College of Engineering and the College of Science. The Associate Provost will serve as chair of the committee.

VII. The Role of the Core Curriculum Committee

The Core Curriculum Committee (CCC) is the body concerned with the core requirements as a whole. Its specific responsibilities are the following:

A. Seek Ways to Enhance Learning in the Core Requirements: The committee will be concerned with the core requirements as a whole. It will promote the creation of new courses, foster excellence of instruction in new and existing courses, advocate for the needs of faculty and students in them, and generate proposals to improve teaching and learning in these courses, such as proposals for inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary courses, innovative approaches to teaching, or more effective use of faculty resources. In this capacity the CCC will make recommendations as appropriate to the Academic Council, the Provost (see VII.D below), a Dean, a Departmental Chair or department, faculty or another relevant unit or individual(s).

B. Hear Appeals of Proposals to CCS's: If a faculty member proposes a course to a CCS and the subcommittee's final judgement is negative, the faculty member may appeal to the Core Curriculum Committee. The CCC will consider the written judgement of the CCS, the faculty member's response, and may consult the CCS and the faculty member further. The CCC can by a majority vote refer the decision back to the CCS for reconsideration.

C. Approval of Credit for Core Requirements for Courses Taught at other Institutions: The CCC should consider procedures and guidelines for approving courses for credit for core requirements which are taught at other institutions, as is necessary in the case of transfer students and participants in foreign study programs. It should work with the various CCSs to establish guidelines and procedures which are clear, fair and consistent.

D. Submit Annual Report to the Provost's Office: Each year the Core Curriculum Committee will submit to the Provost's Office a report on instruction in the core requirements, and send a copy to the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the Academic Council. The report will include data on the availability of classes fulfilling core requirements, size of classes, indications of the quality of learning, measures of student satisfaction and suggestions and proposals about ways in which education of students in these courses can be improved.

Recommendations

In the course of its nearly fifteen months of work, the Curriculum Review Committee identified many issues important for enhancing undergraduate education at Notre Dame. For some of these issues, such as the Core Curriculum Committee and Subcommittees, it felt it was best to put forward specific proposals to the Academic Council at this time. For others, the committee felt it should make recommendations which can be taken up by departments, colleges or bodies, such as the Academic Council, in future years. Below are three recommendations of this sort. The Curriculum Review Committee urges that the appropriate units respond to these recommendations, and that the Academic Council vote to accept these recommendations now.

Recommendation 1: Develop Integrative Courses to Satisfy Core Requirements

The core curriculum at Notre Dame is constructed along disciplinary lines so that our students are introduced to modes of thought and inquiry proper to each of these disciplines. Disciplinary divisions, however, should not become an obstacle to the pursuit of an integrated understanding of the world. As the seminal document for the current strategic planning process, “Notre Dame 2010: A Quest for Leadership”, states, “[The Catholic] tradition recognizes that true understanding derives from the integration of knowledge and practice, that no discipline alone can achieve full and complete understanding, and that all disciplines therefore contribute vitally.”

Inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary courses and educational experiences should be developed which seek such an integrated understanding. A variety of formats should be explored including linked courses, team-taught courses, credit-bearing lecture series, integrated capstone experiences, and one-credit topical courses. Interdisciplinary institutes and centers should be encouraged to contribute to the undergraduate education of both majors and non-majors. Guest lecturers from across campus and beyond should be used in classes to make connections across disciplines.

New integrating courses would be an important enhancement to the current core offerings. The Core Curriculum Committee should encourage the development of such courses and consider the place of such courses in satisfying core requirements. For the science requirement, for example, the study of science could be joined with the study of technological developments and ethical issues that such developments raise. Math courses for Arts and Letters students could be developed which emphasize the application of mathematics in certain areas, and which enhance problem solving, critical thinking, rational decision making, and appreciation for mathematics. Development of these courses will require new resources.

Recommendation 2: Encourage the Development of Honors Opportunities Within Departments and Colleges

In the strategic plans of several colleges one finds an emphasis on enhancing opportunities for undergraduate research. We endorse these efforts, and encourage a variety of initiatives to direct our students to serious research and inquiry in their chosen fields.

We recommend the development of a degree with honors for undergraduate students involved in research. Such an honors degree would be distinct from the traditional Latin Honors based upon GPA, and would be awarded to undergraduates who did significant research work that is of high quality (A or A- work).

Presently there seem to be at least some departments with logistical concerns, particularly regarding the availability of resources which would be required to provide sufficient research opportunities for those students who would want to take advantage of this option. Several college plans include initiatives for enhancing undergraduate research opportunities. We recommend that the Undergraduate Studies Committee revisit this issue in coming years and develop a plan for instituting such a degree.

Recommendation 3: Enhance Education in Ethics

A liberal education asks students to confront fundamental questions about the significance of human life and about how a human life can best be lived. As a Catholic university, Notre Dame bears a special responsibility to confront students with these questions. It also bears a special responsibility to present students with the most compelling answers that have emerged from centuries of philosophical and theological reflection on those questions, including the answers that have emerged from the tradition of Catholic thought. The Curriculum Review Committee wishes to reemphasize these special responsibilities and urges the faculty to renew its commitment to discharging them. For obvious reasons, these responsibilities have fallen primarily on the Departments of Philosophy and Theology. We urge these departments to seek ways to increase their offerings in ethics both by developing more ethics courses and by enhancing the ethical components of existing courses. Because ethics courses are addressed to students from across the university with very different needs and very different futures before them, we also urge an appropriate dialogue among faculty in these departments and others in the university about how education in ethics can be enhanced to keep pace with the changing needs of our undergraduates.