

# **CORE Curriculum Task Force Newsletter**

**September 2011** **Volume 1, Issue 3**

Dear Colleagues,

The Core Task Force members are grateful to everyone who took the time to comment on the information provided in the second Core newsletter which was sent electronically on August 12, 2011. During our meetings on August 22 and 25 we thoughtfully processed all the questions and suggestions we received. On September 6, I shared our responses with the Faculty Senate. This letter includes our responses.

We continue to address the on-going work described on page 5 of the second Core newsletter. We are happy to share our progress here.

At our Task Force meeting on September 26, we will process additional questions and suggestions. We will then present to the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee a proposed Core revision. We are grateful to Karen Albaugh and the committee for their guidance.

As you will recall, the Core Task Force was appointed in August 2009 and charged with the responsibility of reviewing and recommending revisions to the Core undergraduate program. We spent six months examining the history of the Neumann University Core and educating ourselves on current “best practices” in undergraduate liberal education. In addition to reading extensively, we reviewed exemplary programs and spoke with key individuals in other institutions. Two national associations provided excellent guidance: The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities and the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Beginning in February 2010 we engaged faculty members in conversations and eventually conducted campus-wide focus groups with individuals engaged in both the curriculum and the co-curriculum and with students and members of the Neumann University Board of Trustees. At all times, we have attempted to be transparent in our deliberations and have consistently invited your questions and responses.

We strongly encourage you to educate yourself about the best practices related to Core. If you can read only one document, please read *A United Endeavor: Promising Practices in General Education at Catholic Colleges and Universities*, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities [http://www.accunet.org/files/public/A\\_United\\_End endeavor.pdf](http://www.accunet.org/files/public/A_United_End endeavor.pdf)

We are optimistic that the proposal we send to the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee will gain your support as we work together to provide for our undergraduates a “uniquely personal” experience reflective of the Catholic Franciscan tradition. As always, we welcome your input.

Thank you!

*Fr. Pat Hutchison, OSF*

## COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

*The following paragraphs summarize Core Task Force responses to the comments and questions received after the publication of the second Core newsletter.*

**Elimination of INT 202 as a required course:** Many respondents commented that it is possible to integrate respect for diversity and intercultural awareness and competence into many courses. We are developing a template for the “mapping” of the curricular and co-curricular courses and experiences which address learning outcomes related to diversity and intercultural awareness and competence.

**Elimination of CA 206 as a required course:** Several respondents expressed the conviction that oral communication skills should be integrated pervasively across the curriculum and co-curriculum. Many individuals questioned whether oral communication skills can be developed exclusively through English 101 and 102. We agree, and we have invited the Communication and Media Arts (CMA) workgroup to develop a schema for appropriately integrating oral communication across the curriculum. We recognize that such integration will require professional development and have initiated a plan to ensure ongoing development opportunities for both faculty and staff members.

**Impact of elimination of CA 206 and INT 202:** We received the following questions: Will full-time faculty lack a sufficient teaching load? Will “something” need to be added to compensate for 6 fewer required courses? Our analysis indicates that full-time faculty members will have an adequate course load when these courses are no longer required. Furthermore, we anticipate that the courses will not “disappear” from the Catalog but will become elective courses with fewer required sections. Several of our major programs currently require 126 credits or more (e.g. General Biology, Clinical Biology, Education, and Nursing). These majors will not need to require students to take additional courses to meet the Middle States requirement of 120 credits unless they so choose. Several other majors require 125 credits (Business Administration, Communication and Information Management, International Business, Marketing, Sport and Entertainment Management). For these majors one additional credit will be needed to meet the required 120 credits. In the cases where elimination of the six credits will cause a major to fall below the required 120 credits (Arts Production, Athletic Training, Communication and Media Arts, Criminal Justice, English, Liberal Arts, and Psychology) faculty will need to make adjustments to their program plans. This will most likely not necessitate adding courses. The Core Task Force strongly encourages advisors to invite students to pursue an academic minor or an intentional sequence of related electives.

**Sequence of Courses:** There were questions about the sequence of courses as outlined on page 2 of the newsletter in light of the fact that nearly 50% of first year students take one or more developmental courses. The sequence of courses will need to be adjusted to include developmental courses. It is understood that many students will not be able to follow the exact first year, second year, etc. designation due to developmental courses. However, maintaining the sequence is important (Theology 104 should be as early as possible; Ethics should follow Theology 104 and be as near 2<sup>nd</sup> year as possible, etc.). The Task Force will work with faculty members to identify prerequisites.

Some respondents questioned the placement of upper level theology and philosophy courses in the third and fourth year. The Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities recommend that Core courses be spread over the four years with “Common Intellectual Experiences” at each year. The rationale behind the “Common Intellectual Experiences” is that students should be invited into increasingly mature consideration of significant questions and issues. A suggested “best practice” in Catholic institutions positions the “signature” courses (i.e. courses uniquely expressive of the values and culture of the institution) as “Common Intellectual Experiences” across the four years. The Core Task Force has identified and intentionally positioned across the four years the following “signature” courses: First Year – INT 101 and Theology 104; Second Year – Phil 102 – Ethics; Years Three or Four – upper level Theology and Philosophy; Fourth Year – Capstone.

**Philosophy Program:** Some faculty members questioned whether students could navigate successfully an upper level philosophy course without an introductory course. Philosophy professors have pointed out that Ethics *is* a philosophy course and as such will provide the necessary foundation for upper level courses. It should also be noted that the philosophy faculty have identified a limited number of courses which specifically invite students to “reflect on the compatibility of faith and reason with specific reference to the Catholic Franciscan intellectual and moral tradition” as options for the upper level philosophy.

**Integration of Service-Learning into World Language courses:** Some respondents questioned the practicality of embedding Service-Learning in the World Language courses. In addition, the Task Force learned that approximately 100 students take required language courses outside Neumann University. This will allow students to meet intercultural awareness competencies. However, such courses will probably not include a Service-Learning component. The Service-Learning Task Force recommends and the Core Task Force agrees that, consistent with the mission of Neumann University, students should participate in at least two Service-Learning courses (one in the Core and another in the major). The Task Force is addressing this challenge.

**Macroeconomics:** In response to a recommendation of the Business division, Macroeconomics (but not Microeconomics) will be included as a Social Science Core course.

**Inclusion of PolSc 101 (The American Political Process) as a History Core:** After reviewing the policies of the Pennsylvania Department of Education Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee, the Task Force recommended that PolSc 101 become an option for fulfilling the History Liberal Arts Core requirement. However, discussions with Political Science faculty confirmed that this was not advisable at this time. The suggestion did generate creative discussion which may lead to future changes.

**Impact of proposed Core changes on second-degree and transfer students.** Every attempt will be made to respond to transfer and second-degree students and their needs in a “uniquely personal” manner. This may necessitate creating Theology and Ethics courses streamlined for Transfer and second-degree students. The CAPS program has successfully met the required outcomes for theology and philosophy with adapted classes and class presentations on Catholic Social Teaching and the Franciscan tradition embedded into other courses. This requires planning and continual communication, but the challenge has been successfully negotiated in the past and provides a helpful model for the traditional undergraduate program.

**Capstone Courses:** The Task Force will develop guidelines for Capstone experiences, but each Major will decide the design of its Capstone course. It is appropriate that Capstones take many forms. The Task Force anticipates (but does not require) that the current senior seminars will become the Capstone courses.

**Meaning of common syllabus for multiple sections of same course:** In April 2005 there was an internal and external review of the current Core program. The external reviewers made the following recommendation: **“Insure that Core Courses sharing the same course title and number share a common syllabus and textbooks (meaning the same syllabus and textbooks). It is important to understand that this constitutes academic responsibility. Academic freedom allows the professor to identify a variety of pedagogical strategies in reaching common course outcomes.”**

Following the 2005 Core Review some Arts and Sciences workgroups addressed the need for common syllabi. The present Core Task Force concurs with the recommendation for common syllabi. The Task Force believes that this is an implementation issue which will need to be addressed over time.

**Common Policies:** Some respondents questioned the inclusion of common policies for attendance on the syllabi. Neumann University has articulated an Attendance Policy (see 2011-2012 Undergraduate Catalog, p. 75). Literature and praxis support the connection between class attendance and academic success.

## NAME THE CORE...WIN A PRIZE!

There is a great deal of energy around this issue. The Task Force is *tentatively* considering one overall name such as **The Neumann University Core Experience** (perhaps with a colon and some terms specific to Neumann). The recommendation of naming four components (Common Ground, Foundational, Liberal Arts, Major/Minor) provoked many comments. The Task Force review of institutions which have recently revised their Core programs revealed creative names and also named subcomponents (e.g. Cabrini, Sacred Heart University, Lynn University, Siena College, Viterbo University, Silver Lake College, St. Bonaventure University). However, comments from Neumann personnel revealed that some found the subcomponent names confusing. Therefore, the Task Force is *tentatively* considering two subcomponent names to 1) designate the signature courses and experiences which establish our identity as Catholic in the Franciscan Tradition and 2) the courses and experiences essential for a liberally educated person. It is essential that the chosen name (or names) preserve the fact that the Core is an *experience* which includes courses and co-curricular experiences, and goals and outcomes which continue to be developed and reinforced in the major and minor programs. The Task Force is in dialogue with Steve Bell to ensure that the name is understandable, unique to Neumann, and marketable.

**You are invited to name the Core!**  
**We invite anyone with a creative suggestion for the Core**  
**to submit your idea to the Core Task Force**  
**no later than noon on Monday, September 26.**  
**If your name is chosen, you will receive a prize.**

### Core Task Force Members

**Chair:**

Sr. Patricia Hutchison

**Members:**

Sr. Dorothy Bredehoft  
Janelle Ketrick-Gillespie  
Claudia Kovach  
John Kruse  
Nancy Laplante  
Ahmed Y. Nuriye  
Arde Shahmaei  
Tish Szymurski  
Sr. Janet Thiel

**Staff:**

Sr. Mary Ann McCarthy

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ON-GOING WORK OF THE CORE TASK FORCE

### **Curriculum and Co-curriculum Mapping:**

In order to ensure that identified Goals and Learning Outcomes are met, the Task Force is developing a mapping process to identify where and how in the Core, the Major, and the co-curriculum all goals and learning outcomes are introduced, developed, and assessed. Our aim is to introduce a simple process through which faculty and staff will indicate what they are doing to address and assess the Core Goals and Learning Outcomes. The Map will enable us to determine where and how well overall program goals and outcomes are achieved leading to program improvements.

### **Structure to support Core implementation:**

The Task Force is developing descriptions for the position of Director of Core and a Core Advisory Council. (Please note that these names will change after proper review and approvals.) The Core position will involve an open search among current Neumann personnel with the hope of naming a Director by January 2012.

### **Professional Development:**

The Core Task Force plans to sponsor an initial event to introduce and celebrate the Core revision in early January 2012 and a series of practical workshops in May during the week before commencement. Dates and times will be announced when confirmed.

### **Core Goals and Learning Outcomes:**

A review of the Goals and Learning Outcomes shared in the last Core newsletter revealed a few omissions and the need for grammatical changes. Before submission to Faculty Senate, the grammatical errors will be corrected. In addition, the following learning outcomes have been added or reworded:

#### **Learning Outcomes added to Goal 1**

- Maintain academic honesty as described in the Neumann University Student Handbook
- Participate actively and responsibly in classes and in co-curricular programs

#### **Learning Outcomes added to Goal 2**

- Gain insight into personal cultural rules and biases, and develop a worldview that is inclusive of cultures different from one's own.
- Initiate and develop respectful interactions with culturally different others through on-campus and off-campus experiences (Rewording)

#### **Learning Outcomes added to Goal 4**

- Develop the ability to clearly express and articulate ideas through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

Association of American Colleges and Universities <http://www.aacu.org/index.cfm>

See especially the sections on Liberal Education and General Education.

Several articles and reports are available in full text format. In addition, podcasts and videos are available.

Surveys and Research Reports related to the essential goals of higher education, high impact practices, expectations of employers, etc. are available at

<http://www.aacu.org/resources/liberaleducation/index.cfm>

Please review the entire webpage and download relevant documents.

*A United Endeavor: Promising Practices in General Education at Catholic Colleges and Universities*, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

[http://www.accunet.org/files/public/A\\_United\\_Endeavor.pdf](http://www.accunet.org/files/public/A_United_Endeavor.pdf)

*Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, Middle States Commission on Higher Education

[http://www.msche.org/publications/CHX06\\_Aug08REVMarch09.pdf](http://www.msche.org/publications/CHX06_Aug08REVMarch09.pdf)

*Student Learning Assessment*, Middle States Commission on Higher Education

[http://www.msche.org/publications/SLA\\_Book\\_0808080728085320.pdf](http://www.msche.org/publications/SLA_Book_0808080728085320.pdf)

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University – by Monika K. Hellwig

[http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/2525\\_cit\\_in\\_the\\_catholic\\_university.cfm](http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/2525_cit_in_the_catholic_university.cfm)

The Catholic Franciscan Intellectual Tradition

See related articles at <http://libguides.neumann.edu/content.php?pid=218203>

Integration of Franciscan Tradition into various disciplines and also into student life

See related articles at <http://libguides.neumann.edu/content.php?pid=218203>