From the SelectedWorks of Timothy P Cross

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Vision and Practice in the Columbia Core Curriculum

Timothy P Cross, Ph.D., *Columbia University*

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CENTER FOR TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Fu Foundation School of Engineering
and Applied Science

Columbia University

Vision and Practice in the Columbia Core Curriculum

Timothy Cross

AKU Core Curriculum Workshop -- Tufts University

Saturday, 18 October 2008

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Topics

- Schools and Visions
- Programs and Requirements
- The Core in Historical Perspective
- Pedagogical Issues
- Additional Resources

Schools and Visions

Columbia Undergraduate Schools

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- Columbia College
- The Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science
- The School of General Studies
- Barnard College

School Visions

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Columbia College

- *Provide education that allows students to have …*

1. Intellectual mobility
2. Social mobility
3. Career mobility

Engineering School

- *Prepare students so they are …*

1. Technologically adept
2. Liberally educated
3. Socially engaged

Columbia College Core

- Contemporary Civilization (2 semesters; 8 credits)
- Literature Humanities (2 semesters; 8 credits)
- Art Humanities (1 semester; 4 credits)
- Music Humanities (1 semester; 4 credits)
- Frontiers of Science (1 semester; 4 credits)
- University Writing (1 semester; 3 credits)
- *Global Core (2 semesters; 6-8 credits)*

Core requirements comprise 10 semesters during first two years, with 8 semesters common to all students.

Engineering School Core

- Required Non-Technical Courses (16-18 credits)
  - University Writing (1 semester)
  - Contemporary Civilization (2 semesters) or Literature Humanities (2 semesters) or Global Core (2 semesters)
  - Art Humanities (1 semester; 4 credits) or Music Humanities (1 semester; 4 credits)
  - Principles of Economics (1 semester; 3 credits)
- Elective Non-Technical Courses (9-11 credits)
- Required Technical Courses
  - "First-Year Design Course" (1 semester; 4 credits)
  - At least one professional-level course (1 semester; 3 credits;)

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Sample College Core Schedule

First Year		Sophomore Year	
Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Literature Humanities	Literature Humanities	Contemporary Civilization	Contemporary Civilization
Frontiers of Science*	University Writing*	Arts Humanities*	Music Humanities*
	Global Core*	Global Core*	

*Can be taken either fall or spring semester

Sample SEAS Core Schedule

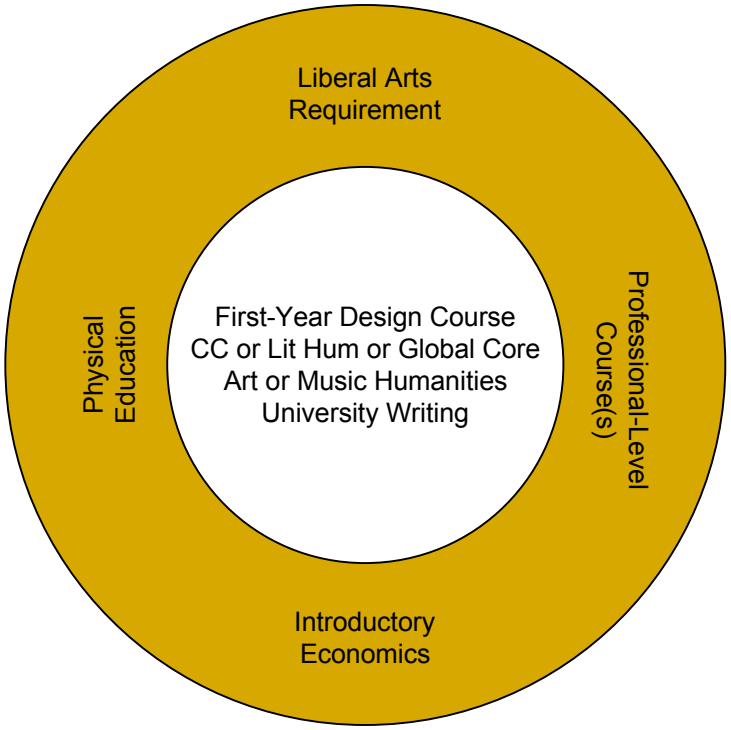
First Year		Sophomore Year	
Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
First-Year Design Course[1]	Professional-Level Course[1]	Contemporary Civilization[2]	Contemporary Civilization[2]
University Writing[1]	Principles of Economics[1,3]	Art Humanities[1,4]	
	Professional-Level Course[1]		

[1] *Can be taken either fall or spring semester*
[2] *Could substitute either Literature Humanities or Global Core*
[3] *Can be satisfied with AP Economics*
[4] *Could substitute Music Humanities*

Programs and Requirements

Columbia Core Models

Columbia College



SEAS

The Core in Historical Perspective

Chronology

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1917 SATC “War Issues” course
1919 Course in Contemporary Civilization
1920 General Honors Course
1928 Contemporary Civilization A & B
1932 Colloquium on Important Books
1937 Humanities A (now Literature Humanities)
1947 Humanities B1 & B2 (Music Humanities and Art Humanities)
1968 Contemporary Civilization B ended
1986 Logic & Rhetoric
1990 Major Cultures requirement
2003 University Writing (formerly Logic & Rhetoric)
2003 Frontiers of Science
2008 Global Core (formerly Major Cultures)

"Historic" Core Ambitions

- Contemporary Civilization (in the West)
  - Began explicitly as "peace studies" course
  - Looked at "man as citizen"
  - Addressed "insistent problems of the present"
  - Evolved from course based on secondary sources to one based on core texts
- The Humanities sequence
  - Had its origins in a "Colloquium on Important Books"
  - Looked at "man as man"
  - Addressed "an inner life of sufficient richness"
  - Evolved from courses based on humanities in a wide sense to somewhat narrower perspective

"Modern" Core Ambitions

- University Writing
  - Second version of Core writing course
  - Shared with SEAS and General Studies
- Frontiers of Science
  - Second attempt to create Core science course
  - Attempt to inculcate "scientific habits of mind"
- Global Core
  - Second (or third) version of non-Western Core requirement
  - Both traditional courses and courses modeled on Core courses can satisfy the requirement

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The Core in Historical Perspective

SEAS Core Ambitions

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- Non-technical requirement aims to produce "well rounded" engineers
  - Shared Core courses with the College
  - Shared liberal arts programs with the University
- SEAS aims to encourage community engagement through community-based learning courses and programs
  - Required in First-Year Design Course; optional thereafter
  - Projects are community selected
  - Project success determined by tangible results for clients
  - SEAS now offers community-based learning to other schools

In 2007-2008, more than 600 students worked on 100 projects for local CBOs, businesses, nursing homes, schools, and churches.

In 2008-2009, we expect to have more than 700 students working on community-based learning projects.

Pedagogical Issues

Core Courses at Columbia

- Required -- encompass all students; can't be tested out of, substituted, or skipped
- Shared -- provide similar learning experiences from student to student
- Recurring -- provide similar learning experiences from year to year
- Engaged -- require students to participate actively in learning (small class size)
- Interdisciplinary -- cut across traditional academic departments

Pedagogical Issues

Not a Great Books Program

- Despite its reliance on texts, the Core is not really a great books program
- In CC, movement has been towards larger portions of texts, but this has been incomplete and never at the expense of content
- Literature Humanities has had a fluid syllabus from the beginning, with few "essential" texts
- Emphasis in the Core is on common questions, problems, and issues

Lit Hum Big Five

Homer, *Iliad*
Aeschylus, *Oresteia*
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
Cervantes, *Don Quixote*
Shakespeare, *King Lear*

Questions Today

- Literature Humanities
  - "analyze texts and construct arguments as they consider conceptions of what it means to be human"
- Contemporary Civilization
  - What is the nature of human beings?
  - On what basis do communities form?
  - Where does authority in a community come from?
  - What constitutes the happy life?

Pedagogical Issues

Tensions within the Core

- Breadth (general knowledge) vs. depth (specialization)
- Content vs. habits and skills
- Historical vs. contemporary materials
- Choice vs. requirements
- Lecture vs. discussion
- Individual vs. shared experiences
- Individual vs. team or common experiences
- Individual development vs. civic (or social) engagement

Pedagogical Issues

Ingredients for Success

- Core of committed faculty leaders
- Pool of available, willing instructors
  - Need to have commitment to interdisciplinary teaching and learning
  - Ideal Columbia mix: 1/3 senior faculty, 1/3 junior faculty, 1/3 graduate students
- Departmental acquiescence
- Administrative support and engagement
  - At Columbia, support of Dean's Office has been crucial
  - College created Center for the Core Curriculum to support the program
- Student acceptance and buy-in

Additional Resources

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Books

Harvard University. *General Education in a Free Society.* (1945)

Columbia College. *A College Program in Action.* (1946)

Daniel Bell. *The Reforming of General Education: The Columbia Experience in its National Setting.* (1966)

Robert Belknap and Richard Kuhns. *Tradition and Innovation. General Education and the Reintegration of the University: A Columbia Report.* (1977)

Timothy Cross. *An Oasis of Order: The Core Curriculum at Columbia College.* (1995)

David Denby. *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World.* (1996)

Robert McCaughey. *Stand, Columbia!* (2004)

Living Legacies at Columbia. Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. (2005)

Websites

Columbia College: www.college.columbia.edu

SEAS: www.engineering.columbia.edu

College Core Curriculum: www.college.columbia.edu/core

Center for Technology, Innovation and Community Engagement: www.ctice.columbia.edu

Association of Core Texts and Courses: www.coretexts.org