

## Annual Report of the Director of the Core Curriculum for the 2012-2013 Academic Year

I assumed office on June 1, 2012, for the express purpose of developing and implementing a plan for the assessment of student learning in the core curriculum with an eye towards the visitation by the Middle States accrediting agency that was scheduled for the spring of 2015. The task was complicated by the fact that the Canisius College Core Curriculum consists of eighteen separate components – four foundation courses, seven fields of knowledge, four learning attributes, two skill attributes, and a core capstone – each of which has its own goals and objectives and requires its own rubric and method of assessment. Working in consultation with Richard Escobales, chair of the Faculty Senate, and Peter Boehm, chair of the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate, as well as with Patrick Mizak, at that time the Director of Institutional Research at Canisius College, and Patricia Coward, the chair of the College Learning Assessment Committee, I put together the draft of a comprehensive plan for core assessment that was subsequently approved by both the Core Curriculum Committee and the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate. Rick Wall, the interim Vice President for Academic Affairs at Canisius College, was apprised of the process and gave his approval to the plan that was being drafted. This plan, entitled “Strategic Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning in the Core Curriculum,” was then submitted to the Faculty Senate on September 14, 2012, and was officially approved by the Faculty Senate on October 12, 2012, with the understanding that specific details of the plan might have to be modified in the course of its implementation. The Core Curriculum Committee reviewed the plan at its meeting on October 15, 2012, and recommended some minor modifications with respect to Information Literacy. Those modifications were subsequently incorporated into the document that was presented to the Academic Committee of the Board of Trustees at its October 2012 meeting.

The implementation of the “Strategic Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning in the Core Curriculum” has proceeded more slowly than I would have liked. Assessment has already taken place in FYS 101 thanks to the excellent work of Thomas Reber, the Director of Freshman Writing, and in RST 101, thanks to the cooperation of Fr. Patrick Lynch, S.J. and the Department of Religious Studies and Theology. Assessment will take place in the fall of 2013 in PHI 101, and a draft of the goals and objectives of PHI 101 has been prepared by the Department of Philosophy and is under review by the Core Curriculum Committee. Assessment in ENG 101 will begin in the spring of 2014. Here too a draft of the goals and objectives of ENG 101 has been prepared by the Department of English and will soon be submitted to the Core Curriculum Committee for its review. A statement of goals and objectives for Field 4–History has also been approved, and the assessment of student learning in Field 4 will begin in the fall of 2013. Work on formulating the goals and objectives for Fields 6–Natural Sciences and 7–Mathematical Sciences is close to completion, and it is reasonable to assume that these two fields will be ready for assessment by the fall of 2013. My goal and the goal of the Core Curriculum Committee are to complete the task of drafting the goals and objectives for the remaining components of the Core Curriculum by the end of the summer of 2013. This is easiest in those components of the Core that are relatively homogeneous and most difficult in those components that are heterogeneous and multi-disciplinary, particularly in the four learning attributes, which are all taught by faculty from a wide range of different departments. In some cases, agreement as to what should constitute the goals and objectives of a particular field or attribute might be difficult to achieve. A timetable for the assessment of the different components of the Core Curriculum has yet to be developed but hopefully will be in place by the end of the summer.

One of the areas in which the Core Curriculum Committee has invested much energy is Information Literacy. Information Literacy is a crucial component of general education, and as such it will almost certainly be a focal point of the Middle States team when it visits the College in the spring of 2015. In January 2013 Thomas Reber, Kelly Lambert, and I met with the faculty who have been teaching the four foundation courses for the purpose of developing a coordinated strategy for the instruction of information literacy and writing skills through the four foundation courses. At the same time, the Core Curriculum Committee approved and sent to the Faculty Senate a resolution on information literacy that was approved by the Senate on February 1, 2013. The resolution read:

In so far as Information Literacy is an institutional learning goal of Canisius College and that it is therefore assumed that all students will develop informational literacy skills within and specific to the major course of study, and in so far as explicit core responsibility for the development of student information literacy skills ends with the four foundation courses and therefore rests with the individual departments and programs, the Faculty Senate therefore resolves that the Academic Vice President and the Deans of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Wehle School of Business, and the School of Education and Human Services ask the chairs and directors of their respective major programs to identify the courses in those majors where information literacy skills are being taught, reinforced, and assessed and that this information be reported to the Core Curriculum Committee by March 1, 2013.

Pursuant to this resolution, the Core Curriculum Committee initiated the assessment of student information literacy skills at two different points in a students' undergraduate education with the help of Kelly Lambert, the information literacy specialist in the library. A random sample of students taking RST 101 in the spring semester was given a scenario-based iSkills assessment made available through the Educational Testing Service. The purpose of this test was to determine to the extent to which students who were in the process of completing their four foundation courses had acquired information literacy skills. The same test was also administered to a random sample of seniors taking a Core Capstone course. In this way we hoped to establish a base line by which we could track change – and hopefully improvement – from one student cohort to the next and from what they could demonstrate in the way of information literacy skills upon completion of the foundation courses to what they could demonstrate as graduating seniors. It is currently our plan to administer the same exam to a random sample of incoming freshman at the beginning of the fall term so that we establish a base line of their information literacy skills when they enter Canisius.

In implementing this plan for the assessment of student information literacy skills, the Core Curriculum Committee encountered considerable confusion within the faculty as to what information literacy meant and entailed. To clarify what information literacy meant, the CCC posted after considerable discussion within the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate a statement that had been prepared by Kelly Lambert that was based on an earlier statement that had been prepared by Kris Kasbohm on 2008-09. This document is now posted on the Core website along with a document prepared by Thomas Reber on Writing in the Core Curriculum, which will serve as the basis both for writing instruction in the Core Curriculum and for the assessment of student writing skills in the foundation courses, the courses that carry advanced writing intensive designation, and at the point of graduation in the core capstone courses. The current plan is to begin assessment of these skills in the 2013-14 academic year. Interested parties should refer to these documents that are posted on the Core Website under Core for Faculty/Core

Documents.

This has been a very busy year for the Core Curriculum. In addition to its work on assessment, the Core Curriculum Committee also approved no less than thirty course proposals for the Core. The Core website was also updated, the major change being that core documents that had been previously accessible only to members of the Core Curriculum Committee or the Faculty Senate were now made available to all faculty. There is still much to be done on the website, but it is much improved over the previous website.

None of this would have been possible without the strong support and hard work of the Core Curriculum Committee. As Core director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all of those on the Core Curriculum Committee whose contributions to its work are ultimately responsible for all we have been able to accomplish, by name Richard Bailey, Dewey Bayer, Betsy DelleBovi, Julie Henry, Tanya Loughhead, Mark Meyer, Matthew Mitchell, Craig Rogers, and Ann Wright as the seven voting faculty members or their appointed representatives, Edward Garrity, Julie Henry, and Debra Instone-Noonan as the deans' representatives, Thomas Reber as the Director of Freshman Writing, Kris Kasbohm and Kelly Lambert as representatives of the library and specialists on information literacy, and Peter Boehm as chairman of the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate. I would also like to express my appreciation to Richard Escobales and the Faculty Senate for its strong and active support throughout the past year, to Debra Instone-Noonan and Patricia Coward for their help and counsel in the area of core assessment, to Rick Wall for his consistent support as interim Vice President for Academic Affairs, and last but not least to Patrick Lynch, S.J., for his willingness to assume the responsibilities of the Core Director for the next three years.

Respectfully submitted,

Larry Eugene Jones  
Director of the Core Curriculum

May 3, 2013