Dear Colleagues,

After shifting through the responses we received we have formulated models for the Seminar Program. Please read our summary letter, and find the models attached.

**Seminar Models and Next Steps**

Last fall, the Faculty Senate asked the Seminar Board to conduct a review of the seminar program as part of the core curriculum review. During the past months, we have been having formal and informal conversations to gather, as much as possible, the range of thought about seminar. We surveyed the faculty at the end of the fall, and based on the results of that survey, demarcated both the commonalities that would appear in the seminar under the new core goals, and the disagreements that surfaced in the survey. To clarify the range of faculty and student concerns and wishes about seminar, we then held two public fora, two alternative sessions, multiple meetings with departments, and processed large numbers of individual meetings and emails. Out of that set of conversations, themes have emerged that we have shaped into several possible models.

**The Consensus on Seminar**

First, there are several commonalities that come out of the consensus about the seminar program. The seminar program will be four classes; Students will take one seminar each year they are students at Saint Mary’s; The curricula of each of the four will have a set of common texts that all students in a class year will read; The format of the course will be seminar-style discussion; The discussion will be student-driven. Furthermore, we have a mandate from the Faculty Senate to make the habits of mind goals developmental, which means that our seminars must ask students to do increasingly challenging tasks and for the instructors to employ increasingly higher expectations. This means that models, particularly model one, which do not explicitly note the developmental aspect in the reading assignments will still reflect it in the writing assignments and the pedagogy (in terms of expectations). Please find the current seminar reading lists here:

[http://smcnet.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/collegiate_seminar/](http://smcnet.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/collegiate_seminar/)

**Themes that Emerge out of Differing Opinions**

The community has expressed some areas of disagreement about the seminar program as well: 1) Many like the chronological sequence of primarily western texts, though some people would like to see shorter readings so that students can be given the chance to become better readers over time; this could involve shortening all readings/reading lists or cutting the upper division reading list somewhat, and the lower division lists significantly. There is also some voice for keeping everything about seminar, including the reading length, exactly the same as it is now. [Models 1a. and 1b. represent this set of choices]. 2) Many people like the chronological sequence, and few want to lose the western primacy entirely, but would like more diverse voices and global texts to enter the conversation where relevant to it, and some would like to see the texts in a chronological world model that does lose the western primacy. 3) These voices also see a need for some explicit developmental scaffolding built into the structure of seminar itself so that the difficulty of text and their lengths could begin with readings appropriate for freshmen and increase in challenge and length with successive seminars [Models 2, 3, and 4 address these choices]. 4) Some would like to have themes organize the readings rather than chronology, because themes would allow an intentional shaping of increasingly challenging readings and lengths of readings without having to
then also use chronology as a primary organizing force [model 5]. 5) Finally, the majority of faculty seem to want some context, though how much and what form is not clear.

Executive Summary of the Models

Through an analysis of the responses we have gotten, we have constructed six models. The first model, 1a., proposes that we make no changes, except to respond to the mandate for more developmental expectations concerning measuring written and oral communication, shared inquiry and critical thinking in the writing assignments and class discussion. Model 1b. proposes to shorten the current readings, the lower division readings substantially and the upper division readings less so, but keep the overall chronological primarily western structure.

Models 2, 3 and 4 are variations on what we do now (which is itself, a variation on the St. John’s model of a great books program). The specific models include different developmental scaffoldings and would include increased amounts of diverse texts and world texts. Models 2 and 3 would keep the western tradition central. Models 2 and 3 both include a freshman seminar to develop seminar skills. Model 3 also includes a capstone as part of a 4th seminar on world texts that reflect on some of the western questions raised in earlier seminars. These models would keep some chronology and would increase reading lengths over the course of the four semesters. Model 4 takes as its organizing method a chronological structure favors a world text series of four classes, while including developmental reading in both text choice and length, and in writing assignments. It’s fourth seminar lends itself to capstone projects. Model 5 takes as its organizing force the University of Chicago method of grouping books around themes, which includes increasingly challenging amounts and levels of reading and writing assignments.

Models 1b-5 would require some new text adoption and/or cutting current reading lists. The process for the transfer seminar list adoption (Sem 110) included a suggestion period for new texts as there is in the current seminar. This was followed by the formation of a sub-committee which spent almost a year planning the seminar, including reading the suggestions together, and testing the reading list in pilot sections. Every seminar leader that taught the new list was interviewed. Adjustments were made based on the feedback, and resulted in the final list. This allows flow of the course to be taken into account when changes are made, and the Board would follow a similar process for text adoption as the new curriculum is implemented.

Process: Voting for a Model and Next Steps

The board proposes that we choose a model by voting affirmatively for one model. Then, faculty will be asked to rank all the models on a Likert scale. In the case of a majority, the majority model will be put forward to the Senate. In the case of a plurality, the board will look at the Likert scale results to determine what the model should be. In addition, there will be a very short survey about options for inclusion of context in any of the models. We will vote on the models after spring break in the first week of May so that the Seminar Board can make a recommendation to the Faculty Senate at their May meeting. We will sponsor some public discussion of the models, and will include some more supporting materials on the Core Curriculum Implementation Committee Website.

Model 1a: The Current Seminar Structure and Texts
Rationale:
1. Emphasizes the strengths of the current program.
2. Keeps the current four seminars, based on a chronological plan from beginning to end.
3. Maintains the Western Conversation as the most important source of texts.

Summary:
The primary intent of this model is to preserve the current seminar structure, pedagogy, and texts. It addresses the “keep things the way they are” voices in the community. How is it developmental? A set of rubrics will be designed that students will be expected to demonstrate at increasingly sophisticated strategies of reading, thinking, arguing and writing in the four seminars. The rubrics will address critical thinking, shared inquiry, and written and oral communication. There will be one assignment (out of all the writing assignments) that will be required and structured by the board to provide evidence for assessment of the goals. The other models would require planning time to create the reading list for the first seminar. If we adopt this model, we would enter the assessment phase immediately and would begin assessing the Greek Thought Seminar.

How is it developmental?
1. A set of rubrics will be designed that students will be expected to demonstrate at increasingly sophisticated strategies of reading, thinking, arguing and writing in the four seminars. The rubrics will address critical thinking, shared inquiry, and written and oral communication, and expectations will be for increasing levels of depth.
2. There will be one assignment (out of all the writing assignments) that will be required and structured by the board to provide evidence for assessment of the goals, and some explicit guidance for how oral communication will be assessed.

Four-year Seminar plan:
First seminar (spring of freshman year) – Greek Thought
Second seminar (fall of sophomore year) – Roman, Christian, Medieval
Third seminar (fall or spring of junior year) – Renaissance, 17th and 18th
Fourth seminar (fall or spring of senior year) – 19th and 20th

Trade-offs:
1. What is gained
   a. We keep as much of the current model as possible.
   b. Texts focus largely on the great conversation without inserting anything between the reader and the texts.
2. What is lost
   a. Fewer texts from outside the western tradition.
   b. Less opportunity for developmental shaping of the courses through intentional connection.

Model 1b: The Current Seminar Structure and Modified Reading List Lengths
Rationale:
1. Emphasizes the strengths of the current program.
2. Keeps the current four seminars, based on a chronological plan from beginning to end.
3. Maintains the Western Conversation as the most important source of texts
4. Decreases the amount of reading to support close, critical reading of texts

Summary:
The primary intent of this model is to preserve the current seminar structure and pedagogy. How is it developmental? Each reading list would be shortened by about 30-40% to support careful, critical reading. A set of rubrics will be designed that students will be expected to demonstrate at increasingly sophisticated strategies of reading, thinking, arguing and writing in the four seminars. The rubrics will address critical thinking, shared inquiry, and written and oral communication. There will be one assignment (out of all the writing assignments) that will be required and structured by the board to provide evidence for assessment of the goals.

Four-year Seminar plan:
First seminar (spring of freshman year) – Greek Thought
Second seminar (fall of sophomore year) – Roman, Christian, Medieval
Third seminar (fall or spring of junior year) – Renaissance, 17th and 18th
Fourth seminar (fall or spring of senior year) – 19th and 20th

Trade-offs:
1. What is gained
   a. We keep as much of the current model as possible.
   b. Texts focus largely on the great conversation without inserting anything between the reader and the texts.
   c. Texts could be selected to enlarge the scope of the discussion - more focus on Middle Eastern texts, for example, during the Medieval era.
2. What is lost
   a. Texts will be shorter and fewer.
MODEL 2: A Developmental Model for The Current Seminar Structure (1-3)

Rationale for this model:
1. Building of student strategies/tools in critical thinking, critical reading, shared inquiry, etc.
2. Developmental structuring focusing on building strategies in the first seminar.
3. Maintenance of the Western conversation as the most important source of texts.
4. Including a larger proportion of diverse voices - especially in the first seminar.

Summary: The primary intent of this model for seminar is to preserve the heart of the Western conversation while at the same time addressing the very real concerns for the development of student learning and the inclusion of more intercultural and global voices. The Western Tradition (from the Greeks to 1900) is preserved in the second, third, and fourth seminars, using the transfer student list as a model for restructuring reading lists. The development of student learning is addressed in the first seminar (focused on critical thinking, reading, and shared inquiry, with texts that facilitate these strategies). The non-chronological structure of the first seminar enables the inclusion of a much broader range of diverse voices.

How is it developmental? The first seminar intentionally educates students in a set of strategies that students will be expected to demonstrate at increasingly sophisticated levels in the next three seminars.

How is this developmental?
1. Includes a freshman seminar to teach seminar strategies through carefully chosen and shorter texts.
2. The historical ordering of texts is intrinsically developmental in terms of content. Ideas from later ages are built on earlier ones.
3. The level of demand – length of reading, discussion rubrics, writing assignments and rubrics, etc. – will be graduated through the four seminars.

Four-year Seminar plan:

First seminar (spring of freshman year) – Critical Strategies and Great Questions

   b. Focus #1 (strategy) – Through the selection of shorter, targeted readings, the primary intention of the first seminar is to facilitate the growth of the students’ abilities to think and read critically and to participate in shared inquiry.
   c. Focus #2 (content) – Texts will be chosen based on a series of factors, in this order: (1) their accessibility to freshmen [i.e., length, difficulty], (2) their relevance to modern life/modern questions, and (3) their challenge/complexity. The focus is on texts that support development in close interpretive reading and critical thinking. Ideally, texts should provoke students to view seminar as potentially transformative, and thus should be both subversive and engaging. Texts from a variety of times and cultures can/should be included.
Second seminar (fall of sophomore year) – Western Tradition, part 1

d. Focus #1 (content) – Western Tradition, part 1 – Students will read the classics of the Greek and Latin worlds through the Medieval, using a model similar to the current first transfer seminar.
e. Focus #2 (strategy) – Students would be expected to employ and build upon the strategies of critical thinking, critical reading, and shared inquiry that were learned in the first seminar.

Third seminar (fall or spring of junior year) – Western Tradition, part 2

f. Focus #1 (content) – Western Tradition, part 2 – Students will read the classics of the Renaissance, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
g. Focus #2 (strategy) – Students would be expected to employ and build upon the strategies of critical thinking, critical reading, and shared inquiry that were learned in the first and second seminars.

Fourth seminar (fall or spring of senior year) – Western Tradition part 3

h. Focus #1 (strategy/integration) – Students would be expected to employ and build upon the strategies of critical thinking, critical reading, and shared inquiry that were learned in the first second, and third seminars.
i. Focus #2 (content) – The 19th and 20th century seminar would reflect the present one.

Trade-offs:

1. What is gained
   a. More explicit strategy building
   b. More explicit development and integration of student learning
   c. More diverse texts (esp. in first seminar)
2. What is lost
   a. Fewer texts from the Western conversation
   b. An explicitly coherent structure of reading lists across seminars
Model 3: A Developmental Model for Seminar (1-2-1)

Rationale for this model:

1. Building of student strategies/tools in critical thinking, critical reading, shared inquiry, etc.
2. Developmental structuring of the four seminars, including a capstone experience in the fourth
3. Maintenance of the Western conversation as the most important source of texts
4. Including a larger proportion of intercultural/global texts

Summary: The primary intent of this model for seminar is to preserve the heart of the Western conversation while at the same time addressing the very real concerns for the development of student learning and the inclusion of more intercultural and global voices. The Western Tradition (from the Greeks to 1900) is preserved in the second and third seminars, using the transfer-list as a model. The development of student learning is addressed in the first seminar (focused on critical thinking, reading, and shared inquiry, with texts that facilitate these strategies) and the fourth seminar (which includes a capstone experience). The non-chronological structure of the first and fourth seminars also enables the inclusion of a much broader range of global and intercultural voices. How is it developmental? The first seminar intentionally educates students in a set of strategies that students will be expected to demonstrate at increasingly sophisticated levels in the next three seminars. The fourth seminar asks students to integrate their learning at the end of this experience.

How is this developmental?

1. Includes a freshman seminar to teach seminar strategies through carefully chosen and shorter texts.
2. The historical ordering of texts is intrinsically developmental in terms of content. Ideas from later ages are built on earlier ones.
3. The level of demand – length of reading, discussion rubrics, writing assignments and rubrics, etc. – will be graduated through the four seminars.
4. The students will discover the convergence of cultures over time, expanding their awareness of that phenomenon.
5. The focus of the fourth seminar readily suggests integrative evaluations and/or capstone projects.

Four-year Seminar plan:

First seminar (spring of freshman year) – Critical Strategies and Great Questions

a. Focus #1 (skill) – Through the selection of shorter, targeted readings, the primary intention of the first seminar is to facilitate the growth of the students’ abilities to think and read critically and to participate in shared inquiry.

b. Focus #2 (content) – Texts will be chosen based on a series of factors, in this order: (1) their accessibility to freshmen [i.e., length, difficulty], (2) their relevance to modern life/modern questions, and (3) their importance in human history. The focus is on texts that best allow students to practice the strategies of critical thinking, critical reading, and shared inquiry. Texts from a variety of times and cultures can/should be included.
Second seminar (fall of sophomore year) – **Western Tradition, part 1**
   a. Focus #1 (content) – Western Tradition, part 1 – Students will read the classics of the Greek and Latin worlds, using a model similar to the current first transfer seminar.
   b. Focus #2 (skill) – Students would be expected to employ and build upon the strategies of critical thinking, critical reading, and shared inquiry that were learned in the first seminar.

Third seminar (fall or spring of junior year) – **Western Tradition, part 2**
   a. Focus #1 (content) – Western Tradition, part 2 – Students will read the classics of the Renaissance through roughly 1900.
   b. Focus #2 (skill) – Students would be expected to employ and build upon the strategies of critical thinking, critical reading, and shared inquiry that were learned in the first and second seminars.

Fourth seminar (fall or spring of senior year) – **The Global Conversation of the 20th and 21st c.**
   a. Focus #1 (skill/integration) – Students would be expected to employ and build upon the strategies of critical thinking, critical reading, and shared inquiry that were learned in the first, second, and third seminars. Most importantly, students would be required to spend the last weeks of the fourth seminar looking back on what they have learned and how they have grown, integrating the steps of their intellectual development in a capstone experience.
   b. Focus #2 (content) – The Global Conversation of the 20th and 21st c. – Building on the Western tradition explored in the second and third seminars, readings would focus on the Great Conversation of the modern world, which includes the West but also fully integrates important intercultural and global voices – texts which are now part of the modern conversation (and would be chosen based on such a status). The focus would be on issues or concerns of significant relevance for a 21st c. student, as well as texts that would allow for integrative thinking.

**Trade-offs:**
1. What is gained
   a. More explicit skill-building
   b. More explicit development and integration of student learning
   c. More diverse texts (esp. in first and fourth seminar)
2. What is lost
   a. Fewer texts from the Western conversation
Model 4: World Texts Model

Rationale
1. Students will read texts from many cultural traditions, orienting them for the increasingly connected world community and diverse national milieu that they live in.
2. Juxtaposition of differing cultural perspectives on broad human issues will challenge the students to arrive at resolutions and evaluations among them.
3. Each student will encounter texts outside his/her cultural mindset as well as texts that align with it.
4. Chronological order of texts will be minimally directive regarding issues for reading and discussion.

Summary:
The primary intent for this model is to offer the students the chance to put together world conversations that mirror the complexity and richness of the world. It challenges students to think about texts outside their cultures, while ramping up that challenge in a developmentally appropriate way, through increasingly difficult texts and through the length of the readings.

Plan
1. The four chronological time periods will be prehistorical – 500 AD, 500 – 1600, 1600 – 1900, 1900 - present.
2. Varied genres will be represented.
3. Texts from many cultures will be on the reading list, with no significant emphasis of those from the Western Tradition.
4. The fourth seminar will emphasize writers from the American cultural mélange.

How is this developmental?
6. The historical ordering of texts is intrinsically developmental in terms of content. Ideas from later ages are built on earlier ones.
7. The level of demand – length of reading, discussion rubrics, writing assignments and rubrics, etc. – will be graduated through the four seminars.
8. The students will discover the convergence of cultures over time, expanding their awareness of that phenomenon.
9. The focus of the fourth seminar readily suggests integrative evaluations and/or capstone projects.

Trade-offs
1. Loss of the Western conversation.
2. Many non-western texts may be more difficult to grasp than most western texts.
3. Students will be introduced to and challenged by ideas and values from unfamiliar cultures.
**Model 5: Thematic Organization**

**Rationale:**
1. Building of student skills/tools in critical thinking, critical reading, shared inquiry, etc. into the text choices.
2. Developmental structuring of the four seminars through the flexibility of themed offerings.
3. Allows for an inclusive model in which texts may be placed together from a variety of cultures and contexts for content even if the authors themselves were unfamiliar with works paired with their own.
4. A Note on Choosing themes and texts: What is perhaps more important than the particular themes we settle upon for the program, is what new criteria we will use to determine which particular texts will be included in each seminar. Developmental progression, guidelines for inclusion of non-Western texts, and other guidelines that would emerge out of the wider community discussion and should not be predetermined in any thematic proposal put forth for a vote at this stage.

**Summary:**
The primary intent for this model is to design a seminar reading list that can be maximally responsive to pedagogical concerns such as accessibility, relevance, developmental appropriateness, difficulty, length, and inclusivity. For instance, a thematic reading approach would offer the most flexibility in choosing texts that unfold in a developmentally progressive manner. The first readings could be more accessible and appropriate for the freshmen, while later readings would build upon these experiences to slowly ramp up the challenge of the material into the upper division classes. Similarly, this approach would also afford a multitude of opportunities to present meaningful and generative dialogues between great Western and great non-Western texts, thus, avoiding current problems of tokenization.

**Four-year Seminar plan:**
- First seminar (spring of freshman year) – **Freshman Theme**
- Second seminar (fall of sophomore year) – **Sophomore Theme**
- Third seminar (fall or spring of junior year) – **Junior Theme**
- Fourth seminar (fall or spring of senior year) – **Senior Theme**

**Trade-offs:**
1. What is gained
   a. The ability to address specific learning goals and persistent challenges within the program
   b. Allows for a whole-class organization to implement developmental progression.
   c. A theme allows more diverse texts to be placed together, without implying that one can only talk about the theme.
   d. Allows for the principle of "relevance" to the audience to be considered as a criteria for text choice.
2. What is lost
   a. The chronology of authors building on what came before.
b. There is some concern that a theme would constrict the range of interpretations a student would bring to the texts.