

New Core Curriculum Celebration April 22, 2009

Remarks by Dr. Paula McNutt, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences:

The inspiration for this celebration came from the Dean of Arts and Sciences' Advisory Committee, in the course of working our way through the strategic plan for Arts and Sciences. One of the goals in the plan is "facilitating the transition to the new Core," and one of the recommended actions for this goal is to "foster excitement and enthusiasm for the ways in which the new Core enacts the College's mission." When we were discussing this particular action, Pat Erickson suggested, in a joking manner, that we have a party. We all chuckled and began to move on in the conversation, but then realized that this was in fact a great idea—to host a kind of "rite of passage" to facilitate the transition from the current Core to the new Core.

This reception is intended to celebrate the transition to Canisius' new Core Curriculum, which will be implemented for all of our undergraduate students in Fall 2009. It is also intended to honor the value of the current Core Curriculum, which has helped to lead us to where we are today in the valuable education we offer our students, because change is not only the path ahead but also the path behind us, the one we have traveled on to get to where we are today.

What I would like to do in my remarks is to address the transition we are all going through now, especially because in many ways our Core Curriculum represents how we define ourselves as member of the Canisius College community.

Transition, on the one hand, is the process of letting go of the way things used to be and on the other hand taking hold of the way they subsequently become. It does not necessitate rejecting or denying the importance of what we have had, just that we let go of it, at the same time honoring it for all that it has done for us. This is clearly where we are right now as we move from a Core Curriculum that was developed a number of years ago by faculty whose intentions were to provide an exceptional education for our students, to a new Core Curriculum, developed more recently by faculty who have had the same intentions for our current students.

We are clearly in between the "letting go" and the "taking hold again" phases of this transition—in a kind of "neutral zone," or what anthropologists have called "betwixt-and-between"—a place where things are not the old way, but they are not really the new way yet either. This "betwixt-and-between" neutral zone is typically characterized by a kind of state of chaos which can feel confusing or incomprehensible. But the great thing about this kind of state is the potential for creativity that accompanies it. It can actually be a fertile state, a creative state, a state of pure energy and great potential. Transition gives us access to the wellsprings of our own creativity, people gain access to their deeper creative energies and impulses, and opens up a world of utter possibility and a whole different way of seeing and understanding the world! This creativity and energy is clearly represented in the many new and exciting courses that are being developed by so many members of the faculty from nearly every department and program. The First Year Seminar classes that will be offered in the Fall cover a variety of topics that I am sure will be very attractive to our incoming students. And courses to fulfill other Core requirements are pouring in to the Core Curriculum Committee to consider!

Transition also renews us. It adds something new to our lives—a new sense of purpose, a new store of life energy. It is when we are in transition that we are most completely alive.

Reorientation is transition's essential function and transformation is its true destination. We are currently on the road to a new, transformed Canisius, a Canisius that is the same Canisius, but not the old Canisius. This is an exciting time at Canisius, and when we reach the goal of our transformation, which will begin in September, there will be a new kind of wisdom that we are providing to our students.

In rites of passage there are typically ritual specialists who help an initiate or group of initiates through the chaos of the betwixt-and-between. In our case, we might say that we have a number of specialists who are instrumental in mediating our "journey through the wilderness of chaos" in our transition to a new Core Curriculum.

First and foremost is Rita Capezzi who has dedicated much of her time and energy to shepherding the new Core to where it stands today—on the verge of becoming a reality. Following her lead have been the many members of the Core Curriculum Committee who have met many many times for what sometimes seemed countless hours over the course of the last two years—including the summers—defining goals, setting learning objectives, reviewing courses and moving things forward in other ways:

Barbara Burns,
Pat Christian,
Jack D'Amico,
Emma Fabian,
Rick Falkenstein,
Peter Galie,
Julie Gibert,
Julie Henry,
Debra Instone,
Kris Kasbohm,
Becky Kraweic,
Mark Meyer,
Steve Molloy,
Phil Pfaff,
Nancy Rosenbloom,
Roger Stephenson,
and Jim Valone

Other faculty contributed their time and expertise in working groups with members of the Core Curriculum Committee to ensure that multiple voices were heard and incorporated into the final product. Their input was invaluable.

Special kudos to Kris Kasbohm, who has worked without the privileges and protections of faculty to educate us about information literacy so that we can best educate our students.

Members of the Faculty Senate--led by Peter Galie, Rene Delapedraja, and Betsy Dellebovi--over the last four years have also worked very hard to support the development of the new Core and to ensure that the it is implemented in a way that is acceptable to faculty.

Other shepherds have included administrators who have contributed to sorting out all of the chaotic details of implementing the Core Curriculum and putting them in a coherent order. The coordinated efforts of the Registrar and his associates, the Associate Deans, and the Advisement Center made it possible to take what was being developed and get it up and running in a timely manner.

And of course there are the many faculty members who stepped up to the plate to create the many wonderful courses that will contribute significantly to the transformation.

There are many other things that are worthy of celebration that have been born as a result of the transformation of the Core Curriculum, and the opportunities it has opened up. Some departments have been inspired to review their current curricula and to transform them in ways that will appeal to our students and contribute more effectively to their education here. Of special note are Philosophy and English—among other things, the new Core made opportunities available in these programs, enabling the faculty to shape major requirements in terms of the goals of the Core.

Courses in Information Systems, Education, Adolescence Education, Physical Education and Health, and Exercise Science are all now designated with Core goals and objectives. For the first time, the Core Curriculum is being integrated across the three schools of the College.

Advanced courses in Chemistry and Education soon will carry Advanced Writing-intensive designation. For the first time, students will be receiving discipline-specific writing instruction as part of the Core.

The First Year Seminar Learning Community for Faculty is an outstanding success. Faculty from across schools and disciplines are meeting regularly to talk about the best ways to help our students learn to write and research well. This faculty learning community will serve as a model for other such groups working to promote specific Core goals.

And many more of our students now have an opportunity to immerse themselves in a second or third major, or in the many minors that we have to offer.

So (as Sr. Pat Brady lit a candle in a crystal bowl),

Like the seeds in the apple, from which the new grows,
Like the core of the earth, heating our world from within,
Like the flame of the candle, lighting the crystal bowl,
So the Core Curriculum infuses our programs and our courses with the Ignatian values and aspirations that make Canisius so special to its faculty, staff, and students.

Remarks by Dr. Scott Chadwick, Vice President for Academic Affairs:

Thank you, Paula. And thanks to all of you for coming here today to help the campus community celebrate this transition.

Over the past fifteen years, I have paid considerable attention to required curricula at a variety of colleges and universities, from general education requirements at large, state schools, to core curricula at small, faith-based institutions. In each case, I sought to understand three things: 1) how the mission of the institution was enacted through the courses, 2) how were the learning goals of the curriculum integrated across time and courses, and 3) how well could the required curriculum be integrated into students' academic majors and lived experiences. I have studied our new Core Curriculum from those vantage points, as well, and I can say, without a doubt, that our new Core Curriculum, when we implement it as designed, will be the best Core Curriculum I have seen. I dare say, it can be the best Core Curriculum of all the Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States.

But even with an exceptionally good design, the Core is only as good as the faculty who teach in it, the administrators and staff who support the faculty, and the students who engage in the learning process. Here, too, we are in a very good position. Our faculty care deeply about what students learn and how they learn it. They struggle together to determine how best to teach and help students achieve the Core's learning goals. It is that presence of that struggle that convinces me that collectively, we will attend to the new Core, develop it into the premier Core, and use it for the benefit of our students and our institution over time.

Blessing of the New Core Curriculum by Rev. Thomas Colgan, S.J.:

Beloved One, You who are the source of the love and our efforts here at Canisius College:

Thank you for each person who has helped to form our community and our core curriculum,
the last one,
the present one,
the future one,
and even the original *ratio studiorum*.
Thank you for all those who have worked so hard.

Thank you for the Grace, the gift of our core curriculum,
the past one,
the present new one,
and the future ones.

Help us to ease our grasp on this curriculum, to soften our hold on this and everything, that we may become freer to love and serve others.

Please give us gratitude for what was,
and give us hope in everything and everyone who are working for the good of our Canisius college community.

May you help us to welcome what is new,
help us to adjust to it,
and may you touch that in each of us that needs your blessing to become free.
And bless this new Core Curriculum and all of us that we may express your love and light to everyone here at Canisius college. We make this prayer in the name of the One who is the love amongst us. Amen.