

2009 Report from the Director of the University Core Curriculum Submitted to the Faculty Council

Unlike last year, the University Core Committee (UCC) began its work for the 2008-2009 academic year with many returning members. Of the nine elected members serving this year, eight returned from the previous year. This allowed us to spend less time on the learning process necessary for new members to develop an understanding of the petition process. It also allowed us to apply the fresh ideas brought to the UCC last year to some important Core matters. My gratitude goes out to the members of the UCC for all their hard work on those matters. They are: Gwen Compton-Engle, Roy Day, Linda Eisenmann, Kathy Gatto, Rick Greci, Penny Harris, Gwen Kinebrew, Kathy Manning, Pat Mooney, and Andy Welki. I also am extremely grateful to the Core Secretary, Linda Munn, for all her work.

As is always the case, the vast majority of the UCC's time was devoted to reviewing petitions submitted by faculty to obtain Core designations. We find that process proceeds most smoothly when faculty submit the petition forms electronically as doing so allows us to make use of Blackboard more easily and efficiently. In an effort to encourage more faculty to submit petitions electronically, the UCC revised the petition form this year. We sought to make it only one page in length and more user friendly for electronic submission. Those petitions we have received via this new form have worked well, so we believe we have met those two objectives. We hope that we can encourage more faculty to submit electronically and use the new form next year because we believe it is easier on the faculty, the Core Secretary, and the committee.

I see two other ways that petition process proceeded more smoothly than it has at times in the past. First, the UCC continues to see the benefits of the new appendix to the Core Document on which I commented in last year's report. That appendix has made the requirements for international designations more clear and easier for the committee to apply. We continue to see less faculty frustration over the international designations. Second, I have received considerable positive feedback from faculty over the UCC's decision last year to extend the approval period from 3 to 5 years for letter designations (D, R, S, and W) and divisional designations for special topics courses. Many faculty have informed me that they find the petition process less onerous given this change. Thus, the UCC continues to be pleased with the effects of these two changes.

Since the UCC was asked by several faculty members to reconsider the longstanding policy against on-line and distance-education courses counting for Core credit, we devoted considerable time to this matter. We sought a broader campus discussion through Faculty Council and the Committee on Academic Policies (CAP). Chairs were asked to canvass their Departments about the issue, and the UCC met with Chairs and CAP to discuss the matter. In the end, the UCC voted to consider petitions for JCU on-line and distance-education courses for Core credit. The committee took seriously the reasons why the UCC has refused to grant such credit in the past, but felt that the Core Document does not preclude such courses. We understand that Faculty Council has received a letter that disagrees with this decision, and we look forward to any further broader discussion that might take place on this matter.

The change in policy regarding on-line and distance-education courses pertains only to JCU courses. Such courses at other institutions still are not eligible for Core credit. This raises an ongoing problem. When students submit Transient Petition Forms to take courses elsewhere, it is not always clear when such courses are on-line. Thus, certainly some on-line courses get through and neither I nor the UCC can devise a way to avoid this possibility. This problem, however, is related to another that the UCC discussed this year. We are concerned about the number of Core courses that students take at other institutions. This concern is not about transfer students, but, rather, students who take courses elsewhere after beginning their studies at JCU. We believe that the University should limit this number and we hope Faculty Council and CAP

will take up this issue with us. As Core Director, I see such a limit as accomplishing two important things. First, it would help to maintain the integrity of JCU's Liberal Arts Core. Second, it would make on-line courses at other institutions "slipping through" the system less of a concern since students would be limited as to how many Core courses they can take elsewhere.

Much of my time is spent on petitions from students. I am happy to report that the new electronic Academic Petition Form has made that process much more smooth. I understand that an electronic version of the Student Transient Petition Form also is in the works. I look forward to its unveiling.

I hope this report provides an adequate sense of my and the UCC's activities this past year. If Faculty Council desires any other information about either, please let me know.

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