

Strategic Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning in the Canisius College Core Curriculum

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Updated and approved by a Faculty Senate Resolution of December 6, 2013

Rationale for Assessment: Assessment is and will remain a permanent fixture of academic life for the foreseeable future. Assessment is essential as a component of self-improvement of academic performance at Canisius, whether that is to be at the level of the individual faculty member, department, program, or college level. As faculty, we are constantly assessing the effectiveness of our teaching strategies and to determine what we can do to make our teaching even more effective. This is inherent in the very nature of teaching and is something that all of us do whether we call it assessment or not. The purpose of this document is take what each and every one of us do as an integral part of our mission as teachers and formalize that for the purpose of assessing student learning in the Core Curriculum at Canisius College.

In the spring of 2015 a team from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools will visit Canisius College to determine whether or not Canisius's accreditation as a degree-granting institution of higher education should be renewed. Since Middle States has already recommended that the College improve its assessment at all levels of teaching, it is imperative that Canisius have a plan in place for the assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum and that this

plan be in place and implemented before the visit takes place. As the body to which the Canisius College Board of Trustees has delegated responsibility for the Core Curriculum at Canisius, the Faculty Senate is responsible for overseeing and approving the plan for the assessment of student learning at Canisius College. Responsibility for implementing this plan will rest with the Director of the Core Curriculum and the Core Curriculum Committee but will remain subject to the oversight and control of the Faculty Senate.

The Core Curriculum: The Canisius College Core Curriculum that is currently in effect was approved by the Faculty Senate in March 2007 and ratified by Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Herbert Nelson in April 2007. The Core Curriculum is a complex entity consisting of nineteen distinct components, each of which requires its own method of assessment. The components of the Core Curriculum are:

- Four foundation courses (FYS 101, ENG 101, PHI 101, and RST 101);
- Seven Fields of Learning (Religious Studies, Philosophy, the Arts, History, Social Science, Natural Science, and Mathematics);
- Four Knowledge Attributes (Diversity, Ethics, Global Awareness, and Justice);
- Two Skill Attributes (Advanced Writing and Oral Communication);
- Information Literacy; and
- Core Capstone.

The Goal: The goal of this Strategic Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning in the Core Curriculum is to have an assessment plan in place and in the initial stages of implementation by the end of the 2012-13 academic year. The goal is to develop an assessment plan that is both transparent and easy for the faculty to implement. The goal for the current academic year is to make certain that the goals and objectives for the various components of the Core and a timetable for the implementation of assessment have been formulated and approved by the Faculty Senate by the end of the spring semester 2013 and that the actual assessment of student learning will begin as early as the spring semester of 2013.

Faculty Involvement: The strategy that lies at the heart of this plan is to involve the Faculty, the Faculty Senate and the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate (EPC), and the CCC as fully as possible in its development and implementation. The Core Curriculum belongs to the Faculty, and the Faculty must

take ownership of the Core in order to make it an effective instrument for realizing the Mission of the College. The method by which the goal of faculty involvement is to be achieved is to place responsibility for drafting the goals and objectives for the different components of the Core Curriculum in the hands of the faculty who teach in those components of the Core.

- For the four Foundation Courses a three-person committee will be appointed for each of the four courses and staffed by members of those departments responsible for teaching in this part of the Core. Specifically this means: for ENG 101 a committee consisting of members of the English Department, for PHI 101 a committee consisting of members of the Philosophy Department, and for RST 101 a committee consisting of members of the Religious Studies and Theology Department. Responsibility for development of assessment criteria for FYS 101 will rest with the Director of First-Year Writing and the FYS committee. To provide for greater coherence at this level of the Core Curriculum, it is further recommended that interested faculty who teach in the four foundation courses meet regularly with each other and the Director of First-Year Writing to determine and implement ways in which the four foundation courses complement each other in terms of the skills they develop and the themes they address.
- For the seven Fields of Learning a committee of three to five members will be appointed for each of the seven fields and staffed by the members of those departments responsible for teaching the courses. If members of more than one Department are involved in teaching the courses in these fields, the composition of these committees should reflect the disciplinary diversity of those who teach in these fields.
- For the four Knowledge Attributes a committee of three to five members will be appointed for each of the four attributes. These committees should be staffed by faculty who teach courses that carry attribute designation for the specific attribute under consideration. The composition of these committees should reflect the disciplinary diversity of those who teach in these fields.
- For the two Skill Attributes a committee of three to five persons will be appointed for each of the three attributes. These committees should be staffed by faculty who teach courses that carry attribute designation for the specific attribute under consideration.
- For Information Literacy a committee consisting of three to five persons from the faculty and library staff will be appointed to oversee the adoption

and implementation of a plan for improving the student Information Literacy Skills in the Core Curriculum.

- For the Core Capstones responsibility for the development of assessment criteria will rest with the Core Capstone Taskforce that was empanelled in the spring of 2011 under the chairmanship of Professor John Zeis. This committee consists of members of the faculty who either offer Core Capstone Courses or are interested in developing and teaching Core Capstone Courses.
- With the exception of the FYS 101 Committee and the Core Capstone Task Force, the faculty committees for the remaining three Foundation Courses, the seven Fields of Learning, and the six Learning and Skill Attributes as well as the faculty-library committee for Information Literacy will be appointed by the Director of the Core Curriculum in consultation with the CCC and the chairs of the relevant departments.

Committee Responsibilities: The responsibilities of the faculty committees are:

- To formulate the goals and objectives for the specific components of the Core Curriculum. Each committee will be responsible for a specific Breadth of Knowledge Field, a Knowledge Attribute, or a Skill Attribute. This work should be completed for all components of the Core with the exception of the Core Capstone Courses by the end of the 2012-13 academic year. As the goals and objectives for a particular component of the Core Curriculum have been developed and approved according to the procedure outlined below, they will be brought to the Senate for its approval.
- The committees assigned with this responsibility should base these goals and objectives on the document entitled “New Core Curriculum” from March 2007 and the templates that were developed in 2008-09 to govern the approval of courses for acceptance into the different components of the Core Curriculum. [These templates appear on the website for the Core Curriculum.] It is planned to submit these templates to the Faculty Senate in October of 2012 for its approval so that they become official parts of the Core Curriculum. It might also prove useful for the committee to examine the ways in which those members of the faculty who had their courses approved for core designation answered the questions posed in the templates.
- The goals and objectives that will be used in the assessment of student learning in the assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum must

be simple, clear, and easy for the faculty to interpret and implement. In the interest of simplicity and to expedite the adoption of a comprehensive plan for core assessment, the committee needs to formulate no more than two goals and for each goal no more than two to three objectives for the component of the Core for which it is responsible. For the Fields of Learning and Knowledge Attributes one of these two goals should focus on knowledge and the other on skills, with the understanding that the appropriate skills would vary from Field to Field and Attribute to Attribute.

- The goals and objectives that will be used in the assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum must reflect what is currently being taught in the Core and not some idealized vision of what the Core might become. Under no circumstances may the goals and objectives be used to decertify courses that have already been approved for the Core. In all cases, inclusivity rather than exclusivity should be the goal in developing the goals and objectives for a specific component of the Core Curriculum.
- The faculty committees will also be responsible for identifying the artifacts and developing the rubrics that will be used in the assessment of student learning in the specific components of the Core Curriculum for which they are responsible.
- Once developed, these rubrics will be used by the faculty committees in assessing student learning according to the timetable outlined below.

Procedure: Once the faculty committees have formulated the goals and objectives for the specific component of the Core Curriculum for which they are responsible, these will be forwarded to the CCC for its review. If the CCC approves the Goals and Objectives that have been forwarded to it, they will then be forwarded to the Senate for its action and approval. If the CCC finds problems with the Goals and Objectives that it has received, they will be returned to the faculty committees for further deliberation and revision, after which they will be resubmitted to the CCC. If at that point there is a dispute between a faculty committee and the CCC regarding the goals and objectives that have been formulated for a specific component of the Core Curriculum, this will be referred to the EPC for its adjudication and, upon appeal from the CCC, to the Faculty Senate as a whole. The determinations of the EPC and, if necessary, those of the Faculty Senate will be final.

Role of the Core Curriculum Committee: The Core Curriculum Committee was created by the Faculty Senate to facilitate oversight and development of the Core

Curriculum at Canisius College. It is a committee that is responsible to the Faculty Senate, and the Director of the Core is an *ex officio* member of the Senate and the EPC, and he reports directly to the Senate on the activities of the CCC. The document that currently governs the composition, responsibilities, and duties of the CCC is the “Constitution of the Core Curriculum Committee” from May 1, 2009. This is a Senate document and may be amended by the Faculty Senate at its discretion according to the rules and bylaws of the Senate Constitution.

In addition to its responsibilities with respect to the review, approval, and rejection of courses that have been approved for inclusion in the Core Curriculum, the Core Curriculum will also be expected to do the following:

- Review the “Resolution on the Committee for the Core Curriculum” in the revised version of May 1, 2009, to see what changes might be needed to bring it in line with current practice and to clarify lines of communication and responsibility between the Senate, the EPC, and the CCC.
- Review and approve the Goals and Objectives that have been drafted by specially appointed faculty committees for each of the various components of the Core Curriculum according to the procedure outlined above.
- Review the work of the Committee on FYS 101.
- Review the work of the Core Capstone Taskforce with particular attention to the question of consistency and standardization of assignments, measures, and rubrics used for assessing student learning in the Learning and Skills Attributes component of the Core Curriculum.

Role of the Faculty Senate: The Faculty Senate has ultimate responsibility for the Core Curriculum at Canisius College. It is therefore important to involve not only the Faculty Senate but also the faculty responsible for the delivery of the Core Curriculum as actively as possible in the development of a plan for the assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum. Specifically the Senate will be asked to:

- Review the “Constitution of the Core Curriculum Committee” from May 1, 2009, to see what changes might be needed to bring it in line with current practice and to clarify lines of communication and responsibility between the Senate, the EPC, and the CCC. A draft revision of the “Resolution on the Committee for the Core Curriculum” will be presented to the Senate for its deliberation and action in the fall of 2012.

- Review and approve the Templates that were developed in 2008-09 and that have been in use for the past three years to govern the approval of courses in the different components of the Core Curriculum. The templates will be presented to the Senate for its deliberation and action in the fall of 2012.
- Review and approve the Goals and Objectives that have been drafted for each of the various components of the Core Curriculum. This is consistent with the Senate resolution of December 9, 2011, stipulating that “Before any plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes in the Core Curriculum can take effect, it must be approved by the Faculty Senate.” Rather than wait for the end of the year to present a comprehensive plan for the assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum, the Director of the Core Curriculum intends to take the Goals and Objectives for discrete components of the Core Curriculum to the Senate for its approval. The Faculty Senate may elect to refer this task to the EPC and reserve its involvement only in those cases where there is a disagreement between the CCC and the EPC.

Sites of Assessment: The Strategic Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning in the Core Curriculum is based upon the assumption that assessment is most meaningful when it occurs as closely as possible to the student learning that is being assessed. This is particularly true in the case of the Foundation and Fields of Learning courses, where assessment will be conducted in the courses the students take to satisfy these requirements of the Core Curriculum. Although ultimately the Core Capstone Courses will serve as the site of summative assessment of what students have learned with respect to the Knowledge and Skill attributes over their undergraduate education, this is not yet feasible in light of the fact that the first Core Capstone Courses were first offered in the summer of 2011 and are not yet ready as a site for core assessment.

- **Foundation Courses:** The assessment of student learning in the four Foundation Courses will be conducted in the courses that a student takes to satisfy these components in the Core Curriculum. It will be the responsibility of the faculty committees that have been appointed for each of the Foundation Courses to formulate the rubrics for the assessment of student learning in that component of the Core and to evaluate the data that has been collected for the purposes of assessment in the courses that fall under its purview.

- **Fields of Learning:** The assessment of student learning in the seven Fields of Learning will be conducted in the courses that a student takes to satisfy these components of the Core Curriculum. It will be the responsibility of the faculty committees that have been appointed for each of the Fields of Learning to formulate the rubrics for the assessment of student learning in that component of the Core, to identify the artifacts that will be used in the compilation of assessment data, and to evaluate the data that has been collected for the purposes of assessment in the courses that fall under its purview
- **Knowledge and Skill Attributes:** The assessment of student learning relevant to the four Knowledge Attributes of Diversity, Ethics, Global Awareness, and Justice and the two Skill Attributes of Advanced Writing Intensive and Oral Communication will be conducted both in the courses that a student takes to satisfy these components of the Core Curriculum and in the Core Capstone Courses. The fact that many students do not satisfy all of their attribute requirements until their senior and that some may even take their final attribute courses concurrently with the Core Capstone Course makes it impractical to rely upon the assessment of student learning with respect to the various attributes. This, however, seems to be a trend that is more pronounced with the Knowledge Attributes than the Skill Attributes.
- **Information Literacy:** Beyond the four Foundation Courses there is no specific course dedicated to the student acquisition of Information Literacy skills although the extent to which students have acquired such skills is subject to assessment the Core Capstone Courses. Preliminary assessment of Information Literacy will take place in the Foundation courses, most likely in either PHI 101 or RST 101. Summative assessment will take place in the Core Capstone Courses. Again, the faculty committees that have been appointed for each of the Learning and Skill Attributes will be responsible for formulating the rubrics for the assessment of student learning in that component of the Core, identifying the artifacts that will be used in the compilation of assessment data, and evaluating the data that has been collected for the purposes of assessment in the courses that carry attribute designation
- **Core Capstone Courses:** The kind of student learning that takes place in the Core Capstone Courses varies greatly from one course to the next. The enormous diversity of content in the Core Capstone Courses makes it impossible to develop an instrument for the assessment of the knowledge

that a student will learn from taking these courses. Core Capstone Courses, however, will serve as a site for the collection of data for summative assessment of student learning with respect to the four Learning Attributes and the three Skill Attributes of the Core Curriculum. It is important, however, to make certain that the assignments, measures, and rubrics for assessing student learning with respect to the Learning and Skill Attributes that are part of the Core Curriculum are more or less comparable and consistent from course to course. This will be the responsibility of the CCC and the Core Capstone Task Force that was formed in the spring of 2011 to solicit and review proposals for capstone courses from the faculty. All of this will require considerable work, and it may be that the Core Capstone courses may not be fully viable as instruments for the collection of assessment data until a full review of the Core Capstone courses has been completed.

Timetable: The timetable for the implementation of a comprehensive plan for the assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum at Canisius College is as follows:

- To formulate and approve Goals and Objectives for the four Foundation Courses and the seven Fields of Learning by the end of the fall semester of 2012-13.
- To formulate and approve Goals and Objectives for the four Learning Attributes, the two Skill Attributes, and Information Literacy by the end of the spring semester of 2012-13.
- To initiate assessment of student learning in FYS 101 in the fall of 2012
- To initiate assessment in RST 101 and possibly one other foundation course as well as Field 1, Field 4, either Advanced Writing Intensive or Information Literacy, and one of the Knowledge Attributes in the spring of 2013.
- To continue assessment in selected other components of the Core Curriculum in the fall and spring of 2013-14.
- To adopt a long-term schedule that would provide for a staggered assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum whereby each year five component of the Core Curriculum (1 Foundation Course, 2 Fields of Knowledge, 1 Learning Attribute, and 1 Skill Attribute) will be assessed over a three-year period beginning in 2012-13 and concluding in the 2014-15 academic year. This would then be followed by a period of focused assessment concentrating on those areas of the Core Curriculum where the initial

round of assessment revealed student difficulty in fulfilling the goals and objectives of the Core Curriculum. This would determine, among other things, whether the goals and objectives for those areas of the Core Curriculum were realistic and whether the measures and instruments used in the compilation and analysis of assessment data were meaningful.

[A grid timetable for assessment in the different components of the Core will be inserted here. The details of this will be discussed and formulated at the meeting of the CCC on October 15, 2012.]

Core Modifications: Possible modifications in the Canisius College Core Curriculum as a result of assessment would be of two kinds: Non-Curricular and Curricular.

- **Non-Curricular Modifications** do not require a structural revision of the Core Curriculum and may be implemented through recommendations from the Core Curriculum Committee or Faculty Senate to the faculty and departments responsible for the delivery of the Core. One such recommendation might be to do more with Information Literacy or Oral Communication if, for example, assessment data indicates that students are experiencing difficulty in meeting faculty expectations in these components of the Core Curriculum.
- **Curricular Modifications** include the addition of new core courses or changes in the goals and objectives for existing core courses. This would amount to a revision of the existing Core Curriculum and could only be undertaken in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Constitution of the Canisius College Faculty Senate. While in the past this has been a lengthy and energy-consuming process that often became contentious and divisive, one can hope that with firm and reliable data to support the proposed changes it will be easier to make the necessary modifications in the Core Curriculum than in the past. Given the fact, however, that the 2012-13 academic year will be the first year that students will have had the opportunity to complete all four years of the Core Curriculum, it would be premature to consider a revision of the existing Core Curriculum until the Faculty Senate has extensive assessment data extending over three to four years before initiating the revision process.

Concluding Remarks: This is an ambitious plan for the assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum. Not only is it comprehensive and seeks to devel-

op an assessment strategy for each of the various components of the Core Curriculum, but it includes elements for both formative and summative assessment. To succeed, this plan will require the active cooperation of the Canisius faculty and in particular those faculty who are involved in teaching courses in the Core Curriculum. Without faculty involvement at all levels of the assessment process, this plan will indeed fall on its face. At the same time, it would be wrong to think of this plan as a perfect plan for core assessment, and there is no claim to this effect. The strategic plan outlined above is best thought of as the beginning of an organic process that will have to be tweaked, modified, and revised along the way to accommodate the needs of our students and faculty. But that is in the very nature of meaningful assessment and should not deter us from taking that first step in meeting the challenges before us.

Resolution of the Faculty Senate of December 6, 2013, on a Revised Timetable for Core Assessment:

Pursuant to consultation between the Co-Directors of the Core Curriculum and Rick Wall, Vice President of Academic Affairs at Canisius College, and Christine Licata, Chair of the Academics Committee of the Canisius College Board of Trustees, the Faculty Senate recommends revising the “Strategic Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning in the Core Curriculum” that the Senate approved on October 12, 2012, and to narrow the scope of assessment prior to the Middle States visitation in the spring of 2015. The Core Curriculum Committee should thus concentrate its assessment efforts on the beginning and end points of a student’s undergraduate education, that is, on the four foundation courses (FYS 101, ENG 101, PHI 101, RST 101) and on the summative assessment of the four knowledge attributes (Diversity, Ethics, Global Awareness, and Justice), the two skill attributes (Advanced Writing Intensive and Oral Communication), and Information Literacy in the Core Capstone and the courses in which these attributes are being taught. Assessment of student learning in the seven Fields of Knowledge, which is largely formative in nature and generally takes place at an earlier stage in a student’s undergraduate education, is to be deferred until some point in the future, although the Core Curriculum Committee will continue developing the Goals and Objectives for each of the Fields of Learning.

This resolution constitutes an addendum to the “Strategic Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning in the Core Curriculum” of October 12, 2012.