

University Core Curriculum in the Liberal Arts (a.k.a. “Old Core”)

Annual Director’s Report

by

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This is my second stint as Director of the Core Curriculum. After Dr. Gwen Compton-Engle completed her term, I was asked, and agreed, to serve as Director again during the Old Core’s phase-out period. The last first-year class that will be under the Old Core will be the Fall 2014 class.

That first-year class will be the last to take the First-Year Seminar (FYS) since that course will not be part of the new Core Curriculum (“New Core”) that begins with the Fall 2015 first-year class. The last FYS will be organized somewhat differently from the seminars of recent years. We are dropping the “overall theme with subthemes” model. Instructors are allowed to use any past FYS theme or construct their own themes provided that those themes are based on social-justice issues. Also, we are allowing several instructors to teach two sections. As a result, we will offer some sections at times that depart from the standard MWF 12:00 timeslot. The reason for the changes is so that we could obtain a sufficient number of instructors for the seminar. Given that the three-year cycle to which FYS instructors had committed ended with the Fall 2014 seminar, it made little sense to construct an overall theme with subthemes for one year. Few instructors would have wished to commit to a new course preparation for only one offering of the seminar. The changes allow instructors to take part in the last FYS in ways that allow them to limit their preparatory workloads.

In order to further limit the workload of instructors during the phase-out period of the Old Core, the University Core Committee (UCC) decided to drop the expiration dates of existing Core designations. All existing Core designations will remain in place throughout the remainder of the Old Core. Instructors need to apply for Core designations only for new courses or for new designations for existing courses.

Nevertheless, the phase-out period of the Old Core will produce certain challenges about which Faculty Council, as well as the faculty as a whole, should begin thinking and planning. I will address two of them. First, although the New Core will begin in Fall 2015, we still will need to offer courses for the Old Core until the Fall 2014 first-year class completes its Core Curriculum. Typically, students complete most of the Core during their first and second years, but, experience as Core Director tells me, many students do not complete the Core until their last semester before graduation. Thus, it is important that we, especially Chairs and Associate Deans who construct the schedules, keep this in mind as we prepare our course offerings over the next four-five years.

A second challenge involves the development of new courses. As instructors begin developing courses for the New Core, we should recognize that many of those courses likely would be appropriate for the Old Core as well. This raises the issue of whether an instructor will need to apply for Core designations both from the New Core’s committee and from the UCC. I

recommend that we not ask instructors to do that. It would be frustrating and burdensome for an instructor to work with two separate committees for a single course development. I believe that we should require instructors to apply only to the New Core committee, and that committee and/or the instructor should inform me when a new course appears to be appropriate for the Old Core. I, then, could review the syllabus and approve any appropriate Core designations. Thus, I ask Faculty Council to review this recommendation before the challenge arises. If Faculty Council does not favor my recommendation, I ask that it supply some alternative approach that would avoid requiring an instructor to apply to two committees.

I also ask Faculty Council to take up the issue of determining how much longer the UCC should exist. As we move further into the phase-out period of the Old Core, the number of applications for Old Core designations will dwindle. This especially will be the case if Faculty Council approves my recommendation in the previous paragraph. There will come a point when I can handle Old Core matters more efficiently and with less of a burden on faculty members without the UCC. Thus, I recommend that Faculty Council end the UCC at some appropriate point.

I am happy to attend a Faculty Council meeting next term to answer any questions it has about this report.