

Summary of written comments on the revised core curriculum proposal

The new “Core Committee” is made entirely of faculty and administrators appointed by the dean of CAS. There is faculty representation on the subcommittees but the proposed structure does not guarantee that the subcommittee’s decisions are final. Even if the role of the subcommittees is strengthened, I think it is unacceptable for the actual core committee to have no elected faculty representatives. [This was written before the revised administrative structure was circulated.]

I like and appreciate the revisions to the core very much. The addition of the social justice course in the Jesuit heritage area makes good sense to me – certainly issues of oppression will continue to be addressed in the human experience linked courses – and this addition strengthens our commitment to that learning outcome.

I also had some concerns about not having the core designed in a way that provided a common experience for first year students. I’m not as fussed about that in terms of the core – I think there are other vehicles that allow us to attend to that and those conversations are in progress and I’m confident that we can meet the specific needs of first year students in concert with this core while not expecting the core curriculum to provide that.

In short, this curriculum has my enthusiastic support.

What happens to the role of CAP in the new proposal? Under the current system, I can at least imagine that there is a mechanism for bringing policy issues to a "consideration" by the Faculty through the organic connection to Faculty Council. I worry that line 6 [in the revised Appendix D administrative structure document] under responsibilities for the new UCC includes "consideration" of "general core policy" without specifying that approval for changes must come from the Faculty.

I am also concerned that the proposal apparently empowers the new UCC to change its structure in the future. Changes in the structure should be subject to approval by the Faculty.

1. In the older version [of the core proposal], I was somewhat dubious that the Fine and Performing Arts were valued at all, since a student could take a more traditional course in Literature and Art History and be a passive learner, instead of being actively challenged to be critical and creative. Three credits raises an arts requirement on the same level as other courses valued here; one credit means [the arts] are something students just wedge in between their other "real" courses, along with physical education. If you are only going to require one credit hour in

the arts, don't bother requiring any. I don't see the value to the students, since a one credit hour "mini-course" cannot contain enough depth of study or experience for the student.

2. Furthermore, I am concerned that the one credit hour "mini-course" arts requirement might harm [enrollment in] three credit hour courses. I don't believe this requirement has been carefully considered, and I am afraid of what it will do to the few arts classes and programs we do currently have here. The full-time tenured arts professors at JCU [should have been] consulted in a more focused way than just through the general open hearings process. [This proposal] drastically changes their teaching responsibilities.

3. I have concerns about the implementation of a "performing arts director" of the core. What does this mean for academic freedom (which involves artistic expression as well as the protection of research and teaching)? I still have this same question, since the arts mini-requirement falls under "Jesuit Heritage".

The chair of the philosophy department expressed regret and concern that, after she was approached for an initial conversation with Gwen Compton-Engle about how ethics might be incorporated into the proposed core curriculum, neither she nor her department were consulted or informed, despite the fact that the chair offered to meet with the working group and suggested that some of its members meet with the department. Moreover, of the three options considered for the incorporation of an ethics component, the one the working group chose is, in the chair's opinion, least effective in cultivating ethical sensibilities in our students because the topic of ethics can be covered only superficially in part of an Intro course. The chair's recommendation to Gwen was that (in order of preference) either 1). three philosophy courses be required, one that is dedicated to ethics or contains a major ethical component (creating "E" courses) or 2). two philosophy and two religious studies courses be required, along with a fifth course in ethics that could be taken in either department. The chair also expressed concerns about the recommended way in which inclusion of ethics will be overseen (her view is that if such oversight is to be required it be conducted by the philosophy department as a whole) and about the bureaucratic structure of the core committee.

How will the "hope" that PL 101 courses include an ethics component be assessed? How will the PL Chair—who is listed in the Proposal as being responsible for "overseeing" the ethics component, as well as being responsible for its assessment—do so? Concerns about academic freedom continue to lurk in the offing.

The advising requirement will be stricken from the cover letter, no doubt, but will that plan nevertheless resurface when details about advising to the new Core need to be spelled out? Will those responsible for assessing advising be cognizant that matters of academic freedom must be on our radar screen?

In spite of the present Committee's best intentions—as well as that of the Dean, by the way—if the Proposal is approved, we will not always have those same Committee members around, nor will we always be led by the present Dean. How will the Proposal and its documentation be interpreted by future faculty and administration? Might they interpret “expectation” as a requirement? Might future PL Chairs think of their “oversight” function in ways that the present Chair most certainly will not?

For these reasons and others, I continue to think that it is imperative that the JCU AAUP Chapter's letter be part of the documentation of our present discussion about Core and the Proposal; and that how the APTF Committee and CAP have responded to these concerns be noted.

The English Department wanted to pass on its comments about the revised draft of the new Core Committee proposal. The EN Department is willing to consider the new Core, but here're our concerns:

- There's no apparent concern for students who need developmental writing and who currently take EN 103-104, worth 8 cr hrs.
- The Fine Arts component, at 1 cr hr, seems an "afterthought" and encourages "dilettantism rather than robust engagement with the arts."
- We're still unclear about the mechanism by which Integrated Courses are going to be organized and scheduled.
- We're still unclear about the "Requirements in Major" elements.

If we are promoting our institution as a liberal ARTS school, we should have more than just 1 credit in the arts. A 1 credit course can hardly cover the topic in any depth. Shouldn't our students have a greater grasp of the arts than just some brief exposure. I would suggest either a 3 credit hour standard course or nothing at all.

I am concerned about the lack of evidentiary support contained in the proposal to change the core curriculum currently before the committee. Key provisions of the proposal seem to be based on prior assumptions or simply asserted. Furthermore, little or no consideration seems to have been given to assessing the impacts on the faculty, particular departments, or the university as a whole if the proposal is adopted. Some examples:

- The necessity or the desirability of cutting the number of hours in the core seems to be assumed. It is not demonstrated. The included appendices relevant to this (the student survey and the listing of credit hours required at other universities) offer at best ambiguous evidence. While the claim is made that adoption of the proposal will strengthen enrollment, no evidence is provided for this assertion.

- That the revised core will provide students with a more “global” perspective is at best arguable, as the foreign language requirement is reduced and area studies requirements (the current International S/R courses) are eliminated. The additional elimination of specific requirements in History, Literature, and Math also will contribute to a narrowing of what we can expect students to gain from the liberal arts core.
- A number of concerns were raised in the earlier hearings about the scheduling difficulties posed by the linked courses (for students, faculty, and departments). This does not seem to have been addressed, and no examples have been given of comparable institutions that have successfully implemented such a requirement on such a scale.
- Adoption of the proposal will have a significant impact on enrollment in departments which currently have relatively high core enrollments and relatively low major enrollments (eg CMLC, Math, Philosophy, History). Little or no consideration seems to have been given to the long-range impact on these departments, including their major programs and faculty needs, as well as the overall impact to the University of weakened departments in these areas.

An informed faculty vote on the proposal is dependent on the provision of supportive evidence, as change of the magnitude proposed should not be undertaken without the fullest accounting of potential consequences.

There has been much discussion about the merits/lack of for the new core proposal hence I will not address those issues in this letter. I’m concerned about its implementation. I did not tally up the total number of faculty that will need to be invested in the new core but I believe it is more than what we now have for FYS. As I recall, there were many (60+?) faculty members interested in contributing to FYS but over time for whatever reason many of them no longer wanted to teach it making it difficult to find enough interested faculty to continue the course. I see this new proposal as having the same issues that it is not sustainable. Of course this is only speculation but the survey being conducted by CAP should shed some light on this.

I’m also concerned about faculty compensation. John Carroll University has a significant deficit built into next year’s budget meaning there is no extra money lying around to pay for the changes in the core. As administrators have repeatedly stated, there is one pot of money and if we dedicate funds for this new core that means there are less funds for faculty compensation and other worthy entities at John Carroll University. As far as I can tell, administrative support will likely come in the form of either stipends or course load reduction and although that is better than no compensation it is not nearly as good as a salary increase since that is maintained/compounded over time. It has also been made clear that faculty participation in the new core would not have an impact on merit considerations. Therefore, faculty can expect to do a lot of work which is likely to reduce the amount of time available for research/scholarship which in turn makes it less likely to receive a merit increase.

The financial information is not available yet but someone (Rich Mausser) must have estimated how much this will cost annually over time. What if we instead dedicate the money to faculty compensation?

As for the core, how about changing the number of credit hours to graduate to 120, reduce the core by 2 (some number) courses, implement as many of the ideas in the new core such as linked courses as possible under the current core framework

In summary, I believe the core proposal if implemented would not be sustainable and faculty as a whole will fall even farther behind in their compensation in comparison to their peers.

Under the revised administrative structure, the core committee has 7 appointed members and 4 elected members. That still seems like a step backward in the notion of representative faculty governance on matters related to curriculum.

One of the duties of the new Committee seems to be administering a fund for innovative pedagogy. Is this fund parallel fund to the summer teaching and summer teaching technology fellowships currently allocated by the committee on research, service and faculty development? Is this new Core Committee going to take on duties parallel to/in competition with an entirely elected FC standing committee? Will it be in competition with the Center for Faculty Development?

If we're anticipating a situation in which no one will stand for election to one of the four elected seats, that seems like a bad sign for the health of the new core. It also seems like a poor reason to make it possible for the Dean to appoint everyone on the UCC.

[Excerpts from a letter from the JCU AAUP Executive Committee.]

The Executive Committee of John Carroll's chapter of the American Association of University Professors has discussed the proposed changes to the university's core curriculum, and has unanimously agreed that several provisions would or could violate AAUP principles of shared governance and academic freedom.

First, the proposed administrative structure of the core removes oversight and assessment from an elected faculty committee to a committee composed primarily of appointed faculty. Furthermore, while the current structure requires the Director of the core to report directly to the Faculty, the proposed structure mandates that the Director report to the Dean of CAS. Additionally, the proposed structure gives the core committee the power to adjust its own structure and composition (by making some members ex officio) and gives the Dean of CAS the power to appoint members to vacant elected positions on the committee or its subcommittees. We think these changes in the administration of the core curriculum would constitute a major departure from the principle stated in the Faculty Council constitution that "Faculty shall have primary responsibility for recommendations on policy in such fundamental areas as curriculum..." The election of faculty to governance bodies is a fundamental principle of shared governance.

Second, we are concerned that the proposal may violate principles of academic freedom in at least two instances: one, the mandate that Philosophy 101 courses include a component on ethics, and two, that the faculty role in advising be more “intentional.” The first we think is a matter for Philosophy faculty to determine; the second we think needs a good deal more discussion and clarification about the “intent” to be served. In the cover letter that accompanied the proposal it is stated that, “The proposed core will require a different advising model, one that will emphasize career and vocation discernment.” As student advising is an integral part of teaching, stipulations about how faculty approach advising need to be just as cognizant of principles of academic freedom as are those related to teaching or to research.

While we have restricted ourselves in this letter to certain precise points that we think contradict AAUP principles, we believe that CAP and Faculty Council, as the elected representatives of the faculty, have a broader responsibility to consider the substantive merits of the proposal.