

Core Curriculum Committee
End of Year Report
May 15th, 2015

The past year has been a busy and successful one for the Core Curriculum Committee (CCC). This report outlines our work during 2014–15.

- Long-Semester Core Designations

The CCC made approximately 62 new designations to the Core during the 2014-15 cycle. (Fewer distinct courses were designated, but the proper metric is ‘designations’.) In addition, numerous courses were given “provisional” designation to try out a learning goal, with the intent that this will lead to a final state of designation (or not). This is approximately the same number as last year. The total number of current designations is about 250.

The CCC expects (hopes?) the number of new course proposals to fall drastically from here on.

- Jan-Term Courses Designations

With the same caveat as above, there were 58 learning goals possibilities available for students during January 2015, about the same number as last year.

There remains the difficulty of lack of incentive for proposing a Core designation for a Jan Term course, as Jan Term courses are selected without considering their relationship (if any) to the Core, nor do ranked faculty appear to receive any benefit in the Rank and Tenure process from having Core-designated courses.

- Assessment

Each Working Group is currently engaged in an assessment project. The various WG’s selected one of the learning outcomes for their/one of their learning goal(s), and then designed and implemented a project attempting to determine the effectiveness of the teaching and/or learning toward that outcome. The final report for each project is due September 1st, 2015.

The CCC faces a number of challenges here. Faculty tend to view themselves as departmental members first, and so often put lower priority on their Core-related work. Having an extra-departmental body seem to review the effectiveness of one’s course is also uncomfortable to many. In addition, the effort to allow faculty on Working Groups flexibility to pursue the assessment question that was of most interest to them resulted in groups doing different things. That it appears that all of the Working Groups will successfully complete a project is due to the diligence of the WG Chairs and the ongoing support of the Director of Educational Effectiveness.

Addressing these challenges will be one of the key focuses of the 2015–16 year.

- WASC Visit

The WASC team visit and commission letter was both very complementary and quite critical. It described the Core Curriculum as an “innovative and unique holistic experience” that is “distinct from many other four-year institutions, maintaining a focus on [the college’s] mission.” It also gave special commendation to “the college’s focus on the meaning, quality

and integrity of the degree”, writing that “the degree represents more than a collection of courses to meet program requirements and stands for what it means to be a graduate of Saint Mary’s.” Because the ‘meaning, equality and integrity’ essay relied heavily on the Core Curriculum, and because SMC’s Institutional Learning Outcomes are primarily composed of Core outcomes, we interpret this praise as being directed at the faculty’s work on the Core.

On the other hand, the WASC visiting team determined that we must very rapidly develop “a practical and sustainable assessment plan (such as rubrics, assignments, plans for collection of artifacts, related faculty training and administrative support).” The Commission endorsed this, and has requested a fall 2018 report on the “completion, adoption, and implementation of assessment plans for the core curriculum and core competencies”. (SMC has identified WASC core competencies as falling within the core curriculum, so these are really one and the same.) In fact, by fall 2018 we must be able to provide “evidence of changes being made as a result of the findings”.

Given the generally positive content of the letter, Chair Sauerberg interprets these sections to be significant criticism of the CCC’s work on core assessment. Considering our current situation, it will be very challenging to design and implement new assessment plans that result in evidence of “curricular improvements and better teaching” by 2018. Chair Sauerberg will be ending his term at the end of the academic year in part to allow new leadership toward this.

- Global Perspective and Language

Working from the explicit shared belief that language learning is an important part of a liberal education, and should not be simply a graduation requirement, faculty from the Department of Modern Languages, the Department of Classical Language, and the Integral Program worked with the CCC to revise the Global Perspectives learning goal to incorporate the language requirement. Our proposal was eventually adopted by the Academic Senate.

- Graduation Petitions

It appears from anecdotal evidence that most rising seniors are making sufficient progress through the Core curriculum. But there will be cases where students face difficulties. The Chair of the CCC has been empowered to review petitions requesting individual variances from Core requirements. The CCC has instructed the Chair that this is to be done only in exceptional cases, that the standard should be “graduate” and not “commence”, and that an explanation from the advisor is necessary (e.g. explaining that the student was mis-advised, argue that the complications of the major preclude the student from meeting the goal, argue that summer work is inappropriate or impossible).

- Teaching in January Term and Collegiate Seminar

Believing that it is self-evident that the inability of Seminar and Jan Term to rely on a reasonable supply of trained and interested ranked faculty is damaging to the quality of the curriculum, the CCC asked, in turn, the Collegiate Seminar Governing Board, January Term Committee, the Undergraduate Educational Policies Board, and the Academic Senate to endorse the statement *The proportion of ranked faculty teaching in January Term and in Collegiate Seminar should be broadly representative of this proportion across the undergraduate college.*

As of this writing, this statement has been endorsed by all the but the latter group.

- Designation Renewals

In an April 2014 action, the Academic Senate instructed that Working Groups should “review previously designated Core Curriculum courses on a four-year rolling cycle and to recommend re-approval/disapproval of those courses to the CCC.” In response in September 2015 the CCC submitted to the UEPC a process for “Designation Renewals”. Because the CCC is quite nervous about the two large tasks the Senate assigned to the WG’s – assessment and re-designation – we attempted to design a single process that could accomplish both.

The UEPC rejected this proposal and in May 2015 recommended a re-designation process that would largely exclude long-semester courses from ever being reconsidered, and was unrelated to assessment. That proposed process is now before the Senate.

In closing, I’d like to particularly thank all the members of the CCC and the Working Groups for their efforts, in particular outgoing members Jennifer Heung and Greg Merrill.

Jim Sauerberg, for the CCC

2014–2015 Core Curriculum Committee

Jim Sauerberg	Zach Flanagin
Alice Baldrige	Jennifer Heung
Greg Merrill	Michael Nathanson
Elena Songster	Richard Carp
Chris Procello	Sharon Walters
Tracy Pascua Dea	Cynthia Van Gilder

Habits of Mind: Jim Sauerberg, Mathematics
Kathryn Koo, English/Composition
Jose Feito, Psychology/Seminar
Sue Fallis, Communication/Jan Term
Aeleah Soine, History
Tereza Kramer, Center for Writing Across the Curriculum
Chris Procello, Educational Effectiveness
Sharon Walters, Library

Mathematical and Scientific Understanding:

Alice Baldrige, Environmental Science
Kristen Beck, Mathematics
Helga Lnrnt-Chang, Modern Languages
Mark Lingwood, Chemistry
Paul Zarnoth, Psychology

Artistic Understanding:

Greg Merrill, Accounting
Peter Freund, Art & Art History
Wesley Gibson, English
Felicia Martinez, Integral
Matthew Zapruder, English

Theological Understanding:

Michael Nathanson, Mathematics
Anne Carpenter, TRS
Norrie Palmer, TRS
Lino Rivera, Performing Arts
Mindy Thomas, Politics

Social, Historical, Cultural Understanding:

Jennifer Heung, Anthropology
Liz Hamm, Integral
Makiko Imamura, Communication
Sawako Suzuki, SOE
Claire Williams, Kinesiology

American Diversity and Global Perspective:

Elena Songster, History
Zeynept Atalay, Sociology
Cathy Davalos, Performing Arts
Constanza Dopfel, Modern Languages
Caitlin Powel, Psychology

The Common Good and Community Engagement:

Zach Flanagan, Theology & Religious Studies
Ron Ahnen, Politics
Mike Hadani, Management
Monica Fitzgerald, Liberal and Civic Studies
Raina Leon, Single Subject Credential, Education