

**SAINT JOSEPH'S COLLEGE OF MAINE
CORE CURRICULUM PROPOSAL**

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By

AD HOC CORE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

Lucas Bernacki, Chris Callaway (Faculty Senate President), Karen Croteau, Patricia Ireland (Administrative Representative), David Pinchbeck, Dan Sheridan, Christopher Sullivan (Chairperson), Sherrie Winton (Online College Representative), William Yates, and Marion Young

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I. Report in Brief

The Ad Hoc Core Curriculum Committee (CCC) would like to submit the following proposal outlining our substantive change for review by the Educational Policies Committee (EPC) and vote by the Faculty Senate (FS). The CCC was charged by the FS to review the current core curriculum, develop a substantially revised version (if the committee believes it necessary), and submit a proposed revision to the FS for a vote.

The core curriculum is the backbone of our Catholic liberal arts identity and its presence is a strength of our on-campus undergraduate program¹. After reviewing the past research done by the 2011 core curriculum committee, performing interviews with department stakeholders, and researching best practices of aspirant institutions, we found that there are many positive aspects of our existing core curriculum, but changes to the core curriculum's structure are needed to address concerns about flexibility of course selection and the core curriculum's relationship to our learning outcomes. We decided to take a modest approach to redesign (instead of developing a substantially revised version) and chose to make strategic edits to address these concerns. We then gave departments agency over their disciplines and worked with them on each of these changes.

The result of this process is a new, four-category core curriculum that is in line with both the Institutional Learning Outcomes and the Core Curriculum Principles adopted by the FS on April 15, 2015. The strengths of the new design are: (1) it is compatible with our existing structure and course offerings; (2) it builds in flexibility for students; (3) it features a clearer emphasis on social science, which is consistent with new NEASC language about core education; (4) it displays a clearer philosophy of core education by its structure and use of category titles. In addition to proposing a new core curriculum, this document also contains recommended actions needed to address issues identified by the 2011 Core Curriculum Committee.

II. Background

The existing "Core Curriculum for the 21st Century" was voted in by the senate in 1999 as part of the switch from a three-credit system to a four-credit system. The framework was designed to offer students a wide breadth of knowledge in the humanities and natural science, and depth of knowledge through concentrations and outer core electives. The original design had a specific sequencing that developed foundational skills and facilitated incremental

¹ GDA Integrated Services, *Saint Joseph's College of Maine Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats*, 2012. pg. 3-10

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learning, however the sequencing has been lost in practice as the sequence is not universally followed.

In 2011 a Core Curriculum Committee was formed to review and revise the core curriculum. The committee reported findings to the FS stating that that core curriculum was valued by both faculty and students. They also identified a need to explore the nature of liberal arts education and its relationship to the core curriculum and student learning outcomes, and a need to make the core curriculum more flexible for both faculty and students. They also drafted the core principles that were to govern future work:

- Introduces and develops foundational skills that are relevant for all majors and careers (thinking and analytical abilities, informational/technological literacy, research and communication skills) and promotes a passion for learning.
- Fosters spiritual and social growth (ethics and integrity, faith and spirituality, global awareness/intercultural skills), and civic and environmental responsibility.
- Provides opportunities for the exploration of relevant community and world issues from interdisciplinary perspectives.
- Facilitates connections within the Core Curriculum and between the Core Curriculum and the students' major requirements.
- Progresses throughout undergraduate learning experience culminating with Capstone
- Offers variety and flexibility in course selection and instructional delivery modes.

In 2012 the President was charged by the board to begin strategic planning work. There were concerns that this work could impact the core curriculum, so the President suggested that the committee put its work on hold until the Strategic Plan was finalized. The strategic plan was completed in September 2014, and called for the rebuilding of our undergraduate program.

In response to this, the faculty began work on creating Institutional Learning Outcomes. The Institutional Learning Outcome Committee (ILOC) was formed and the following outcomes were approved in 2015 by the FS:

- Identify and apply the ethical and moral dimensions of their particular field of study.
- Demonstrate effective communication skills in both written and oral formats.
- Demonstrate competency in programmatic content and career preparation through applied and/or experiential learning opportunities.
- Engage in responsible citizenship, social justice, and environmental stewardship.
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze and evaluate information from diverse sources and perspectives.
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As part of their proposal, the ILOC recommended that a new committee be created to consider the core curriculum and its outcomes and that the former Student Learning Outcomes be used as “interim” Core Student Learning Outcomes until the Core Curriculum Committee has an opportunity to present their results².

In September of 2015 the FS voted to create an Ad Hoc Committee for Core Curriculum Revision. This committee was populated with its current members at the following senate meeting. We have worked steadily reviewing the work of the 2011 core curriculum committee and working with department chairs to identify areas for improvement.

III. Needs Assessment Research

The notes from the 2011 core curriculum committee’s work showed two key issues related to our existing core curriculum: lack of perceived value of the core curriculum, and the core curriculum’s inflexibility. Their research showed that the presence of a core curriculum was valued by the faculty of the college. However, they found that students did not see the value of the core curriculum or understand how it relates to their professional goals. This was attributed to the general public’s lack of understanding the meaning of a liberal arts education and its value. Their notes expressed a need for a coherent theme across the core curriculum that bridges connections between courses and the learning outcomes. There was also a need for better communication to faculty and students on the value of a liberal arts education.

Lack of flexibility came up frequently and referred to several different issues with the core curriculum. Their research showed that there were a variety of barriers making the current core curriculum difficult for departments to design programs around, and difficult for advisors and students to navigate. Feedback from faculty listed the number of credits to graduate, the four-credit system, time classes are offered, and lack or type of electives as contributing to the rigidity of the core curriculum.³ The Issue we saw most fitting to address was the lack or type of electives. The other issues around flexibility involve the core curriculum, but cannot be solved through structural changes to the core curriculum alone. For these we are making recommendations for other changes.

We conducted further formative assessment and confirmed the aforementioned issues. All faculty we met with saw the core curriculum as an asset, but were split on whether the

² Institutional Learning Outcome Committee, "Proposal & Recommendation of the Institutional Learning Outcome Committee" March 18, 2016

³ Past core work included survey work with faculty and students. A summary of faculty feedback is captured in meeting notes and a report by Paul J. Woodward, "Qualitative Analysis of Faculty Response to the Core Curriculum Survey" June 26, 2012

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existing core curriculum needed to be changed or not. The faculty wanting change were looking for a decrease in the core curriculum size, or different course options that better aligned with their programs, or could lead to a minor. The committee concluded that there was a need for improving the existing core curriculum, but the changes did not need to be as drastic as we had originally assumed.

Our strategy was to take a modest approach to design that focused on making the value of the core curriculum clearer and increasing the core curriculum's flexibility for students. Flexibility was defined as freedom in course selection, course sequencing, and increased credit flexibility for high admissions programs.

IV. Best Practices Research

The CCC reviewed the core curriculum design from colleges in the Strategic Performance Comparison Group that the college uses as benchmarks for our strategic performance indicators. The Strategic Performance Comparison Group is comprised of both "peer" and "aspirant" institutions. This research both confirmed current practices and provided solutions to the issues described above.

Colleges that were reviewed and discussed included the following:

- Dominican College of Blauvelt, NY
- The College of Mount Saint Vincent, NY
- Misericordia University, PA
- University of Saint Joseph, CT
- Salve Regina University, RI
- Assumption College, MA
- Saint Anselm College, NH
- St. Michael's College, VT
- DeSales University, PA
- Anna Maria College, MA
- Emmanuel College, MA
- Rivier University, NH
- Caldwell College, NJ
- Benedictine College, KS

The credit hours at these schools ranged from 44-52, putting Saint Joseph's college in the middle at 48. The comparison group contained many colleges on a three-credit system who were able to offer more courses for fewer credits, so it was hard to benchmark an ideal number of core credits. Some schools included more robust requirements in art, language, or science, but in general most schools had similar subject distributions and foundations and elective

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structure to ours. The most prominent difference between the structure of our core curriculum and the comparison group was how they organized their core curriculum. Most of the comparison institutions group their core curricula into specific units called clusters, areas, elements or domains of knowledge. The unit headings related to a specific institutional learning goal, making the relationship between liberal arts education and the core curriculum much clearer. Also, this structure allowed them to group various departments together, making their core curriculum appear much more diverse and multi-disciplinary.

V. Accreditation Requirements

Our core curriculum is governed by our New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation. On July 1st of this year, they are instituting new guidelines. The new general education guidelines emphasize a connection to the school's institutional learning outcomes: a new focus on arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences.

4.16 The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn.

4.17 The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another.⁴

To make the connection to the institutional learning outcomes and make the NEASC emphasis on social sciences clear, we adopted the recommendation of the 2011 committee and best practices of peer institutions and organized our core curriculum into 4 thematic learning experiences: Foundations for College Thinking; The Human Condition and the Human Story; Nature and Society; and Art, Creativity, and Self-knowledge.

The new guidelines also stress the importance of programmatic assessment; therefore, we will make a recommendation that part of the implementation process should include the development of an ongoing method for evaluating the core curriculum.⁵

⁴ "Standards (Effective July 1, 2016): General Education" New England Association of Schools and Colleges, accessed March 25, 2016, https://cihe.neasc.org/standards-policies/standards-accreditation/standards-effective-july-1-2016#standard_four

⁵ "Standards (Effective July 1, 2016): General Education" New England Association of Schools and Colleges

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VI. New Core Curriculum

The core curriculum is a set of courses that reflects the College's vision of what it means to be an educated person. It is the heart of our baccalaureate education, and provides the grounding for the student's major course of study. The core curriculum's concentration on the liberal arts and science supports key parts of the College's mission: to "encourage students to explore widely the arts and sciences while they also prepare to lead ethical and meaningful lives" and to "enhance students' awareness of human dignity and the meaning of life". Moreover, the core curriculum supports several of the College's Institutional Learning Outcomes. Specifically:

- Identify and apply the ethical and moral dimensions of their particular field of study.
- Demonstrate effective communication skills in both written and oral formats.
- Engage in responsible citizenship, social justice, and environmental stewardship.
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze and evaluate information from diverse sources and perspectives.

Proposed Core Curriculum:

1. Foundations for College Level Thinking (2 courses)
 - College Writing
 - MA elective (or MA course required by major)
2. The Human Condition and the Human Story (6 courses)
 - Modern Global History
 - Intro to the Judeo-Christian Tradition
 - Human Nature & Ethics
 - Choose an elective from each of the following disciplines: HY, TH, and PH
3. Nature and Society (2 courses)
 - Ecology and the Environmental Challenge
 - One additional course from a list of courses in natural or social science (see Appendix A)
4. Art, Creativity, and Self-knowledge (2 courses)
 - EH English elective
 - One additional course from list of courses in this area (see Appendix B)

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VII. Increased Flexibility

This proposal has increased flexibility by replacing the Western Civ I & II requirement with a new, more flexible history requirement. The two history courses in this proposal consist of one Modern Global History course (beginning around the Age of the Enlightenment and going up to contemporary times) and a History elective from any 200-400 level course offered. This model allows for students to receive a consistent historic foundation and the freedom to explore a history elective of their choosing.

We have also increased flexibility by allowing students to use core classes to count toward their major (or minor) requirements.⁶ As part of this effort, we added courses to the listed elective requirements that will benefit students in our high demand, high credit majors. This will allow students to count courses twice, once to satisfy a core requirement and once to satisfy a major requirement, thereby decreasing the number of courses needed to graduate with 128 credits.

Lastly, the proposal does not require a specific sequencing. We recommend EH100, College Writing, to be taken in the freshman year, but the design allows for departments to sequence the core requirements as they see fit.

VIII. Thematic Structure

The thematic structure of the proposed core curriculum better aligns with our institutional learning outcomes. This categorical structure is similar to a strategy we saw being used by the institutions in our Comparison Groups. We took our proposed course offerings and divided them into four learning themes: Foundations for College Thinking, The Human Condition and the Human Story, Nature and Society, and Art, Creativity, and Self-knowledge.

The Foundations for College Thinking learning theme supports the development of fundamental writing and quantitative reasoning skills, which are critical for all majors and careers. These courses lay the groundwork for both effective communication and critical thinking.

The Human Condition and the Human Story learning theme adds to students' understanding of the world. Through philosophy, students better understand the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of human life; through theology, students learn to investigate the phenomenon of religious faith as an enduring concern of the human community; and through history, students learn how the practice of preserving the past helps us understand the

⁶ Students may not "triple-dip" by counting a core requirement as a major requirement and minor requirement. Also, they may not double dip within the core (for example, counting the Human Condition and the Human Story philosophy elective towards the Art, Creativity, and Self-knowledge elective.)

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present. These subjects are meant to foster spiritual and social growth, helping students think critically about the ethical and moral dimensions of their actions.

The Nature and Society learning theme provides opportunities for students to learn about and engage in responsible citizenship, social justice, and environmental stewardship. Ecology and the Environmental Challenge (ES300) provides students with both a foundational understanding of the earth's past, current, and future environmental problems and with service learning experiences that invite them to actively engage in environmental stewardship. Electives in this category allow students the freedom to build on this foundation and learn about responsible citizenship, social justice, or deepen their understanding of the makeup of our planet. The Nature and Society learning theme is also more closely aligned with the new NEASC requirements, presenting a clearer emphasis on social science, which is consistent with new NEASC language about core education.

The Art, Creativity, and Self-knowledge learning theme is a multidisciplinary experience that helps students build their creativity and develop self-knowledge. The foundational requirement is a literature elective. Students can explore creative expression through a writing course or reflect upon and think critically about the expressions of others in literature courses. Both options align with the college's goal to increase the students' communications skills. Students will also take an elective from a multidisciplinary list of courses that empower students to think creatively and develop their spiritual, physical and emotional wellbeing.

IX. Integration

We have designed the core curriculum to be compatible with our existing structure and course offerings. However, there is still considerable work to be done before we can implement the new core curriculum. The Faculty Senate should establish a transition team in FY2017 who will be tasked with working with the Chief Learning Officer, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, and the Registrar on implementation of the proposed core curriculum. This team will work with departments to align the new core curriculum with existing programs, finalize the list of electives for (1) Nature and Society and (2) Art, Creativity, and Self-knowledge (see Appendix A & B), and create a plan for phasing in the new model for current and future students. They will also have to develop materials for the catalog, website, and advisor trainings so we can improve how we communicate the value and purpose of the core curriculum to prospective and current students.

Departments will maintain their agency to change their electives listed in the core curriculum by using the existing course adoption procedures. EPC will take back oversight of the core curriculum following implementation.

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X. Recommendations

Directly related to our proposal are several recommendations. During our due-diligence phase we discovered several core curriculum-related issues that could not be solved through structural changes. To help solve them, the committee recommends the following:

- Quality of courses: establish an ongoing mechanism for evaluation to make sure core courses are contributing to core and institutional learning goals.
- Better understanding of conceptual framework: prepare a web presence for the core curriculum on the College website and catalog. Work with advisors to help them understand the core curriculum's requirements and purpose.

Appendix A

The following are example course offerings that fit into the **Nature and Society Elective**. A final course list will be adopted as part of the implementation work. (Courses marked with xxx are not yet developed)

Biology

- Concepts in Biology (BI110)
- Biology I (BI101)
- Biology II (BI102)
- Anatomy & Physiology I (BI204)
- Flora & Fauna of the SJC Campus (BIXXX)

Chemistry

- Chemistry for the Health Sciences (CH105)
- Principles of Chemistry I (CH103)
- Principles of Chemistry II (CH104)
- Chemistry of Cooking (CHXXX)

Physical & Environmental Science

- Research Science on Sebago Lake (ES107)
- Physics for Poets (ESXXX)
- Physical Geology (ESXXX)
- Astronomy (ESXXX)

Economics

- Economics (203/PS 411)

Communications

- History and Tradition of Mass Media (CO101)

Psychology

- Intro to Psych (PY101)
- Child Development (210)
- Educational Psych (/PY 307)
- Psychopathology (PY308)
- Cognitive Psych (PY314)
- Sleep and Dreaming (PY333)

Political Science

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- Intro to Political Science (PS101)
- American Government and Politics (PS102)
- Comparative Politics (PS201)
- International Relations (PS202)
- Politics and the Media (CO350/PS350)

Sociology

- Intro to social work profession (SO 101)
- Principles of Soc (SO 201)
- Intro to Criminal Justice (SO 202)
- Relationships, Marriage, and Family Issues (SO 303)
- Intro to Gender Studies (SO 208)

Appendix B

The following are example course offerings that fit into the **Art, Creativity, and Self-knowledge Elective**. A final course list will be adopted as part of the implementation work. (Courses marked with xxx are not yet developed)

Fine Arts

- Basic Drawing: Theory and Practice (AT 116)
- Digital Photography (AT 215)
- Beginning Ceramics (AT 216)
- Painting 1 (AT 302)
- Printmaking (AT 206)
- Elem. Art and Technology Methods (AT 202)

Communications

- Digital Media (CO 110)
- Media Production (CO 2XX)
- Web Design (CO 210)
- Oral Communications (CO 218)
- Movies in America (CO 333)
- Introduction to Film Studies (CO 2XX)
- Film Analysis (CO 2XX)

English

- Second literature elective
- Creative Writing (EH 209)
- Nonfiction Prose Writing (EH 211)
- Interpretive Nature of Cinema (EH 319)

Math

- Contemporary Math (MA 107)

Music

- Music Appreciation (AT108)

Sport & Exercise Science

- Personal Health (HE 111)
- Stress management (HE 204/NU 422)

Philosophy

- Philosophy of Gender (PH 204)

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- Good and Evil (PH 221)
- The Moral Self (PH 305)

Psychology

- Happiness, Character, and Well-Being (PY 225/PH 225)
- Cultural Psych (PY 254)
- Psychology of Gender (PY 214)
- Psychology of Cinema (PY 408)

Theology

- Christian Spirituality: Life and Prayer (TH 209)
- Contemporary Christian Morality (TH 303)