

## CREATING A NEW CORE CURRICULUM: THE PROCESS AND THE PRODUCT

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"Changing a curriculum is like moving a cemetery."

These were the words of warning offered by a consultant in 1985 when the faculty at our college began the process of reconsidering the undergraduate curriculum. That process is now seven years old. Much sacred ground has had to be reconsidered, and not a few intellectual ancestors have lost their honored place to traditions and people from far away places. The warning, it seems, was not misplaced.

As a result of this process, the core course requirements and recommended content of courses have already been substantially revised in the humanities and social sciences. The course requirements are now more rigorous, and course content more accurately reflects the multicultural world in which students will live and work. But guidelines from on high are not always instantly reflected in the actual content of courses. In many disciplines, for instance, faculty are not trained in the teaching of non-western materials. They are unsure and hesitant about what new material to include and what old standbys to cut out. Sometimes these choices are difficult and painful; yet the exercise has a positive side. Core courses are no longer taken for granted and taught in the same stale way term-after-term. The new core also places strong emphasis on connections among closely related courses. Faculty in different departments are, as a result, increasingly communicating with one another on the content and methodology of their core teaching. Though the process of reforming the core has undoubtedly exacted costs, one certain benefit is the substantial and continuing dialogue among the faculty on core issues. One of the chief responsibilities of a new campus committee is to nurture and encourage this dialogue.

### THE ORIGINS OF THE PROCESS

The reappraisal of the baccalaureate at Kennesaw began in 1985 as the result of a curricular dispute between the Business School and the faculties of the Arts and Sciences. The Business School had created a number of "applied" courses that replaced Arts and Sciences courses. Faculty in the traditional disciplines believed the "applied" courses were different chiefly in that they were less demanding. The Business faculty thought the traditionalists were just trying to hold onto business students in order to justify more faculty positions. The administration called for a year-long study of the entire baccalaureate program, partly to distract attention from an increasingly unproductive debate and partly

because such a study was overdue in any event. One result of the ensuing study of the baccalaureate (1986-1987) was a general recognition of the need to strengthen those elements of the baccalaureate program that all schools hold in common, which focused attention on the core curriculum. The Ad Hoc Committee on the Core Curriculum (1988-1989) was the result. Another year of consultation and discussion followed. In its final report, the Ad Hoc Committee produced the basic structure and the underlying philosophy that the faculty ultimately accepted as the basis for a revised core curriculum.

It is important to note, however, that the very substantial changes called for in the new core would not have been accepted if it were not for the long period of self-study and reappraisal just described. The many hours of small group discussions had involved virtually the entire faculty, not least because the administration was interested enough in the process to call off classes several times a year and require attendance. Something like a consensus emerged as to how the core might be improved. Besides, many faculty members felt we had talked long enough. It was time to do something.

#### THE RESULTS, OR THE PROCESS CONTINUED

The report of the Ad Hoc Committee outlined a structure for a revised core. The first aim of the new structure was to provide a core educational experience with greater rigor and coherence than had previously been the case. In history, for example, students had been required to choose either World Civilization I (up to 1500 AD) or World Civilizations II. Whichever course they chose, the vast majority of our students never took the second course. The same choice - take either of two courses - was available in American history. The range of elective choices in both the humanities and the social sciences was very broad. Many students chose the path of least resistance; most never took any courses in Philosophy, Religion, Geography or Foreign Language.

Under to revised core, every student in the college must take a course in ethics taught by the Philosophy and Religion faculty, must take either Geography or Economics and must take a foreign language (or test out of it) up to the 102 level. The new core is more rigorous. New survey history courses are reduced to three credits each, but every student must take the full sequence both in World and in American history. Not only must students explore the traditional liberal arts domain more thoroughly, but,



with these strict and universal requirements, professors in upper-level courses now have some confidence that their students have certain shared academic experiences. The new core produces greater commonality.

The Ad Hoc Core Curriculum Committee's report also emphasized a need to find meaningful connections among core courses. The required sequence of world literature courses runs roughly parallel to the sequence of world civilizations courses mentioned above. Faculty in both departments are expected to work together to identify key "points of intersection" that both sequences should touch upon to help students appreciate the way the different disciplines bring varied insights into the same subject. The faculties of the two departments have identified eight such points of intersection: Periclean Greece, Eastern Chou China, Gupta India, and so on. The points are general enough so that individual professors are still free to determine which works or events should receive the closest attention in their courses. The total number of points of intersection has been kept small for the same reason. Both discipline groups and individual professors must be free to teach to their strengths, that is, to emphasize those aspects of a course or particular subject that they teach with the greatest expertise and enthusiasm.

Another major theme of the new core is the effort to introduce more non-western material into the general curriculum. Our college had taught a number of courses on non-western subjects for years. For the most part, though, only history and international affairs majors took them. The only course with substantial non-western content that was required of all students was the world civilizations sequence and, as mentioned above, students were required to take only one course of the two-course sequence. Under the new core, the exposure to non-western material will occur in many courses. A new world literature sequence replaces a course that looked only at western literature. The required ethics course contains much from non-western traditions, American government is now taught with a comparative slant, and all students are required to demonstrate a minimal competence in a foreign language.

Finally, the Ad Hoc Committee proposed, and the faculty agreed, to establish a new Core Curriculum Committee as part of our institutional structure at the college. This was vital. The departmental organization of American colleges and universities enables disciplines to watch over, and advocate for, their programs through the departments. The new core

committee functions, if you will, is a kind of Department of the Core. Its members are elected from each of the disciplines that teach a core course, with additional at-large representatives for non-core faculty. The Core Curriculum Committee serves as both watchdog and advocate for general education at the college. Already it has supervised the implementation of the new core, with all the problems of advisement and transfer of credit that are inevitably involved. Next year the committee will begin a series of workshops for faculty, focusing on how to strengthen the interconnections among the new core courses. The net result, then, is not only a new structure of courses for the core but a new institutional structure that should provide both continuity and drive for the general education program. It is the purpose of the statutory Core Curriculum Committee to make the process of tending to the core an ongoing one that will continually adjust the content and approach of Kennesaw State's general education program to changing needs.

#### CONCLUSION

The process of curricular change at Kennesaw State College began with a dispute between the Business School and the older schools in the college. The administration rather skillfully shifted the energy and interest generated by that dispute into general reappraisal of the college's baccalaureate program which, in turn, focused attention on the need for improvements in the core. The new structure eventually approved by the faculty reflects a desire to have a more demanding and coherent set of courses that interconnect across discipline lines much more frequently than had been the case. The new core also features substantially more attention to non-western cultures in many of its courses. Finally, to assure that such changes are not just on paper, but impact the students in a continuous and meaningful way, the faculty approved creation of a new statutory Core Curriculum Committee charged with oversight and advocacy of the general education program at the college.

The seven-year process that resulted in these changes was, indeed, at times, akin to trying to move a cemetery. But, sensitive and contentious as the process has been, it has also led to a good deal of intellectual growth and very substantially greater interest in the core curriculum that provides the common foundation of knowledge and skills on which our students subsequent education must build.