

CORE Curriculum Task Force Newsletter

December, 2011

Volume 1, Issue 4

Dear Colleagues,

In October, the Core Task Force submitted to the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee the official proposal to revise the Neumann University Core Program. After the designated time for review and comment, the Task Force addressed questions and concerns.

In November, the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee approved the proposal which then moved to the Faculty Senate for consideration.

On December 6, 2011, the Faculty Senate approved the proposal which will now be forwarded to Executive Council for final approval.

The newsletter announces several focus sessions to continue the conversation about the Neumann University Core Experience which will be implemented in Fall 2012 (see p. 7), as well as two upcoming workshops related to the revised Core (see p.2).

In an attempt to remain transparent, this newsletter also contains the proposal sent to Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee and the questions and responses to questions received.

I invite you to take the time to read the newsletter at your leisure. Please do not hesitate to contact me or any member of the Core Task Force with questions, concerns, and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Pat Hutchins, OSF

Remember to sign up for one of the Focus Groups

January 24	4:20 pm - 5:20 pm
February 3	11:30 am - 12:30 pm
February 8	12:30 pm - 1:30 pm
February 13	3:00 pm - 4:00 pm
February 16	8:30 am - 9:30 am
March 1	4:20 pm - 5:20 pm (see page 7 for locations)

Remember to mark your calendar for the Professional Development workshops.

Tuesday, January 10, 2012
9:30 AM to 2:30 PM

Tuesday, May 8, 2012
9 AM to 4 PM
(see page 2 for details)

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Professional Development to support Revised Core

All Neumann University faculty and staff members who interact in significant ways with undergraduate students are encouraged to attend the following workshops. Faculty and staff who interact with graduate students may also find the workshops helpful and are welcome to attend!

Core Experience Professional Development I

*The Neumann University Core Experience:
Liberal Education in the Catholic Franciscan Tradition
What it is...Why I should Care...How I can be engaged...*

As a result of participating in this day faculty and staff members will:

Recognize the importance of a Liberal Education in the Catholic Franciscan Tradition

Reflect on how all academic disciplines and co-curricular activities contribute to the formation of students

Engage in dialogue with colleagues across disciplines and departments to thoroughly integrate the Core

Date: Tuesday, January 10, 2012

Time: 9:30 AM to 2:30 PM (includes lunch)

Place: Meagher Theater and Bruder Life Center

Presenter: Timothy Johnson, Ph. D.

For information about Dr. Johnson see the links below:

<http://www.flagler.edu/campus-directory/profile-details.html?profile=275DBA697C4BBF6219C4DA6E27A97D65&directory=F0317665816F9ED70F2BAC6813F058B0>

<http://flaglermagazine.com/2010/03/22/professors-abroad-timothy-johnson-in-milan/>

Core Experience Professional Development II

Effective Speaking: A Framework for Oral Communication

Date: Tuesday, May 8, 2012

Time: 9 AM to 4 PM

Place: Meagher Theater and Bruder Life Center

Presenter: Erik Palmer

For information about Erik Palmer see the link below:

<http://erikpalmerconsulting.com/>

Curriculum Proposal: Revision of Core Experience

Those who have not had an opportunity to read the Core Curriculum Proposal which was presented to the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee in October, may wish to take the time to read it at your leisure.

Significant changes in the proposed Core revision include:

Recognition that the Core Goals and Learning Outcomes are not restricted to a certain number of academic courses; rather the entire campus (academic and co-curricular areas) collaborates to achieve the Goals and Learning Outcomes

Revision of the philosophy of the Core program and the associated Goals and Learning Outcomes

Identification of signature courses (courses which are uniquely expressive of the values and culture of Neumann University as a Catholic institution in the Franciscan tradition) which serve as common intellectual experiences offered over four years

Identification, after consultation with disciplinary workgroups, of a recommended sequence of Core courses across the four years of study

Elimination of six credits (INT 202- Exploring Diversity and CA 206- Public Speaking); both courses (INT 202 and CA 206) will remain as elective courses and may be identified as allied requirements by major programs

Integration of learning outcomes associated with INT 202 and CA 206 across the curriculum and co-curriculum. The Communication and Media Arts workgroup has accepted responsibility for developing a plan to integrate oral communication skills appropriately into the curriculum and co-curriculum.

Replacement of Philosophy 103 (Introduction to Philosophy) with an upper level philosophy course selected by students from a restricted number of courses which invite reflection on the compatibility of faith and reason with specific reference to the Catholic Franciscan intellectual and spiritual traditions

Addition of Macroeconomics as an acceptable Social Science requirement

Requirement that every student participate in two Service-Learning courses (one in the Core program and one in the Major program)

Introduction of a Capstone experience in each Major developed by the Major program following criteria provided by the Core Task Force. Unless the major program decides otherwise, the Capstone experience will be integrated into an existing course.

Rationale for Proposed Changes

The current Core curriculum was implemented in the 1997-1998 academic year. The Core Assessment Task Force conducted a self-study of the Core program during the 2004-2005 academic year. The Core Self-Study, conducted as part of the Core Program Review, documents focus groups with faculty who taught in the Core program, faculty who taught in the Major programs, and students. The Self-Study also describes ongoing efforts to assess the effectiveness of the Core program and yearly workshops to help faculty members to improve the program. The Self-Study concludes with a number of recommendations for improvement. A complete list of the recommendations may be found on pages 75 to 77 of the Core Self-Study Report 1996-2005, available upon request.

In May 2005, a Core Curriculum Evaluation Team reviewed the Core Self-Study, conducted an on-site visit, and submitted an Evaluation Team Report. In August 2005, the Core Assessment Task Force prepared and submitted a response to the Evaluation Team Report with a timeline for addressing each of the Evaluation Team's recommendations. The Evaluation Team recommended clarification of the purpose of the Core and appropriate sequencing of courses; assurance that Core Courses with the same course title and number share a common syllabus and textbooks; identification of a structure in support of the Core; review of the goals of the First Year Experience course (INT 101) and its relation to the Core and the major programs; and determination of how transfer students are exposed to and evaluated regarding the Core.

In April 2006, the Middle States Visiting Team identified three recommendations related to the Core program. Specifically, the Visiting Team encouraged the continued infusion of the Catholic Franciscan intellectual tradition throughout the Core; the development of a staffing plan for faculty with targets for full-time coverage in the Core; and development of a comprehensive assessment plan. Both the Core Curriculum Evaluation Team and the Middle States Visiting Team Reports are available upon request.

The divisions of Arts and Sciences and Pastoral and Theological Studies addressed some of the recommendations from the Core Curriculum Program Review and the Middle States Review. Several Core courses adopted common syllabi. A Task Force was established to examine the First Year Experience course (INT 101). University administration resolved the question of teaching INT 101 as overload vs. course load by designating the course within the faculty member's course load. The University also attempted to increase the number of full time faculty teaching Core courses although the ratio of full-time to adjunct faculty teaching Core remains a concern. In addition, several Core courses strengthened the integration of the Catholic Franciscan intellectual tradition.

The Evaluation Team supported the Self-Study Task Force's identification of the need for an administrative structure to "effectively and efficiently mentor Core faculty, coordinate development of course materials, promote interdisciplinary course development, and monitor and implement the Core." A faculty member was appointed to fulfill this identified need temporarily during the 2007-2008 academic year.

Preparation for the 2006 Middle States Review and administrative changes within Neumann University prevented a more comprehensive focus on the Core program and the recommendations of the Evaluation Team until August 2009 when a Core Task Force was appointed and directed to review the current Core and begin preliminary conversations leading to a Core revision. The anticipated time-line for implementing a revised Core was August 2011.

At a faculty Development program in February 2010, Task Force members shared their progress and invited feedback. Between October and December 2010, the Task Force conducted seven all-campus focus groups to share their work and gain feedback. Forty-seven faculty members, 22 staff members, and 16 administrators attended at least one session. In November 2010, the Chair of the Task Force met with the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee who suggested that the time-line for implementing a revised Core program was not realistic. Therefore, the Task Force requested and received permission to move the implementation time-line to August 2012 in order to gain greater understanding and support from the campus community.

From January to April 2011, Task Force members met with their respective academic divisions and with staff of co-curricular areas to clarify the Core proposal and to gain feedback. In February 2011, the Task Force chair shared with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees the progress of the Task Force; in June 2011, the Task Force chair shared the progress with the Board of Trustees.

In May, August, and September 2011, the Core Task Force distributed electronic Core newsletters to update the campus community on the progress toward the Core revision. Each newsletter included a request for feedback. The Task Force thoughtfully reviewed and responded to all feedback.

Throughout the Core revision process the Task Force has been guided by current literature and best practices. In particular, the Task Force has studied and incorporated recommendations from the Association of American Colleges and Universities and Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities.

Because the work of the Core Task Force has been guided in part by a recent project of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (*A United Endeavor: Promising Practices in General Education at Catholic Colleges and Universities*, 2009) and by review of recent revisions of the Core programs of 25 other Catholic institutions, the Core Task Force is confident that the proposed changes are congruent with the mission of Neumann University. Moreover, the changes should strengthen the University's identity as Catholic in the Franciscan tradition. The first Goal of the proposed program states: "Active engagement in the Neumann University Core Experience, including credit-bearing courses and co-curricular activities, will enable Neumann University students/graduates to reflect on the compatibility of faith and reason with specific reference to the Catholic Franciscan intellectual and spiritual tradition and commit to actions consistent with Reverence, Integrity, Service, Excellence, and Stewardship." The requirement that students participate in two Service-Learning courses supports Neumann's "belief that knowledge is a gift to be shared in the service of others" (Mission Statement). The Core revision identifies and sequences throughout the four years of study signature courses which are uniquely expressive of the values and culture of Neumann. The Core revision retains a requirement of six credits in Theology and six credits in Philosophy. All students will take an Ethics course with a strong focus on the Catholic Franciscan tradition and an upper level philosophy course which invites students to reflect on the compatibility of faith and reason with specific reference to the Catholic Franciscan intellectual and spiritual tradition.

Impact of recommended changes to Core Program:

Implementation of the proposed Core revision will require that:

Academic and co-curricular areas collaborate to promote understanding of the Core philosophy and achievement of the goals and learning outcomes

Academic and co-curricular areas participate in a “Mapping” process to demonstrate where and how the goals and learning outcomes are introduced, developed, and assessed

Appropriate members of the Neumann University community participate in professional development to ensure achievement of the goals and learning outcomes

Major programs review and modify program plans to comply with the recommended sequence of Core courses

Major programs design a Capstone course (in most cases a re-designed Senior Seminar) according to specific guidelines

Transfer and second-degree students, as well as students enrolled in the Continuing Adult and Professional Studies Program, appropriately meet the goals and learning outcomes (N.B. Two courses will be revised/created for the Liberal Studies Program. One current course will embed and combine the competencies for History and Social Science; a newly created theology course will meet new Core goals and learning outcomes. Changes or deletions to the Liberal Studies Degree Completion Program will be reviewed and approved by the Panel in the Division of Continuing Adult and Professional Studies. Such courses will be six credits each and will not interfere or disrupt the current program plan designed for the returning adult learner.)

Major programs which have fewer than 120 credits when CA 206 and INT 202 are eliminated make appropriate adjustments to their program plans. This should not require that additional courses be created or offered.

Upper level Theology courses appropriately integrate Service-Learning to fulfill the requirement that students participate in one Service-Learning course within the Core (requirement is currently fulfilled by inclusion of Service-Learning in INT 202)

Majors develop at least one course which integrates Service-Learning if they do not currently have such a course

Sufficient Core courses are offered each semester to meet the required sequence

N.B. The elimination of CA 206 and INT 202 as required courses will reduce or possibly eliminate the adjunct faculty members currently teaching these courses. It is anticipated that the courses will remain in the Catalog with sufficient staffing from full and part-time faculty members.

Resources to support the recommended change

Faculty are in place to teach many of the required courses; however, additional faculty may be needed to meet the required sequence of courses sometime in the future.

Core Task Force is developing guidelines to help Major programs to develop Capstone courses.

Support for the development and implementation of Service-Learning courses is available from the Office of Experiential Education and the Neumann Institute for Franciscan Studies.

Core Task Force and AVPAA for Assessment are collaborating in the development of an assessment plan and Mapping process for the revised Core experience.

Funds are available through the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs to support implementation workshops in January and May 2012.

As evident in the narrative response to #3 (Rationale), many of the provisions of the current Core Curriculum proposal respond to recommendations made by the Core Curriculum Evaluation Report of 2005 and the Middle States Report of 2006. Because needed changes have been anticipated, resources are available to cover necessary administrative and faculty staffing and professional development.

The Neumann University Core Experience: Continuing the Conversation

As we prepare to implement the Neumann University Core Experience (August 2012), the Core Task Force wishes to share information and resources and to answer any questions you may have.

Therefore, we invite you to attend one (or more) of the focus sessions listed below.

At each session we will provide an overview of the Neumann University Core Experience and offer helpful resources to support implementation.

We invite you to suggest topics that you would like addressed at the focus sessions and/or in future professional workshops. Send suggestions and registrations to mccarthy@neumann.edu

Focus Sessions

Tues., January 24	4:20 pm - 5:20 pm	PHS, Mirinda Center
Fri., February 3	11:30 am - 12:30 pm	McNichol Room
Wed., February 8	12:30 pm - 1:30 pm	Assisi Room BMB
Mon., February 13	3:00 pm - 4:00 pm	PHS, Mirinda Center
Thurs., February 16	8:30 am - 9:30 am	Assisi Room BMB
Thurs., March 1	4:20 pm - 5:20 pm	McNichol Room

Responses and Comments

The following section summarizes comments received from faculty members who reviewed the Core Proposal and the Responses to the Comments.

Comments on Core Proposal and Responses to Comments

Twenty-five faculty members submitted votes after reviewing the Core Revision Proposal: 22 in support of the proposal and three in support with reservations. Two of the persons who supported with reservations had expressed the same concern related to theology through the discussion board. The other faculty member who approved with reservations had not placed comments on the discussion board; this reservation requested that Modern Language (not World Language) be used as terminology in place of Foreign Language. Six faculty members utilized the Black Board Vista discussion board to communicate questions and concerns about the Core Revision Proposal. Additional questions and concerns were raised in meetings held within the Arts and Sciences division, in meetings of the chair of the Core Task Force and members of the Theology faculty (October 26, 2011) and the Language faculty (October 18, 2011), in a memo from the dean of Arts and Sciences (October 17, 2011), and in concerns and questions communicated to members of the Core Task Force. Concerns and questions are addressed by topic below.

Service-Learning

Concerns addressed the need for assistance in designing Service-Learning courses, questions about when the courses would need to be developed, and the need to cap theology courses at 25 students for a successful Service-Learning experience.

The Neumann University mission states that “knowledge is a gift to be shared in the service of others.” Service is one of Neumann’s core values. Neumann students have multiple opportunities to engage in service through campus ministry, clubs, and athletic teams. The question of the appropriate place of Service-Learning within the curriculum was raised when the core program was reviewed in 2005. The revised Core addresses this ongoing question by designating that Service-Learning will be integrated into the second level theology course and one course in each major. The integration of Service-Learning into the major is a most appropriate way to encourage students to use their knowledge and their chosen career pathway in the service of others.

The Service-Learning Task Force has created a website to help faculty members to integrate Service-Learning into courses. The link to the site is <http://www.neumann.edu/academics/service-learning/default.asp>. This site includes the Neumann University Service-Learning Policy, approved in June 2010, as well as procedures for developing a Service-Learning course, links to community agencies and organizations with which Neumann has developed partnerships, and suggestions for developing reflective components. In addition, the Office of Experiential Education and the Neumann Institute for Franciscan Studies have collaborated to offer workshops to assist faculty members to develop Service-Learning courses. Both offices also offer assistance with identifying service sites congruent with the learning outcomes of the course and placing students in these sites. The major programs will need to develop Service-Learning courses in time for students who enter the university in Fall 2012 to engage in these courses.

Capstone Courses

Capstone courses, considered best practices by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, take many forms. Members of the Core Task Force have been investigating ideas for developing and assessing Capstone courses. Based on their research, the task force is developing criteria and rubrics to guide the development and assessment of Capstones. However, each major program will have the freedom to develop a Capstone most appropriate for the particular major.

Integration of Oral Communication skills across the curriculum

Members of the Communication and Media Arts work group have identified learning outcomes for fostering oral communication skills and a rubric for use with any type of oral presentation. The CMA workgroup has also suggested a presenter for a professional development workshop for faculty members. The Core Task Force recognizes the need to offer multiple opportunities to support faculty and staff members to develop skills and strategies to integrate oral communication across the curriculum and the co-curriculum.

Participation in internships, cooperative, student teaching, or clinical placement

In a memo dated October 17, 2011, the dean of Arts and Sciences questioned the match between the second learning outcome under Goal 6 and the reality for some Arts and Sciences majors. However, the dean conceded that participation in coops and internships was a worthy goal and suggested further discussion. No faculty member questioned this learning outcome.

Professional Development

The Core Task Force has frequently discussed the need for ongoing professional development to assist faculty and staff members to address the Core learning outcomes. Each of the core newsletters and the presentations held in October and November 2010 also emphasized the need for professional development. Some of the professional development topics the task force has identified include: Service-Learning, Capstones, Oral Communication, Diversity, and “Mapping” the Core learning outcomes. The task force has also invited faculty and staff members to suggest topics for professional development. Within the normal budgeting process funds are annually allocated for such professional development. The task force has recommended that there be a professional development program on January 10, 2012, to introduce faculty and relevant personnel in co-curricular areas to the importance of liberal education in a Catholic Franciscan university. In addition, the task force has recommended that each May, during the week between the end of the Spring marking period and commencement, a menu of professional development activities be offered for interested faculty and staff members.

Sequence of Core Courses

There is a logical sequence to foundational and skills courses. In addition, the best practices which the Core Task Force examined and the recent Core revisions in several other institutions establish the value of “common intellectual experiences” spaced across the four years of study. Current research has also found that college students desire to explore questions of meaning, purpose, values, and spirituality in the classroom. The courses designated as signature courses are sequenced across the four years of study in order to promote increasing depth and maturity in exploration of such issues. A review of current literature will reveal a variety of uses of the term “signature courses.” The Core Task Force is using the term to designate courses which are uniquely expressive of the values and culture of Neumann University. It is important to note, however, that these are not the only courses in which the Neumann values (RISES) and Neumann’s identity as “Catholic in the Franciscan tradition” will be infused.

Flexibility

The Core Task Force acknowledges that a prescribed sequence of courses prevents students from taking courses in any sequence desired. However, current research suggests that a lack of structure within the curriculum contributes to fragmentation and lack of coherence. Furthermore, with a reduction of six Core credits, students in many majors will have the ability to take additional elective credits and hopefully develop minors.

Although there is a recommended sequence of courses, the Core Task Force recognizes that there will be circumstances (e.g. time of transfer, need to make up a failed course) which prevent students from taking courses in the semester specified in the program plan.

Funding Plan

There was concern that the comment “funds are available” does not seem like a commitment to a specific plan of development. Funds needed to ensure the smooth implementation and maintenance of the Core are allocated in various cost centers (e.g. salaries and benefits for faculty, professional development for faculty and staff, student assessment, student activities). The various budget areas would be allocating funds for these activities even if the Core program was not being revised. There will be a need for collaboration among various offices as unit budgets are developed to ensure that funds are designated for professional development related to implementation of the Core program.

Theology

Several comments concerned the need to cap theology classes at 25 students per section.

Experience and research has shown that many first year college students are severely limited in their religious literacy. Theology faculty members in all institutions have the challenge of presenting a quality theology curriculum to students who often lack a solid foundation. A few years ago, the Neumann University theology faculty revised their program to require that all students take a Theological Foundations course. This change has resulted in a stronger program. Faculty report that students are now better prepared for whatever upper level theology course they choose. However, faculty members continue to struggle with the challenge of large classes which include students of varying abilities and diverse theological backgrounds.

Faculty members also recognize the care that first year students need and welcome the opportunity to support these students as they transition into higher education and for many, living away from home for the first time. Faculty members believe that it is important to maintain a cap of 25 students in the first year classes to facilitate the proper academic, social, and emotional climate. In addition, theology faculty members could promote retention (and thus positively impact the university’s budget) if they were better able to serve the needs of the first year students.

Capping the classes at 25 would require 24 sections of Theology 104 over the course of the academic year for first year students alone. Additionally, integrating Service-Learning into the upper level theology courses would be best accomplished by a class size of 25. Capping theology classes would necessitate hiring an additional theology faculty member and/or additional adjunct professors.

At present Neumann University has two full-time theology professors. Neumann University identifies itself as a Catholic institution in the Franciscan tradition. Traditionally, the cornerstone of Catholic higher education has been a sound program in theology and philosophy. In order to provide such a program, the theology faculty requests and the Core Task Force affirms hiring at least one additional full-time theology professor and capping all theology courses at 25 students.

Capping the class size and hiring an additional theology professor will require an additional expense in the first year of implementation. However, by fiscal year 2014 and beyond there will be a decrease in funds needed to support CA 206 and INT 202 (both of which have caps of 25 students) which will no longer be required courses for all students.

Foreign Language

Many secondary schools and some universities now use World Language, Romance Language, or Modern Language to identify courses in language and culture other than English. A review of 25 universities revealed that most institutions who have a Core language requirement continue to use the term Foreign Language. In a meeting on October 18, 2011, language faculty members indicated that they were comfortable with identifying language courses as either Modern Language and Diversity or World Language and Diversity. Recent consultation with the Language work group revealed preference for the term Modern Language in the Catalog description. The change has been made in the revised Catalog copy. The language work group also requested that the Catalog copy for Language refer students to the appropriate pages for placement information and that the placement information indicate that questions should be referred to the professor who teaches the language in question.

Philosophy

There was a suggestion that the Catalog copy not list all the acceptable upper level philosophy core courses. Instead, the Catalog copy should state “PHIL XXX – Any designated PHIL course at the 200 level or above.” The philosophy workgroup has modified the Philosophy course descriptions to state clearly which upper level courses fulfill the Core requirement.

Anthropology

There was a question about the inclusion of Anthropology as an acceptable Social Science Core course. The Core Task Force made no changes to courses that the Arts and Sciences division had already designated as acceptable Core courses. If there is desire to remove anthropology then that recommendation should be made by the Arts and Sciences division.

INT 101

Page 3 of the proposal states: “University administration resolved the question of teaching INT 101 as overload vs. course load by designating the course within the faculty member’s course load.” There was a comment that this statement was not accurate. The statement is not part of the proposal; nonetheless, the Core Task Force will publish a fourth Core newsletter and include a correction of this item.

Correction: Teaching INT 101 is rarely included in a faculty member’s course load; it is ordinarily considered overload.

Assessment Plan and Mapping Process

Neither the Assessment Plan nor the Mapping Sample is part of the Core proposal. Both are implementation activities. The documents were presented as samples only. The Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force and the Core Task Force, in conversation with faculty who teach various courses and staff members who address Core goals, will be engaged in designing and implementing the Assessment Plan. Academic and co-curricular areas will be engaged in developing the Core Map. Concerns related to the coding of the Core Goals and Learning Outcomes and also the signing of the Mission Commitment will be referred to the appropriate task forces.