

## CAS Core Curriculum Committee Report

April 25, 2017

### Elected Members:

Elizabeth Boquet, Johanna Garvey, Shannon Harding (Chair), Dennis Keenan

### **Charge of the committee.**

Our original charge was determined at a CAS faculty meeting on Jan. 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017:

*The faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences directs the Arts and Sciences Planning Committee to conduct an election of a four-person committee, drawn from the full-time faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, to bring to completion the proposed revision of the Core Curriculum as it stood in the spring of 2016 (while incorporating the work accomplished by faculty in the summer of 2016 on the writing across the curriculum component, the interdisciplinary component, and the social justice component), and shepherd this proposal through the process of: (1) approval by the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, (2) approval by the appropriate Faculty Handbook committees, and (3) approval by the General Faculty. The committee will consist of one former member of the Fairfield 2020 Core Curriculum Task Force, and one former member of each of the Summer 2016 Working Groups (the Writing Across the Curriculum Component, the Interdisciplinary Component, and the Social Justice Component). The four-person committee will aim to bring a proposal to the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences for a vote Sciences for a vote by the end of the academic year.*

### **Background.**

Fairfield 2020 Core Revision Task Force. The Core Revision Process began in 2014 as a Fairfield 2020 initiative to examine the current core, determine if revisions were desirable, and to develop recommendations based on careful, critical analysis. This resulted in a reduction of the core from 60 credits to 45, with courses offered in specific disciplines in scaffolded experience (two tiers), plus a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) component in Tier 1, and an Interdisciplinary component in Tier 2.

Revisions. The initial proposal has been through several revisions (see Core Proposal, page 8), and in April 2016, the proposal passed UCC, with the recommendation that U.S. and World Diversity graduation requirements be included in the Core. Next, summer working groups were formed by Associate Vice Provost Christine Siegel to consider resources and implementation plans for Writing Across the Curriculum, Multicultural Competency, and the Interdisciplinary Experience. Fall working groups (2017) were formed to model student schedules, review the distribution of courses across tiers, identify professional development needs, and determine governance and committee strategy. The specific changes are outlined in the core proposal dated November 28<sup>th</sup>, and summarized in Appendices A and B.

## **Major Issues.**

During Interim Provost Siegel's presentation to the CAS faculty on January 27<sup>th</sup>, a number of concerns were raised by College faculty about changes that occurred to the Core Proposal between April and December 2016 (a proposal that passed UCC in December). At the College meeting, there were four major issues that were identified as problematic, and for the past two months, the CAS Core Revision Committee has focused our work on these issues.

1. Governance and the approval of courses offered in the Core (Tier 2) based on learning outcomes (i.e. outside of a department).
2. The distribution of courses into tiers: comparing the Core Proposal from April 2016 with December 2016.
3. The integration of summer work, including the signature elements of Social Justice, Writing Across the Curriculum, and the Interdisciplinary experience.
4. The proposed change to the language requirement for the School of Engineering.

## **Process.**

Meetings. Faculty were elected to the committee on February 27<sup>th</sup>. The committee had an initial planning meeting on March 1st, and 8 working meetings as a full group. There have also been smaller discussions with interested parties when needed.

Listening tour. The CAS Core Revision Committee met with a number of stakeholders in the Core, including representatives from the School of Engineering (SOE), the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures (DMLL), the Office of Mission and Identity, and the Office of Service Learning. Outside of our scheduled meetings, we had additional conversations and correspondence with DMLL and SOE, plus informal discussions with the School of Nursing and the School of Business.

As a group, we reviewed a number of materials including (1) a report from the SOE about the limited language requirements in comparable programs and curricular and recruitment issues related to the proposed core, (2) correspondence between the DMLL and the SOE that led to the proposed changes, (3) information from the DMLL about national trends in languages, (4) additional information from both DMLL and SOE about comparable programs in Engineering and language requirements. We were also provided with the most recent version of the core proposal dated November 28<sup>th</sup>, which outlines the rationale for the proposed changes and provides model student schedules in various disciplines, including Engineering students.

In our initial review of the core proposal, we were reminded that the primary goals of the core revision were to (1) reduce the number of required core courses for students, allowing them more flexibility, and (2) to keep the experience common across all schools.

With the vocal concerns from the SOE, additional concerns were raised about how the

summer work may affect other professional programs (Nursing and Business). However, because the committee is housed within CAS, we elected to review the four major issues and make recommendations in a working document, and then to present our ideas to the professional schools later in the process for additional feedback.

### **Findings and recommendations.**

Overall, the Core Proposal has some strong elements, and the work that has gone into the process is commendable. The document we received represented years of analysis, review, and compromise, however, there are a number of places where the details and oversight still need to be clarified. What has resulted is a Core that is reduced (to 15 courses: 45 credits instead of 60); however some of the simplicity has been lost, and there are concerns that reductions might not meet the needs of all schools. The proposal includes parts that not everyone will agree with, but compromise is critical in delivering a common experience to students at a comprehensive university. Our discussion of major issues and recommendations follow.

### **Major Issue 1: The distribution of courses into tiers (Comparing the Core Proposal from April 2016 to December 2016).**

The committee carefully reviewed the course distributions in Tier 1 and Tier 2 in the core proposals from April 2016 and December 2016. (Please see Appendix A.) Two major differences emerged in the December 2016 version: (1) the separation of “Arts and Literature” into two separate requirements in Tier 2 (vs. 2 optional requirements in Tier 1 and Tier 2), and (2) a new, somewhat confusing graphic.

**Recommendation #1.** After careful review and discussion of the April 2016 and December 2016 distribution of courses across tiers, the committee endorses the course distribution from the December Core proposal. For simplicity, we recommend returning to the original listing of courses (as “orientation” and “exploration”) and moving away from confusing graphics.

#### **ORIENTATION Components**

- 1 Composition and Rhetoric course
- 1 Religious Studies course
- 1 Philosophy course
- 1 History course
- 1 Math course
- 2 courses in the same Language (any level)

#### **EXPLORATION Components**

- **Humanities**
  - 2 courses\* in Religious Studies/Philosophy/History
  - 2 courses\* in Visual and Performing Arts/Literature
- **Natural Sciences and Mathematics**
  - 2 courses\* in Math/Biology/Physics/Chemistry

- **Social and Behavioral Sciences**

- 2 courses\* in Sociology&Anthropology/Psychology/Economics/  
Politics / Communication

\*indicates that courses should be taken in two different departments.

**Major Issue 2: Governance and the approval of courses offered in the core (Tier 2) based on learning outcomes (i.e. outside of a department).**

The latest version of the Core Proposal suggests that whether courses “count” within a specific discipline is determined not by departments, but by learning outcomes. In addition future approval of courses in Tier 2 is governed by outcomes, not by expert faculty:

- *“Tier Two features 8 courses, defined by learning outcomes. For example, a course in Art History or Music History might count as a History course.” (p.3 and p.10)*
- *“Approval of courses for curricular areas of Tier Two follow learning outcomes developed by subcommittees from those curricular areas” (p.15)*

While the committee recognizes the need for flexibility in the current Core, we also recognize the importance of faculty and departmental expertise in particular areas. The committee would encourage departments to work collegially with faculty to cross-list courses to meet the needs of the Core when it is appropriate. In its review of governance, the committee also recognizes that different processes exist for approval of core courses, and that we will need an appeals process.

**Recommendation #2:** The committee recommends we (a) remove language in the Core proposal about courses meeting learning objectives to be offered in a particular area and (b) direct the UCC to form a subcommittee to review appropriate processes, especially an appeals process.

**Major Issue 3: The integration of summer work, including the signature elements of Social Justice, Writing Across the Curriculum, and the Interdisciplinary experience.**

The committee discussed an initiative to make the Jesuit and Catholic identity of Fairfield University more visible in the Core, taking this opportunity to rename the signature elements from the proposal in December 2017. (In a communication and meeting with the committee, Professor Dallavalle, VP for Mission and Identity suggested RATIO as a term for consideration for some of these elements. However, the committee arrived at MAGIS, which means “more” or “better” and is an expression of aspiration and inspiration.) We also discussed ways to make these signature elements easier for students to accomplish, by allowing students to take them during fulfillment of Orientation and Exploration components, or by taking additional courses in the College.

The learning goals of the signature elements and the ways in which the Interdisciplinary component can be fulfilled are outlined in Appendix C. The number of courses suggested represent the ideal number of experiences that a student would get within the

College, which would make our program unique and highlight our commitment to writing across the core, social justice, and interdisciplinary experiences. The committee also agreed to rename the Writing Across the Curriculum elements Writing Across the Core.

**Recommendation 3:** The committee recommends the College of Arts and Sciences vote to (a) rename the signature elements “MAGIS components” to increase visibility of our Catholic and Jesuit mission; and (b) endorse the MAGIS components as a central feature of the revised Core.

**MAGIS** Components\*

- **Interdisciplinary Seminar** (1 interdisciplinary experience)
- **Social Justice** (3 courses: an Orientation to SJ course and at least one course that considers race, class, and gender)
- **Writing Across the Core** (3 courses)

**Major Issue 4: The proposed change to the language requirement for the School of Engineering.**

This issue was highly contentious and resulted in active discussions with the School of Engineering and Modern Language Department. The proposed change from December is summarized below and taken from the Core Proposal dated November 28<sup>th</sup>:

*In the proposed Core, the accommodation for the engineering students is this: Engineering students take two semesters of Computer Programming and also study a non-English-speaking culture in at least two of their Core classes. In this way, they will be wrestling with a form of language, and they will also be studying another culture.*

The committee spent a large portion of our time reviewing and discussing materials provided to us by the DMLL and the SOE, including data from comparable programs (notably other Jesuit schools that offered 4-year degrees in Engineering) national trends in Modern Language, and a precedent for counting a courses outside of Languages in this requirement. The change suggested was specifically for Engineering students, violating one of the central principles of the Core Proposal (a universal experience for all).

The issue for Engineering is two-fold: (a) difficulty recruiting students (most comparable engineering programs have smaller cores and/or a reduced/absent language requirement), and (b) the large number of requirements in courses designated as “science” and “engineering” required for accreditation.

The committee reviewed / discussed a number of options, including:

- **No language requirement for the SOE.** This idea was in direct opposition to the idea of a common core experience, and opens the door for additional exemptions by other professional schools.
- **Placement (place out) testing for the SOE or everyone.**
- **Allowing Computer Programming courses to count in that block of “language” courses for all students.** Although this would assist the SOE in

meeting accreditation needs, it goes against disciplinary norms and national trends in Modern Languages.

- **Keeping the core requirement the same for all schools (2 Language courses).**

In the end, our committee was unable to come to resolution. Below are some possible recommendations for discussion.

**Recommendation #4a:** To expand the “Language” category in the Core Requirement and to allow Computer programming courses to fulfill the language requirement. This option would be available to all students.

**Recommendation #4b:** To allow all students to place out of the language requirement.

**Recommendation #4c:** To require a 2-course sequence in Modern/Classical Languages and to give all students a 2-course exemption of their choice from the core.

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If the College supports this initiative, the CAS Core Revision Committee will share our report with the professional schools, and will report back to the College when these questions are addressed.

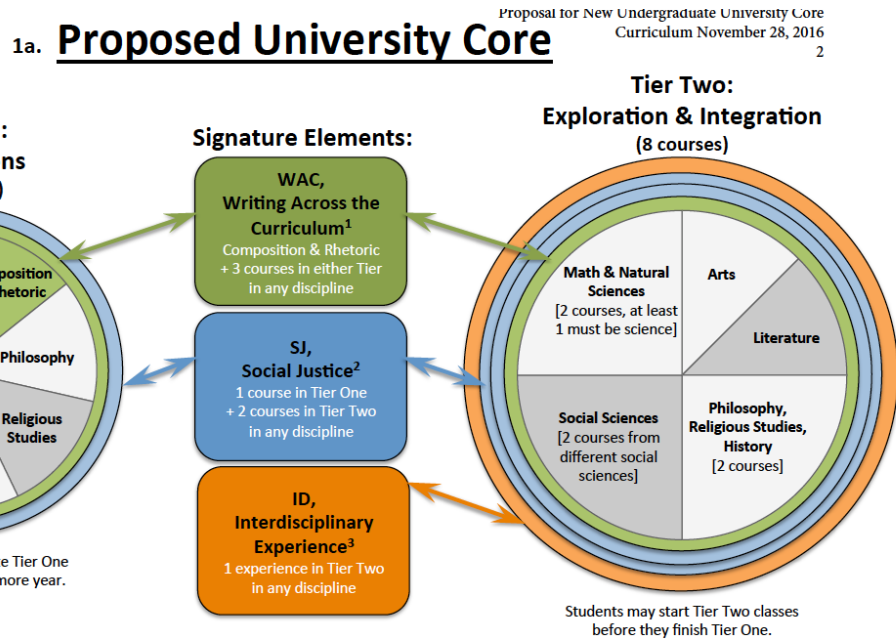
**Appendix A. Comparison of course distributions**  
**Core Curriculum Proposal April 2016**  
**TIER ONE: ORIENTATION (8 courses)**

- 1 English writing course
- 1 Religious Studies course
- 1 Philosophy course
- 1 History course
- 1 Mathematics course
- 1 Arts and Literature course
- 2 Foreign Language courses, at any level

**TIER TWO: EXPLORATION AND INTEGRATION (7 courses)**

- Humanities: 3 courses in 4 different departments (PH; RS; HI; Arts & Lit)
- Natural Sciences and Mathematics: 2 courses in 2 different departments (MA; BI; PS; CH)
- Social and Behavioral Sciences: 2 courses in 2 different departments (SO & AY; EC; PO; PY; CO)
- Integration: 1 pair of cluster courses, or 1 team-taught or individually taught interdisciplinary course

**Core Curriculum Proposal December 2016**



## **Appendix B.** Major summer initiatives and the School of Engineering Language compromise

before they finish Tier One.

<b><sup>1</sup>Writing Across the Curriculum Details:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All students must take the new Composition and Rhetoric course in their first year.</li><li>• All students must take three additional WAC courses.</li></ul>	<b><sup>2</sup>Social Justice Details:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All students must take three SJ courses:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One SJ1 course in Tier One, AND</li><li>• Two SJ2 courses in Tier Two, at least one of which must have SJ2A designation.</li></ul></li><li>• Students must complete the SJ1 course before they can enroll in SJ2 courses.</li></ul>	<b><sup>3</sup>Interdisciplinary Experience Details:</b> <p>The Interdisciplinary Experience can happen in one of three ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 team-taught course OR</li><li>• 1 set of cluster courses in two different disciplines, one of which is in a Core Curricular Area OR</li><li>• 1 interdisciplinary course in a Core Curricular Area taught by one faculty member.</li></ul>
<b>* Engineering students take:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 semesters of Computer Programming and</li><li>• Study a non-English-speaking culture in at least 2 of their Core classes.</li></ul>		

## **Appendix C.** Learning objectives of the MAGIS components.

### **Integration Seminar**

An “Integration Seminar” will satisfy the following learning outcomes:

1. Synthesize or draw conclusions by connecting examples, data, facts, or theories from more than one perspective or field of study
2. Meaningfully synthesize connections among experiences outside of the formal classroom (e.g., life experiences, service learning, study abroad, internship) to deepen understanding of fields of study and to critically examine their own points of view
3. Adapt and apply skills, theories, or methodologies across disciplines to explore complex questions and address problems

Integration seminars may be team-taught, individually taught, or taught in a cluster format.

### **Social Justice**

An “Orientation to Social Justice” course will satisfy the following learning outcomes:

1. Identify values, beliefs, and practices of multiple cultures, worldviews, or perspectives
2. Identify one’s own social identities and elements of one’s own culture
3. Ask critical questions about assumptions, biases, or worldviews

Other “Social Justice” courses will satisfy the following learning outcomes:

1. Demonstrate understanding of the historical and/or contemporary context of *either*
  - a. race, class, and gender, *or*
  - b. power, inequality, and oppression
2. Articulate how social identities and cultural values intersect to influence different worldviews and experiences in a global society
3. Analyze one’s own social identities, cultural values, and privilege
4. Explore answers to critical social questions from multiple perspectives and a variety of resources

Optional additional learning outcomes include:

- Apply knowledge, awareness, and skills to problems of inequality and oppression
- Propose solutions to problems of inequality and oppression
- Commit to interrupting systems of power, privilege, and oppression



## **Writing Across the Core**

A “Writing Across the Core” course will address at least one of the following learning outcomes:

1. Use writing as an instrument of inquiry across a variety of writing situations, both formal and informal
2. Respond to and use responses to drafts in revision, and in this and other ways demonstrate metacognitive awareness about their writing
3. Engage in writing that explores and responds to texts or other content in a discipline in ways that deepen student understanding in rhetorically appropriate ways that provide information to others
4. Make choices reflecting their awareness of purpose, audience, and the rhetorical context in which they write
5. Employ the forms of attribution appropriate to academic discourse