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Vision and Practice in the Columbia Core Curriculum

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Vision and Practice in the Columbia Core Curriculum

Timothy Cross
AKU Core Curriculum Workshop -- Tufts University
Saturday, 18 October 2008
Topics

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

Columbia Undergraduate Schools

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

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
Programs and Requirements

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.
Programs and Requirements

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)
# Sample College Core Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Year</th>
<th>Sophomore Year</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Spring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature Humanities</td>
<td>Literature Humanities</td>
<td>Contemporary Civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontiers of Science*</td>
<td>University Writing*</td>
<td>Arts Humanities*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Core*</td>
<td>Global Core*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Can be taken either fall or spring semester*
# Sample SEAS Core Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Sophomore Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year Design Course</td>
<td>Professional-Level Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Writing</td>
<td>Principles of Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

- Global Core
  - Contemporary Civilization
  - Literature Humanities
  - Art and Music Humanities
  - Frontiers of Science
  - University Writing
- Science Requirement
- Foreign Languages

SEAS

- Liberal Arts Requirement
- First-Year Design Course
  - CC or Lit Hum or Global Core
  - Art or Music Humanities
  - University Writing
- Professional-Level Course(s)
- Introductory Economics
- Physical Education

Physical Education
The Core in Historical Perspective

Chronology

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)
The Core in Historical Perspective

“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
The Core in Historical 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
The Core in Historical Perspective

SEAS Core Ambitions

- 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*
Pedagogical Issues

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

Books
Harvard University. General Education in a Free Society. (1945)
Columbia College. A College Program in Action. (1946)
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