

TO: MUW Faculty

FROM: Tom Richardson, Interim Provost/VPAA
Chair, Academic Council

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Chair, Core Curriculum Committee

DATE: March 27, 2007

SUBJECT: Core Review

As part of the Academic's Council's required review of the Academic Master Plan (AMP), the Council asked the Core Curriculum Committee (CCC) to initiate a general review of the core. Given the program review that has been taking place in the colleges and departments in conjunction with the AMP, the Council thought it appropriate also to review the general education program. The attached information offers a rationale from the CCC for reviewing the core at this time, a list of the present core, a sample core to initiate discussion, some suggested points for discussion, and a proposed timeline for completing the review.

The faculty is responsible for all curricular decisions, including recommendations to the President regarding the university's core curriculum. Although the attached document provides an initial suggestion for a smaller and more-flexible core, the faculty is not bound to pursue this direction and may indeed decide that no changes or only minor changes are needed at this time. In the end, the only requirements that must be followed are certain mandates for general education established by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning. To facilitate this review process, an ad hoc committee comprised of full-time faculty will be appointed. The ad hoc faculty committee will lead the review of the core and ultimately will make recommendations to the faculty for a vote. The attached timeline for review of the core is also only a suggestion. Adjustments can be made at any time as the process moves forward to insure adequate deliberation and full faculty input.

It should also be noted that the core review is not driven by financial considerations. The President is committed to maintaining at minimum the current level of full-time instructional staff; there will be no full-time positions eliminated as a consequence of a reduction in core hours in a particular discipline.

A review of the core curriculum is an opportunity for faculty to exchange ideas about the purpose of higher education in general and about the value of a strong liberal arts background for students of all academic disciplines. It is also an important opportunity for people within specific programs to discuss what general education means to their discipline, and it is especially valuable as a chance for people from different academic disciplines to be able to discuss common education goals for their respective students. A review of the national debates on the purpose of general education might help us define our own goals more clearly and offer us fresh perspectives on general education. To that end, we are setting up a library of relevant publications for the use by faculty in the review process. These materials are available in the Ray/Anthony Conference room, Welty 300. In addition to what we have on campus, Dr. Sandra Jordan, incoming Provost/VPAA, is lending us several resources. Dr. Jordan has had extensive experience in the Kentucky higher education in assisting faculty through core reviews.

If the process is to be successful, there must be ample opportunities for faculty to share ideas. We encourage departments and colleges to find time over the next few months to discuss

the core. There will be opportunities for groups across various disciplines to share ideas, as well as open campus meetings for faculty to get together as a whole. We are also setting up a discussion group on WebCT so that faculty will be able to exchange ideas generally or about specific issues that arise in the discussions. The committee will be open to suggestions for additional opportunities for communication.

We look forward to conversations over the next few months about what we value as an educational institution and about how we can best prepare our students for the challenges of the rapidly-changing world in which they live and work. We thank you in advance for participating fully in this process and for what we know will be very fruitful results of these discussions.

CORE CURRICULUM REVIEW

March 2007

Why Review The Core Curriculum Now?

- During a review of the Academic Master Plan, the Academic Council recommended that the university consider a comprehensive review of the core curriculum.
- The current core curriculum has been in effect with only minor revisions since fall 2000. Regular review of curricula is an important component of institutional effectiveness.
- Three years ago IHL mandated a maximum of 124 hours in most degree programs. The reduction in hours in MUW's programs means that students have fewer elective hours and, in some cases, programs had to reduce required courses in the major area.
- The Core Curriculum Committee began discussing the need for a review in fall 2005. The CCC believed that increased flexibility would assist in aligning MUW's core more closely with the IHL-community college articulation agreement.
- The Mississippi IHL is examining the issue of college readiness, documenting the knowledge and skills necessary for college entry. It may be appropriate to consider how MUW's core curriculum builds on students' knowledge and skill base as an extension of this review of high school curricula.
- Faculty and students have expressed concerns that the current core curriculum may require too many hours and may be too inflexible. In addition, faculty and students have expressed concerns that requirements for transfer students differ from those for native MUW students, resulting in confusion in determining completion of degree requirements.
- This is a good time in terms of MUW's SACS accreditation cycle. We are early enough into the next cycle of review to be able to implement and assess the curriculum before the next scheduled accreditation renewal.

What Are The Potential Benefits To Altering The Core Curriculum?

If the university reduces the number of required hours in the core curriculum and if the university introduces more flexibility into which courses can satisfy the various core curriculum categories:

- Departments can restore major and elective courses that were cut from university programs when the IHL mandated that undergraduate degrees, with few exceptions, reduce their required hours to 124.
- Prospective students will notice that the MUW core requirements are no longer dramatically greater than the core requirements of other IHL institutions. (MUW currently requires 49-53 hours of core curriculum courses; by comparison, Ole Miss requires 30 hours, MSU requires 36 hours, and USM requires 37 hours.)

- Enrollment pressures on core courses will be reduced and enrollment will be distributed across a wider variety of upper-level courses, many of which have been under-enrolled or available on a limited rotation basis. This change will reduce over-reliance on adjunct faculty for general education instruction and also will allow departments to reallocate some full-time faculty from general education instruction to upper-level, specialized, and interdisciplinary courses.
- Introducing more flexibility into which courses can satisfy the various core curriculum categories will allow the introduction of innovative interdisciplinary core courses. Such courses cannot currently easily be included in the core curriculum due to the rigid nature of the core curriculum categories.
- Students who change their majors and transfer students will be less likely to experience delays in graduation with a reduced core course load that allows them more flexibility in catching up with required courses in their new major.
- The university might enroll transfer students earlier if our core is no longer more rigid than the articulation agreements MUW follows for community college transfers. The current rigidity of our core acts as an inducement for transfer students to complete as much of the core as possible before transferring.

What Are The Goals We Are Trying To Achieve In Changing The Core Curriculum?

These goals are works in progress and the ultimate goals of any changes to the core must be established by the university community as a whole. The following represents a first stab at both goals and guiding principles, but should be regarded as tentative.

- MUW's liberal arts emphasis is important. A reduced core curriculum must preserve the breadth of content for MUW students while supporting increased depth in content through the use of upper-level electives. This will be possible, however, only if departments retain as many elective hours as possible to support students' exploration of disciplines outside their major area of study.
- Freeing up elective hours by reducing core requirement hours will allow advisors to encourage more students to pursue minors. Currently few students complete a minor unless required because they have so few electives available to them. A structure that supports minors could strengthen programs by increasing enrollment in upper-level courses. Declared minors also can be used for documentation of program vitality.
- The following page includes the statement of our values from the MUW Bulletin. Can these goals be accomplished with fewer hours and increased flexibility in core curriculum requirements? Does this statement still reflect our beliefs about the core knowledge and skills necessary for our graduates? Are there any elements in this statement that need to be added, deleted, or changed?

Mississippi University for Women strongly believes in the necessity of a core curriculum that prepares students to be active citizens in a continually changing world. The General Education Core is designed to provide a common body of knowledge, to strengthen essential skills, and to facilitate the exploration of self, relationships, and values. An individual with a liberal arts education should have an understanding and appreciation of many areas of intellectual endeavor. Knowledge is enhanced through exposure to historical, literary, artistic, scientific and cultural traditions that have shaped societies, both antiquated and contemporary. An understanding of varied cultures, languages and ideas reveals the interconnectedness of world cultures, both western and non-western, and promotes compassion and good will among people of diverse origins and backgrounds.

A liberal arts education also should develop those skills requisite to life in a rapidly-changing environment. All individuals should be able to reason critically and to express themselves clearly; thus, MUW's core curriculum blends basic knowledge with essential skills in writing, speaking, and critical thinking. In addition, computer and quantifying skills are essential in an increasingly technical world; therefore, the MUW core requirements seek to enhance the student's proficiency in accessing information and utilizing technologies in settings both academic and professional. Each of the above critical skills is introduced through core courses and is reinforced in the various majors.

A liberal arts education strives to transform students into independent, productive, and responsible members of society, with the ability to negotiate complex moral and ethical dilemmas with both rigor and compassion. MUW's goal is to produce well-educated individuals who will enjoy a life of fulfilling personal successes, but who will also make selfless contributions to the society in which they live. (2006-07 *Bulletin*, p. 72)

How Might a Revised MUW Core Curriculum Look?

Both the Mississippi IHL and the SACS Commission on Colleges have specific requirements regarding the total number of credit hours and the content areas required for university general education programs. Because of these requirements, we will have little or no flexibility in making changes in some areas of the MUW core curriculum. In other areas, we will have a great deal of flexibility. The Core Curriculum Committee is offering a sample based on our current core structure as a starting point for discussion. This sample meets the requirements set forth by IHL/SACS while reducing the total number of hours required and increasing flexibility within the curriculum. *The CCC is not recommending this curriculum for action. It is meant only as a mechanism for initiating discussion.*

Current Core	Summary of Changes	Sample Core	IHL	SACS
<p>To Develop Knowledge for a Changing World (23-26 hrs)</p> <p>A. World Heritage (15 hrs) History of Civilization (6 hrs) HIS 101, 102 Literature and Fine Arts (9 hrs) Literature Survey (3 or 6 hrs) EN 201, 202, 203, 204, 231,232 FLF 311, 213 FLS 311, 312 Fine Arts History/Appreciation (3 or 6 hrs) ART 102, 211,212 DAN 110 MUS 100, 105 TH 175</p> <p>B. Natural Sciences with Laboratory (8 hrs) BSB 101, 102, 201 BSM 131 PSC 111, 112 PSP 211, 212, 213,214 SM 101, 102</p> <p>C. Intercultural Studies (0-3 hrs) EN 231, 232 GEO 101 REL 213 Language Course (non-English course) Approved study-abroad course</p>	<p>Reduce from 15 to 12 hours; remove specific listing of courses</p> <p>No changes in hours; remove specific listing of courses</p> <p>Remove requirement</p>	<p>To Develop Knowledge for a Changing World (20 hrs)</p> <p>A. Humanities and Fine Arts (12 hrs from at least 3 of the 4 areas) History Literature Fine Arts Philosophy</p> <p>B. Natural Sciences with Laboratory (8 hrs) Two lab-based sciences</p>	<p>(15 hrs)</p> <p>9 hrs</p> <p>6 hrs/ 2 lab-based classes</p>	<p>(6 hrs)</p> <p>3 hrs</p> <p>3 hrs science or math</p>
<p>II To Strengthen Skills for Living and Working in a Changing World (18 hrs)</p> <p>A. Critical Thinking Skills (3 hrs) PHL 201, 202, 204, 205, 206, 306, 307</p> <p>B. Written Communication (6 hrs) EN 101, 300</p> <p>C. Oral Communication (3 hrs) COM 101</p> <p>D. Quantifying and Technology Skills (6 hrs) MA 113 or higher (3)</p>	<p>PHL moved</p> <p>No changes</p> <p>No changes</p> <p>Reduce from 6 to 3 hrs; require</p>	<p>To Strengthen Skills for Living and Working in a Changing World (12 hrs)</p> <p>A. Written Communication (6 hrs) EN101, EN300</p> <p>B. Oral Communication (3 hrs) COM101</p> <p>C. Quantifying Skills (3 hrs) MA113 or higher</p>	<p>(9 hrs)</p> <p>6 hrs</p> <p>3 hrs (MA113 or</p>	<p>(3 hrs)</p> <p>3 hrs science or math</p>

Other MA or computer course (3)	documentation in major*		higher)	
III To Explore Self, Relationships and Values (8-9 hrs)		To Explore Self, Relationships and Values (4-5 hrs)	(0 hrs)	(3 hrs)
A. Meeting the Challenge of College (*0 -1 hr.) UN 001, 101	Change UN001 to UN399	A. Meeting the Challenge of College (*0 -1 hr.) UN101, 399		
B. Developing Personal Well Being Through Physical Activities (2 hrs) HKC (1) HK Activity course or additional HKC (1)	Reduce from 2 to 1 hr	B. Developing Personal Well Being Through Physical Activities (1 hr) HKC/HK Activity course (1)		
C. Social Institutions (3 hrs) BU 201, 202 GEO 101 POL 101, 201	Combine and reduce from 6 to 3 hours; remove specific listing of courses	C. Social Sciences (3 hrs) Economics Geography Political Science Psychology Sociology		3 hrs
D. Human Behavior (3 hrs) PSY 101, 206 SOC 201				
Total 49-53 hrs	Reduce total by 13-17 hrs	Total 36-37 hrs	24 hrs	30 hrs

*To add to (or *specify* in) majors: Technology (3) This is a SACS requirement that could be accomplished by a course in the major that is "certified" as tech-intensive and includes appropriate learning outcomes and assessments to document its inclusion. SACS requires that students have access to and receive training in the use of technology.

Some Questions for Consideration

We are setting up a discussion group on WebCT for faculty to use to provide campus-wide input into the core review. All suggestions will be welcomed, but there will also be some focused areas for discussion as the major issues emerge. Here are a few questions for consideration as we begin the review:

- Are we comfortable with our statement of purpose for the core? Do we need to revise our philosophy? What “categories” of knowledge and skills do we want to include?
- How flexible do we want to be? Do we want to designate specific courses or just designate disciplines or categories of disciplines?
- Do we want to include disciplines that we have not previously included, such as religion or family studies? Do we want to include additional types of courses within disciplines, such as studio and performance courses in the fine and performing arts?
- Currently we require philosophy under “skills” to meet the critical thinking requirement; should philosophy stay in skills or move to “knowledge”?
- One current trend in general education requirements is to include a “global perspectives” area. Do we want such a requirement; if so, how will we accomplish it?
- Another trend is to include some junior-senior level core requirements. Do we want to include upper-level courses (prerequisites might be an issue)? Or are we interested in developing new, interdisciplinary upper-level courses that might serve to provide students an opportunity to synthesize their educational experience?
- What else?

How Will Changes To The Core Curriculum Be Decided Upon?

Although the Core Curriculum Committee has responsibility by policy for recommending changes to the core, no policy is in place for approving an overhaul of the core curriculum. The following procedures and timeline were suggested by the Core Curriculum Committee and Deans & Directors; alternative processes could also be considered. The following timetable recommended by the CCC and Deans/Directors will allow the process to be completed early enough in the fall semester 2007 so that any necessary or desired changes to academic programs can be made in time for printing the 2008-09 university catalogue. However, this is an ambitious timetable; it certainly can be extended as necessary.

March 30: Have a campus-wide meeting to initiate the review process.

April 5: Appoint a faculty Ad Hoc Core Review Committee.

March 30-October 10: This will be a time for discussion of the core within departments, colleges, institutes, faculty and student groups, and across the campus as whole. There will be a discussion group set up in WebCT to facilitate open discussion on campus. Broad campus input is strongly encouraged.

September 11 at 3:30: Campus-wide meeting to discuss the core.

September 21 at 1:30: Campus-wide meeting with the Ad Hoc Core Review Committee. There will be an opportunity for focused presentations about specific points that have arisen during Core discussions.

October 10: Recommendations for the Core due to the Ad Hoc Core Review Committee. The Committee will compile this feedback to guide their deliberations.

October 19: The Ad Hoc Core Review Committee will finalize a proposal for the core. The proposal will be distributed to campus by October 26.

October 26: Campus meeting for Ad Hoc Core Review Committee to present the core proposal. Voting opens.

November 9: Deadline for voting. Voting will be open to all full-time faculty. Voting will be done by online “secret ballot” using the class climate software. A 2/3 majority of voting faculty will be required to approve a new core.