

## What's with core curriculum?

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On April 15, 1969, the Department of Chemistry at Canisius College petitioned the Faculty Senate for a reconsideration of the core curriculum. The petition urged more flexibility for students in choosing courses in their major area, instead of the core curriculum requirements. Following this petition, the Faculty Senate established the Committee on Educational Policy. The purpose of this committee was threefold: first, to make a continuing study of the educational needs of the college students and community; second, to study the educational philosophies of the academic world; and finally, to recommend policies for improvement to the Faculty Senate.

The present Educational Committee consists of nine members and its chairman, Father Brzoska. In accordance with the Senate Faculty Constitution, Fr. Brzoska was appointed chairman by Fr. Finnegan, the Senate Chairman. Fr. Brzoska in turn appointed the other committee members: Dr. Sharrow (History Dept.), Drs. Bieron and Heffley (Chemistry), Dr. Uschold (Mathematics), Dr. Murphy (Economics), Dr. Lavere and Dr. Vodraska (Philosophy), and Dr. Lovering (English). In addition to these voting members, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs and the Academic Deans serve as non-voting members on the Committee.

The majority of Committee members have from the outset stressed the need of core reduction and greater core flexibility to allow for more student choice of courses. The Cormie Proposal, considered last year, argued for a division of academic departments into four or five major areas. Students would be required to take a specific number of courses from each area. This proposal became bogged down in the Committee when each department was invited to justify its core courses. The Committee was unable to decide which courses to maintain in the core.

On September 8, 1970, the Committee finally presented a proposal for core revision to the Faculty Senate. Ironically, it was approximately the same as the Cormie Proposal. The academic departments were divided into five major areas. "The Natural and Quantitative Worlds," the first area included: the sciences and mathematics. The second area, "The Structure and Functioning of Human Life," included the social sciences. The third area, "The Aesthetic Interpretation of Human Experience," consisted of English courses and the Fine Arts. "The Temporal Processes of Mankind," the fourth area, included various History courses. "The Purposes of Human Life," the final area, included only two departments, the Philosophy and Religious Studies departments.

Students would be required under this proposal to take two courses each from Areas I, II and IV; four courses from Area III and three courses in both Philosophy and Religious Studies.

The Committee also made the following strong recommendations to the Faculty Senate:

I. The Establishment of Curriculum Review Boards (in effect this year).

II. Revamping of the existing faculty advising system.

III. The development of new departments and/or courses to fulfill the recommended areas of study as listed above, e.g. music, ecology, geography, urban studies, natural sciences, etc.

IV. Each Department will require a sequence consisting of not more than twelve major courses and six ancillary courses.

V. The students fulfill core requirements with a minimum of two courses per year.

The Faculty Senate rejected the proposal, claiming that the changes were not broad enough. However, there are more probable reasons for rejection. The most obvious is the conflict of vested interests between departments. Although the revised core would favor the Philosophy and Religious Studies Departments, other departments could be slighted. The argument is that a student could conceivably go through four years at Canisius without taking basic English, History, Language and Speech courses. He could take other courses in the specified area and avoid many of the present requirements. Controversy arose over which department would handle certain courses. The History of Economics could be taught either by an historian or an economist. In what area does one place Ecology, Urban Studies, Black Studies? A final reason for disagreement was that some members in both the Committee and Faculty Senate are opposed to changing the present core requirements, while others favor increasing the core requirements. One professor wrote a fourteen-page justification for extending the Philosophy requirements to six courses.

Even if the Committee did come up with "the solution," it would still have to be ratified by the Faculty Senate.

At the present time the Committee members in favor of the five-area plan are drawing up a report to the Faculty Senate which justifies their proposal. A twenty-three-page preliminary draft has already been drawn up and it contains the gist of the projected report. The draft explains why the core should be changed and why the specific change should be the already proposed five-area plan. The need for core change rests on two factors. First of all, the present core curriculum has serious problems. It is too large, thereby hampering students from following their own interests. The present core is also deficient in the areas of art, music aesthetic or perceptual activities generally. The present core is also inconsistent since many students are restricted in their

courses, while others are not. These are some of the reasons given for the present core's serious problems.

The second factor cited for changing the core is that the characteristics of students have changed. The students no longer are satisfied with learning for its own sake, but rather want to relate learning to their personal, moral, and political needs. The present core emphasizes the intellectual pursuits without enough consideration to the relevance of their pursuits to other factors.

Justification for the specific core proposal is analyzed in the preliminary draft. A basic distinction is drawn between the individual department's rights to determine the core courses needed by their majors and the core courses required of all students. The Committee felt it had no right to interfere with the former (each department determines its own requirements) but felt it could deal with the overall core requirements.

This draft will soon be refined and submitted to the Faculty Senate for reconsideration of the proposed "content area" plan. The Faculty Senate will meet sometime in December to discuss the Committee's proposal. What the chances are for its passage, how individual Committee members feel about the proposal and about any other core changes will be explored in forthcoming discussions along with interviews with committee members, members on the Faculty Senate and members of the Administration.