

***(The following preface was composed by the Curriculum Review Committee to provide the Academic Council with an introduction to and context for the proposals and recommendations which follow. It was not part of what was approved by the Academic Council.)***

## **Preface**

Attached are the revised proposals of the Curriculum Review Committee. As you recall, in November and December of 2002 an earlier draft (Draft 3) was circulated first to the Undergraduate Studies Committee, then to the full Academic Council, and finally to the faculty as a whole. We received many comments and suggestions, and have made substantial changes. We have retained Proposal 1 (*Create Incentives to Increase Faculty Engagement in General Education*) with minor modifications in wording. We have retained a substantially revised version of Proposal 2 (*Core Curriculum Committee & Subcommittees*), which we discuss at length below. The specific mandates of Proposal 3 (*Create an Undergraduate Degree with Honors*), Proposal 4 (*Improve the Mathematical and Scientific Literacy of Our Non-Technical Students*), and Proposal 5 (*Enhancing Education in Ethics*) have been withdrawn, but we have put forth some goals and ideals from each of these in a series of recommendations, and we believe that these goals and ideals can and should be realized through the structures we do propose or through subsequent initiatives of departments, colleges, the Undergraduate Studies Committee of Academic Council and others.

In the preface we briefly summarize the import of each proposal and explain any changes we made since the circulation of Draft 3.

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

This proposal urges those in positions of responsibility to provide support for faculty teaching the core requirements and to create incentives for faculty, departments and colleges to teach these courses well. The only change from Draft 3 is that the phrase “general education courses” has been replaced with “core curriculum” or “core requirements”

### **Proposal 2: Standing Core Curriculum Committee and Subcommittees**

Among the five proposals of the draft circulated in November and December of last year, the proposal for a standing curriculum committee for core requirements generated the widest and most energetic debate and discussion. We have substantially revised that earlier submission in response to the comments and suggestions we received. In this preface to the revised proposal we will do the following: 1) set forth briefly our reasons for proposing a committee and subcommittees for the university requirements; 2) describe the rationale which is sought for each requirement; and 3) describe the Core Curriculum Subcommittees and 4) the Core Curriculum

Committee that we are proposing.

***1.) The Need for a Core Curriculum Committee***

At the core of the education of every Notre Dame undergraduate are the twelve academic courses required of all undergraduates at the university in theology, philosophy, science, mathematics, history, social science, English composition and literature or fine arts. The nature and number of these requirements clearly have their historical roots in the university's Catholic character. Notre Dame, along with other Catholic universities, has fashioned its curriculum in accord with a broad tradition of Catholic liberal education, encouraging a breadth of learning grounded in a belief in the unity of truth and the ideal of the integration of knowledge centered on theology and philosophy. Although there have been regular curricular reforms at Notre Dame, a striking continuity is evident. The required undergraduate curriculum at the start of the twenty-first century is substantially the same as it was 150 years ago, albeit with some significant deletions (Latin and Greek) and additions (Social Science and History).

The Curriculum Review Committee affirms the value of these core requirements in the education of Notre Dame undergraduates, while at the same time recognizing the challenge we face to ensure the required courses remain vibrant, engaging and accomplishing the goals for which they are intended. We are fortunate to have at Notre Dame many dedicated faculty members who intellectually inspire and enliven our undergraduates with superb courses taught as university requirements. However, because core requirements are often fulfilled by large, introductory classes taught to students whose primary interest may not be in the field, one can also find a tendency among some faculty and students to give such classes a low priority, and even to approach them as an intellectually pointless exercise in "getting requirements out of the way". We must strive to make these courses as successful as they can be in fulfilling the educational ideals for which the requirements were instituted. The Curriculum Review Committee believes that some common effort of review and reflection on these required courses is needed to articulate their goals and ensure that they are realized. It is precisely this appropriate sort of review and reflection by faculty that Proposal 2 attempts to promote.

The Curriculum Review Committee believes that the structures set forth in Proposal 2 are critical to enhancing undergraduate education at Notre Dame. A large number of the core requirements are taken in our students' first year at the university, a time when habits of inquiry and intellectual curiosity are formed. The 1993-94 Curriculum Review Committee, recognizing the importance of the first year, established the university seminar for all first year students in order to give them an intellectually stimulating experience in a small class with significant writing assignments. These seminars have significantly enhanced the intellectual experience for students in their first year. It is critical that we give attention to the other required courses which dominate our students' first year at Notre Dame, and the present proposal is designed to do that.

Proposal 2 consists of several key elements: a Core Curriculum Committee, Core Requirement Rationales, and Core Curriculum Subcommittees. The Core Curriculum Committee is a standing committee whose role is to enhance instruction in the core requirements. Core Requirement Rationales are statements of what should be learned in each requirement.

Core Curriculum Subcommittees evaluate courses proposed to fulfill core requirements and strive to enhance instruction in them. These are described in detail below.

## ***2.) A Rationale for each Core requirement***

As a first step toward such appropriate review and reflection, the Curriculum Review Committee proposes that those in the relevant discipline formulate a rationale for each of the core requirements which is accepted across the university. In contrast to many of its peers, Notre Dame lacks a canonical statement of the learning goals of its requirements. Although the Academic Council mandates that certain courses must be taken by all our students, there is no statement of even the broad outlines of what students should be learning in these courses and how the courses should contribute to their education.<sup>1</sup> Some departments, such as Theology and Philosophy, have taken it upon themselves to produce such a statement and teach the required courses in accord with it, and all reports are that this has had a salutary effect on instruction in these courses.

Proposal 2, then, establishes procedures by which faculty from the relevant disciplines will formulate a statement of the learning goals for each core requirement and eventually have these approved by the Academic Council. This rationale should be a succinct statement of what students are expected to learn in any course which fulfills the particular requirement. However, it need not be excessively specific or restrictive. A variety of courses, each with somewhat different readings and assignments, may attain the goals stated in the rationale. Moreover, for the purpose of such a rationale, the concept of learning goals may be as broad as the faculty believes is necessary to capture what should be accomplished in these courses. It, of course, should include some appropriate level of knowledge of the subject, but may also include such things as skills in analysis, assessment and formulation of arguments; an abiding appreciation of literature; an experience of artistic creation; a deepening of faith that seeks understanding; a grasp of the method of scientific inquiry and thought; a sense of the power of the application of scientific discoveries to change society; and so on.

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<sup>1</sup>The evolution of a statement about the rationale for required courses at Notre Dame is instructive. A 1953 review of the Notre Dame curriculum offered a rich and detailed account of the curriculum for all students, emphasizing the integration of study around broadly Thomistic theology and philosophy (*The Curriculum of a Catholic Liberal College*, Notre Dame: 1953). It specified what courses are to be taught, how they are to be taught, and what is to be taught in them. A 1961 report acknowledged the value of the principle of the unity of knowledge embraced in the 1953 report, but concluded that “as a principle of curricular organization it is an illusion” (*Progress Report Prepared for the Dean and Faculty by the Special Committee*, 1961). In the early 1970's the present list of university required courses was established, but there seems to have been no canonical statement of the purpose of these courses and how they are to contribute to a student's education.

Responsibility for drafting the rationale for each core requirement will lie with the faculty from the relevant disciplines. Proposal 2 specifies for each core requirement designated academic units whose faculty normally offer the courses fulfilling the requirement in question. With the exception of three cases, the rationale will be written by the faculty from the designated units. Exceptions include the science requirement, which will be drafted by a committee consisting of the Dean of the College of Science and two faculty from that college, as well as the Dean of the College of Engineering and one faculty member from that college. This committee will, it is hoped, offer a balanced appreciation of pure and applied science in courses fulfilling the science requirement. A second exception is in English Composition, which is not associated with a department, but with the University Writing Program. It will consist of the Director of this program and two faculty he or she appoints, and two other faculty appointed by the Provost. Finally, the University Seminars fulfill one of the core requirements, and as such these courses will fall under the rationale for the requirement each fulfills. In addition, the Core Curriculum Committee, whose composition and role is described below, will state the additional goals these courses will have as first year University Seminars.

Some have suggested that, in addition to rationales for each individual core requirement, there should be a rationale for the set of these requirements as a whole. The Curriculum Review Committee did not mandate such a general rationale in Proposal 2, though it would certainly be possible for the Core Curriculum Committee to formulate such a rationale after those for the specific requirements have been formulated.

### ***3.) Core Curriculum Subcommittees***

A second key part of Proposal 2 is the formation of a Core Curriculum Subcommittee (CCS) for each core requirement. The primary role of these CCS's will be to review and approve courses proposed to fulfill a particular core requirement. Its judgements will be made on the basis of whether the course can be expected to achieve the goals stated in the rationale for that requirement. Consequently, a part of the role of these subcommittees is the judicial one of approving or refusing approval to courses proposed to fulfill a requirement. However, they should see themselves as providing assistance and advice to faculty on how the course they propose can most effectively attain the goals for the requirement. CCS's are encouraged, then, to work with faculty to help them improve their courses, and not simply render judgements on them.

A second role of these subcommittees is to consider course proposals from faculty who do not have a regular or concurrent appointment in the designated departments or designated units within departments. 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. We do not expect the number of these sorts of proposals to be large.

Finally, CCS's are required to review approved courses every three years. The purpose of such a review is, first, to ensure that the course continues to achieve the goals set forth in the rationale. In addition, such reviews should provide an opportunity for the CCS to inform

themselves both about what is particularly successful in each course, so that the committee may use this information to help other faculty, and about the ways in which a course falls short of aspirations, so that it can provide advice and help to the instructor of the course under review.

The composition of the CCS's is such that the majority of the members are from the designated departments or designated units within departments. The Curriculum Review Committee, in its conversations with various colleges and departments, found that inter-departmental and inter-collegiate conversations about core requirements were sometimes lacking. Consequently the CCS includes a minority of members who are not regular members of the designated departments or units within departments. The role of such bodies then is to provide review and accountability for core requirements, but they also should be vehicles for communication and discussion among departments and colleges about courses required for all our undergraduates.

The composition of each CCS is as follows. In the case of those requirements for which there is a single designated department (History, Mathematics, Philosophy and Theology), the chair of the department will chair the subcommittee and appoint two others from his or her department as members. In order to include the perspective of others outside the designated department, the Provost will appoint two members. The chair of the CCS may make recommendations to the Provost regarding appointments to his or her subcommittee. In the case of three requirements with several designated departments or units (Social Science, Literature and Fine Arts), membership will be from the chairs of the various designated departments or from faculty in the designated units. The Dean of the College of Arts and Letters will appoint the chair of the subcommittee from among these *ex officio* members. The Provost will appoint two other members. The chair of the CCS may make recommendations to the Provost regarding appointments to his or her committee. 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 or designated units within departments. In the case of the science requirement, the Dean of the College of Science will chair this CCS and appoint two members from the designated departments of the College of Science to serve on this committee. The Dean of the College of Engineering will also serve on this committee, and also appoint one other faculty from the College of Engineering to serve. For English Composition, which has no designated department as such, the Director of the University Writing Program will serve as chair and appoint two additional faculty to serve. The Provost will appoint two additional faculty to serve, and the chair of this CCS may make recommendations to the Provost regarding appointment to his or her subcommittee.

In section V in the proposal are certain notes on and possible exceptions to the composition of these subcommittees which is described above.

The previous draft of this proposal had a central curriculum committee performing the roles which in this draft we have given to the CCS. One central objection to that draft was that it gave oversight for who teaches and what is taught in a university requirement to those outside the relevant discipline. The creation of CCS's gives this role to a committee, the majority of whom are from the relevant discipline and department, while allowing for some representation outside

the department or departments.

#### **4.) Core Curriculum Committee**

In order to provide a forum for faculty across the university to consider the university requirements as a whole, and to attend to issues pertaining to these requirements as a whole, we propose a Core Curriculum Committee (CCC). This committee consists of the nine chairs of the CCS's, an Associate Provost designated by the Provost, the Dean of the First Year of Studies, the Academic Commissioner of Student Government, and up to five faculty members appointed by the Provost. In making these appointments, the Provost will include representatives from the Mendoza College of Business, the College of Engineering and additional representatives from the College of Science. The Associate Provost will chair the committee.

The primary role of the CCC will be to enhance instruction in the core requirements in the manner described in VII, (A). The CCC will also hear appeals of decisions from the CCS's, and it may, by a majority vote, refer the decision back to the CCS for reconsideration. It will attempt to establish clear, consistent and fair policies on approving credit for courses taken at other institutions. Finally, the CCC will submit an annual report to the Provost, with a copy to the Undergraduate Studies Committee, on instruction in courses fulfilling core requirements. This report, as stated in VII, (D), "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**

These recommendations arise from issues the Curriculum Review Committee has identified in its fifteen months of work. In the earlier draft, specific proposals were included with these recommendations. Although we are not now making specific proposals, we put forward these recommendations as goals and ideals which can be pursued by departments, colleges, the Core Curriculum Committee and Subcommittees and other bodies, such as the Academic Council. The Curriculum Review Committee urges the Academic Council to accept these recommendations which can be pursued by various means in the future.

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