CCIC Proposal to the Senate
Regarding the New Core’s Integration of Area Requirements and Learning Goals
November 8th, 2010

Summary: The new core curriculum takes an important step in moving the campus toward placing articulated and intentional learning goals at the heart of the SMC education. There is, however, one major issue that was not settled by the language of Model 1. Model 1 both maintains the area requirements as departmentally-defined course requirements and at the same time stipulates that students meet the twelve learning goals, #5-8 of which basically shadow the area requirements – without ever clearly stating how the two lists of student requirements are related. We do not have the space in the core curriculum for both sets of requirements to stand separately. Therefore, we believe the Senate should consider a change to Model 1 to clarify this relationship. In sum, the currently undefined relationship between area requirements and learning goals is unworkable, and we request that the Senate make a formal decision to synthesize these elements. The CCIC believes that this synthesis could be achieved in two different ways, and all members (including six out of seven faculty) present at the 10/21/10 meeting give their unanimous endorsement to the second option.

Option #1 – Keep the departmentally-based area requirements but stipulate that, in order to meet an area requirement, the course must satisfy the corresponding learning goals

Explanation – In essence, this option will maintain a system very similar to today’s area requirements. The primary change will be that not every course in the specified departments will “count”, but rather only those courses that meet the outcomes of the corresponding learning goal. For example, Sociology department courses would count as Area 4: Social Sciences only when they meet the outcomes for Social, Historical, and Cultural Understanding, which necessitate student learning in social science (or history) theory and methodology, in addition to a general focus on human society. (We do expect that most Sociology courses can and do meet such outcomes.) Ultimately, this option would create a more refined and intentional set of area requirements by shortening the list of approved courses in each area and expecting each of those courses to intentionally fulfill common learning outcomes.

Advantages:

• Will be familiar to the faculty, who are used to area requirements defined by departments
• Will be easier to administer, as fewer courses and fewer faculty will potentially apply to fulfill each area
• Will preserve academic quality

Disadvantages:

• Limits options for and creativity of faculty who are not in the specified departments
• Limits options for students to fulfill goals in multiple ways, especially within their major courses
• Will contribute to the sentiment that the new core is not really “new”
Option #2 – Replace the departmentally-based area requirements with disciplinary-based fulfillment of the learning goals (**RECOMMENDED BY THE CCIC**)  

Explanation – This option flows out of a series of principles. First, we recognize that goals #5-8 are specific "pathways to knowledge" or "ways of knowing," rather than "topics of study" (which could be approached by various pathways). As such, goals #5-8 are disciplinary pathways (and thus presume disciplinary training by the instructor), which was the stated intent of the Senate that passed them. (This principle maintains academic quality. It is not an argument that any faculty member can teach any course.) Second, we recognize that, while most of the properly-trained faculty reside in obvious departments (i.e., mathematicians in the Math department), there are many faculty on this campus who have diverse, multi-disciplinary expertise and training; however, these faculty have official standing in only one department and would be very limited by a departmental definition (as in option #1). For example, there are a number of people at SMC with disciplinary training in Theological Understanding that sit in departments other than TRS. This proposal would allow students to fulfill their Theological Understanding goal in any course that (1) meets the stated learning outcomes and (2) is taught by someone with disciplinary expertise, whether that faculty member is housed in TRS or not.¹  

Advantages:  

• The core curriculum will truly begin to belong to the college as a whole, as opposed to fiefdoms owned by departments.  
• This will help maximize freedom and creativity for faculty and students.  
• In certain cases where students could fulfill more area requirements in their major courses, there would be a corresponding increase in space in their program of study.  
• The disciplinary-training requirement will preserve academic quality.  

Disadvantages:  

• Evaluating the disciplinary expertise of faculty proposing courses will add an extra element to the course approval process, though not a substantive one on most occasions. (See footnote 1.)  

Implications:  

• If the CCC is truly in charge of vetting, approving, and administering the courses (and experiences) that qualify for the fulfillment of the core curriculum, then this will be a body with significant power. Special care will be needed in properly designing the CCC, particularly with regard to the issue of disciplinary expertise. (That said, option #1 has basically the same implication.)  

¹ See attached explanation of disciplinary expertise.