PROPOSAL TO SIMPLIFY FACULTY-FACING ASPECTS OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

The Core Evaluation Committee (CEC) concluded that the Core Curriculum serves “the educational interests of our students, both building their skills of critical thinking and writing, and exposing them to a wide range of academic disciplines and, potentially, interdisciplinary inquiry” (p. 2). However, the CEC argued that the Core needed to be revised and refined to reduce confusion and make it more transparent to faculty and students. The CEC noted, “Combining closely related goals and deleting those that have been difficult to put into practice would create a more coherent Core Curriculum that is easier to understand and assess” (p. 16).

Some of the recommendations of the CEC would involve changing the requirements facing students. The consideration of such changes must await the conclusions of the campus-wide deliberations on the possible additions of diversity and language requirements for all New Brunswick students. At that point, deliberate and thoughtful care needs to be taken in proposing and implementing such changes.

Many of the recommendations to simplify goals and streamline aspects of the curriculum’s structure, however, could be enacted without changing the requirements facing students. Faculty often complain that the faculty-facing version of the Core is too complicated and as such it is difficult to implement and assess. Students know that they must meet Core requirements in 10 categories whereas faculty are presented with 27 goals. Simplifying the faculty-facing structure of the Core would reduce confusion, make it easier to prepare and review proposals for Core certification, and lead to more effective assessment of student learning outcomes.

The Core Requirements Committee (CRC), therefore, has prepared this proposal to revise the faculty-facing aspects of the Core Curriculum. This proposal was developed in two phases. In the first phase, subcommittees were charged with drafting proposals for revising five sets of Core goals: 21C, NS, HST and SCL, WC and ITR. A couple of these subcommittees included past members of the CRC to ensure a wider range of perspectives were involved in the process. In the second phase, the subcommittee drafts were presented and discussed at a meeting of the full committee. The proposal presented in this document is the outcome of that discussion.

Section I presents the CRC proposal for the revised Core Curriculum. Section II provides comparisons of the current and revised Core, along with justifications for the proposed changes.
I. PROPOSED REVISION OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

Upon completion of the Core Curriculum STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES [CC] - (6 credits)
Students must take two degree credit-bearing courses that meet one or more of these goals.

a. Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on contemporary issues.

b. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.

c. Analyze the relationship that science and technology have to a contemporary social issue.

d. Analyze contemporary issues of social justice.

AREAS OF INQUIRY

Natural Sciences [NS] (6 credits) Students must take two degree credit-bearing courses that meet one or more of these goals. Each course meets goal e.

e. Understand and apply basic principles and concepts in the physical or biological sciences.

f. Explain and be able to assess the relationship among assumptions, method, evidence, arguments, and theory in scientific analysis.

Historical Analysis [HST] (3 credits)
Students must meet one of (k or l).

k. Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time.

l. Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

Social Analysis [SCL] (3 credits)
Students must meet one of (m or n).

m. Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.

n. Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

Arts and the Humanities [AH] (6 credits)
Students must meet two goals.

o. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production. [AHo]

p. Analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies. [AHp]

q. Understand the nature of human languages and their speakers. [AHq]

r. Engage critically in the process of creative expression. [AHr]
COGNITIVE SKILLS AND PROCESSES

Writing and Communication [WCR; WCD] (9 credits)
Students meet WCR in 01:355:101. Students must take two additional courses that include instruction on writing and communication, one that includes revision = WCR and one that involves communication in the discipline = WCD.

WCR. Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience, and respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, &/or supervisors through successive drafts & revision.

WCD. Communicate effectively in modes appropriate to a discipline or area of inquiry; evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly; and analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights.

Quantitative and Formal Reasoning [QQ; QR] (6 credits)
Students must meet two goals.

w. Formulate, evaluate, and communicate conclusions and inferences from quantitative information. [QQ]
   (includes various quantitative methods courses as well as 640 courses)

x. Apply effective and efficient mathematical or other formal processes to reason and to solve problems. [QR]
   (includes 640 courses and formal reasoning courses)

Information Technology and Research [ITR] (3 credits or equivalent)
Students must meet one goal.

y. Employ current technologies to access and evaluate information, to conduct research, and to communicate findings.

   aa. Understand the principles that underlie information systems.
II. COMPARISON OF CURRENT TO PROPOSED CORE AND JUSTIFICATION OF PROPOSED CHANGES

A. 21ST CENTURY CHALLENGES

*Current:*

**21ST CENTURY CHALLENGES [21C] - (6 credits)**

*Students must meet 2 goals.*

- a. Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on the world.
- b. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.
- c. Analyze the relationship that science and technology have to a contemporary social issue.
- d. Analyze issues of social justice across local and global contexts.

*Proposed:*

**CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES [CC] - (6 credits)**

*Students must take two degree credit-bearing courses that meet one or more of these goals.*

- a. Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on contemporary issues.
- b. Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective.
- c. Analyze the relationship that science and technology have to a contemporary social issue.
- d. Analyze contemporary issues of social justice.

*Justification:*

The 21st century challenge goals are a unique feature of the Rutgers New Brunswick Core Curriculum. The committee that formulated the Core Curriculum viewed this uniqueness as a strength, something that set the Rutgers New Brunswick general education program apart from general education programs at peer institutions. However, over the years, this section of the Core has been the target of the most complaints from faculty. The most common complaint is that all of the courses taught at a research university like Rutgers are relevant to the 21st century. The CEC report noted that some faculty in the humanities believe that these goals are biased against the historical disciplines.

The CRC spent most of its full committee deliberations on the 21st century challenge goals. In the end, the CRC decided to recommend only modest changes: a change in the title from “21st Century” to “Contemporary” challenges, and the addition of the modifier “contemporary” to some of the goals to make it clear that the focus should be on a current issue. Although modest, the change in title is meant to broaden the scope of the challenges that could be addressed in courses certified for these goals to those that pre-date the year 2000. The CRC also believes that the “21st Century” nomenclature will in a few years seem out of date, and “Contemporary” allows more flexibility in interpretation.

The CRC considered proposals for more radical changes to these goals, but all of these would have changed the requirements facing students. These proposals sought to address the perceived need for a diversity or cultural competency requirement. One proposal was to require all students to take a course...
that meets goal a (“Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person’s experiences of and perspective on the world”), and then one other course that meets any of the goals a-d. Another proposal was to replace the current set of goals with goals that would fit under the title, “Global Studies and Social Diversity” and foster the understanding of the pluralistic nature of cultures, societies, and institutions around the world. These proposals could be a starting point for the discussion of how to incorporate a diversity goal into the Core Curriculum.

The CRC decided not to endorse the CEC recommendation to add “including the historical” to goal b so that it would read “Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective, including the historical.” The CRC agrees that courses taking a historical perspective on a contemporary issue should be certified for this goal. Indeed, in the past couple of years, the CRC has certified a number of such courses for the 21C learning goals. The CRC believes that the addition of the “including the historical” is not necessary and could create confusion if some faculty interpret it as requiring courses to take an historical approach to a contemporary challenge.

B. AREAS OF INQUIRY

1. Natural Sciences

Current:

Natural Sciences [NS] (6 credits)

Students must meet 2 goals – each course meets e and (f or g or both).

   e. Understand and apply basic principles and concepts in the physical or biological sciences.

   f. Explain and be able to assess the relationship among assumptions, method, evidence, arguments, and theory in scientific analysis.

   g. Identify and critically assess ethical issues in science.

Proposed:

Natural Sciences [NS] (6 credits) Students must take two degree credit-bearing courses that meet one or more of these goals. Each course meets goal e.

   e. Understand and apply basic principles and concepts in the physical or biological sciences.

   f. Explain and be able to assess the relationship among assumptions, method, evidence, arguments, and theory in scientific analysis.

Justification:

The CRC is proposing to drop goal g and to eliminate the requirement for students that they meet two goals in NS.

There is considerable overlap between goal g in the Natural Sciences and goal c in 21C, both pedagogically as well as in courses certified (of the 19 courses certified for g, 11 of them are also certified for c). Thus, the CRC believes it would simplify the core, without significant impact on student learning or faculty teaching/assessment, to remove goal g. However, both goals e and f are integral to the teaching and learning of the natural science disciplines and thus the CRC believes both should remain in place.
The CRC also believes that the assessment required to measure student learning in e and f is sufficiently different to suggest that the two goals remain separate.

Although the CRC anticipates that the vast majority of courses certified in NS will be certified for both e and f (as evidenced by the current data, 60 of the courses are certified for e and f whereas only 13 are certified for only e and g), there may be faculty who feel that their course does not enable students to meet both learning goals e and f. Thus, if goal g is eliminated, these faculty should have the flexibility to assess only goal e.

The requirement that students had to meet two goals was met de facto by the previous requirement that all courses meet at least two goals. As the proposal is that courses might be certified to just meet goal e, the CRC believes it is reasonable to remove this requirement.

2. Social and Historical Analysis

Current:

Social and Historical Analysis
(see HST and SCL below – all courses meet at least one of h, i, & j)

h. Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place.

i. Explain and be able to assess the relationship among assumptions, method, evidence, arguments, and theory in social and historical analysis.

j. Identify and critically assess ethical issues in social science and history.

Historical Analysis [HST] (3 credits)
Students must meet one of (k or l) - all courses meet one of (h, i, j) above.

k. Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time, including the history of ideas or history of science.

l. Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors.

Social Analysis [SCL] (3 credits)
Students must meet one of (m or n) - all courses meet one of (h, i, j) above.

m. Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.

n. Apply concepts about human and social behavior to particular questions or situations.
Proposed:

Historical Analysis [HST] (3 credits)
Students must meet one of (k or l).

k. Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time.

l. Employ historical reasoning to study human endeavors, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

Social Analysis [SCL] (3 credits)
Students must meet one of (m or n).

m. Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.

n. Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

Justification:

The CRC is proposing the elimination of the background goals and some revision of the language of goals k-n.

The “background” goals are unique to this part of the Core Curriculum and therefore create confusion for faculty. The CRC believes that these goals can be eliminated without changing the overall learning objectives of the HST and SCL requirements.

The goal articulated in background goal h is restated in more specific terms in goals k and m.

Background goal i adds detail that enhances what is intended for goals l and n. Therefore, the CRC is proposing incorporating the language of goal l into those goals.

The CRC believes that the study of ethics belongs in the Core Curriculum. However, background goal k seems oddly placed and worded. Is it intended to cover the discussion of ethics or the discussion of ethical approaches to social and historical analysis? The former belongs in a general education curriculum, and in the current version of the Core is included in goals d and o. The latter certainly belongs in major programs in social science and history but is most often addressed in more specialized methods courses targeted at majors.

For goal k, the CRC is proposing eliminating the phrase, “including the history of ideas or history of science.” Courses in these two subfields should, and are, certified for the HST learning goals. The specific mention of these fields in goal k is inconsistent with the wording of other learning goals and is unnecessary.
3. Arts and the Humanities

Current and Proposed: (No changes proposed for these goals.)

Arts and the Humanities [AH] (6 credits)
Students must meet two goals.
   o. Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production. [AHo]
   p. Analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies. [AHp]
   q. Understand the nature of human languages and their speakers. [AHq]
   r. Engage critically in the process of creative expression. [AHr]

C. COGNITIVE SKILLS AND PROCESSES

1. Writing and Communication

Current:

Writing and Communication [WC; WCR; WCD] (9 credits)
Students must meet 4 goals - 01:355:101 [WC]; one WCR (s-2); and one WCD (t)
   (s-1) Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience.
   (s-2) Respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, &/or supervisors through successive drafts & revision. [WCR]
   t. Communicate effectively in modes appropriate to a discipline or area of inquiry. [WCD]
   u. Evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly.
   v. Analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights.

Proposed:

Writing and Communication [WCR; WCD] (9 credits)

Students meet WCR in 01:355:101. Students must take two additional courses that include instruction on writing and communication, one that includes revision = WCR and one that involves communication in the discipline = WCD.

   WCR. Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience, and respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, &/or supervisors through successive drafts & revision.

   WCD. Communicate effectively in modes appropriate to a discipline or area of inquiry; evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly; and analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights.

Justification:

The Writing and Communication goals create the most confusion for faculty. The current version of this section contains five learning goals, and courses are required to be certified for at least three of these goals. Many faculty complain that the five goals have significant overlap and that it is difficult to assess these goals separately in reading students’ work.
The proposal is to make the faculty-facing version of the goals line up with the student-facing version. Students need to take courses that meet writing with revision – WCR – and writing in the discipline – WCD. The CRC is proposing that faculty use the same two, more broadly defined, goals to develop courses and evaluate student learning outcomes.

2. Quantitative and Formal Reasoning

Current and Proposed: (No changes proposed for these goals.)

Quantitative and Formal Reasoning [QQ; QR] (6 credits)
Students must meet two goals.
  w. Formulate, evaluate, and communicate conclusions and inferences from quantitative information. [QQ] (includes various quantitative methods courses as well as 640 courses)
  x. Apply effective and efficient mathematical or other formal processes to reason and to solve problems. [QR] (includes 640 courses and formal reasoning courses)

3. Information Technology and Research

Current:

Information Technology and Research [ITR] (3 credits or equivalent)
Students must meet one goal.
  y. Employ current technologies to access information, to conduct research, and to communicate findings.
  z. Analyze and critically assess information from traditional and emergent technologies.
  aa. Understand the principles that underlie information systems.

Proposed:

Information Technology and Research [ITR] (3 credits or equivalent)
Students must meet one goal.
  y. Employ current technologies to access and evaluate information, to conduct research, and to communicate findings.
  aa. Understand the principles that underlie information systems.

Justification:

The CRC believes that learning goals y and z have significant overlap. In particular, the CRC believes that y implies z; in order to conduct research, a student must be able to analyze and critically assess information from a variety of sources. Therefore, the CRC is recommending that goal z be subsumed into goal y. Most courses currently certified for goal z are already certified for goal y; any course that is only certified for goal z will be automatically re-certified for goal y.