

**General Education/Core Evaluation Ad Hoc Committee
Report to the Wright State Faculty Senate
Submitted by Laura Luehrmann and Anne Russell, Co-Chairs
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Background

In August 2012, Wright State University transitioned its academic calendar to a semester system, along with the other state-supported colleges and universities in Ohio. As part of this transition, the General Education Conversion Committee, co-chaired by Jean Edwards and Henry Limouze, drafted a new program of courses and experiences to fulfill General Education requirements, known as the Wright State Core.

In March 2014, the Wright State Faculty Senate approved a resolution requiring a review of the Wright State Core and other university-wide graduation requirements at least every four years by the Undergraduate Academic Policies Committee. In April 2015, the Faculty Senate tabled the report of the Ad Hoc General Education Core Review Committee indefinitely, noting the need for a thorough assessment of the current Core.

In Fall 2015, the Ad Hoc Core Committee was founded, co-chaired by Laura Luehrmann and Anne Russell. The Undergraduate Academic Curriculum Review Committee is charged with overseeing this committee, which included representatives from all WSU colleges serving undergraduate students. The committee spent AY 2015-2016 and the first part of Fall 2016 collecting information on the implementation of the Wright State Core since 2012, with special attention to its impact on student success. We were charged with discovering roadblocks affecting completion rates and access for students, the impact of “special attributes” including Integrated Writing (IW) and Multicultural Competency (MC), course availability, and overall responses to the Core curriculum.

Activities

During the Fall Semester 2015, the committee co-chairs met with and interviewed advisors in each of the major undergraduate-serving colleges at Wright State (including Lake Campus advisors who participated in a conference call). They shared this information with the full committee in late Fall 2015, requesting each of the representatives to query faculty colleagues and advisors in their units to help discern the strengths and weaknesses of the Wright State Core.

The committee requested feedback from multiple units across campus, and was fortunate to have numerous individuals consult with its members to include their expertise, including Tim Littell (Executive Director of Student Success and Associate Dean of University College), Joy Wanderi (Associate Director of the University Center for International Education), Craig This (Director of Institutional Research), Henry Limouze (Interim Associate Vice President for International Affairs), Judy Chivers (Academic Advisor, Athletics), Seth Gordon (Director,

Veteran and Military Center) and Jack Dustin (Interim Director, Service Learning and Civic Engagement). Carl Brun (Assistant Vice President for University Curricular Programs) regularly met with the committee and provided updates on changes in state policy and pertinent background information.

Summary of Key Findings:

1. College advisors across the University stated that they did not believe students encounter difficulties registering or completing Core requirements as required by Wright State. Faculty members in some majors, though, highlighted challenges due to changes in state requirements, and they expressed concern that some of these changes may present difficulties, both to student registration, as well as to the departments offering Core classes.
2. Committee members asserted the importance of writing and the need to continue to include this in the WSU Core. The committee strongly recommends that faculty, staff and administrators all clearly convey, in every channel possible, the importance of writing. This priority is communicated in multiple recommendations below, including the reconstitution of faculty-led IW committees as well as attention to the need for reasonable class sizes for IW courses, especially those within the WSU Core.
3. The committee identified some innovations from the 2012 Core that have lacked a structure to support their implementation. These include Study Abroad Core courses that should be tagged as Multicultural Courses and could be counted toward the Multicultural Competence requirement, as well as Service Learning Courses that meet the expressed learning outcomes.
4. Most significantly, the committee identified need for enhanced, clearer communication throughout the university and with students. Awareness of the Core – its structure, innovations and usefulness – needs to be heightened, and needs to be maintained by a faculty-led committee focused on the Core.
5. Larger structural changes throughout the state of Ohio, including College Credit Plus (CCP) and the emphasis on quick times toward degrees, have the potential to significantly impact the climate for continued General Education offerings at all universities. We should be strategic in our approach to these changes and recognize the increasingly competitive environment for General Education beyond campus.

Recommendations

I. Communication

- A. Promote the importance of General Education across the university community (faculty, advisors, administrators, students and families). Routinely throughout our work, the committee was reminded of the importance of a strong General Education program within a university, and the committee believes it is imperative to promote this program.
- B. Faculty and advisors would like to see changes to the current website to make it a centralized, clear and reliable source for all information pertinent to the Wright State Core (<https://www.wright.edu/academic-affairs/programs/general-education>). The website should include important policies and should be searchable and simple to update.
- C. In addition to the searchable website, a simple brochure should be provided to all students upon acceptance to Wright State, as well as to all faculty that teach Core courses. The current Core brochure (developed by University College staff to distribute to students during summer orientation) is a helpful guide and should serve as a model for this new, more widely distributed brochure.
- D. Rather than experiencing too little choice within the WSU Core, the concern that was raised by advisors and others working closely with students was that students were sometimes confused by too much choice – an issue we hope is rectified with clearer communication of the options available. Indeed some programs (most notably RSCOB) limit the menu of Core options available to their majors in order to help focus their coursework and complete the degree in a timely manner.
- E. Gather data from exit interviews with seniors: many departments and colleges may already be collecting relevant information but this is not systematically being shared across units.

II. Faculty oversight

- A. The committee strongly recommends re-charging Faculty Senate committees to work with Core. We recommend that a separate faculty driven standing committee needs to be focused on Core oversight, with subcommittees dedicated to IW, MC and, possibly, Service Learning (SRV). A major task of this new committee would be to clearly communicate criteria for tagging, and publicize course attributes. It seems there are courses that are likely meeting the criteria for tagging, but some faculty are unaware of the process for submission, approval. This committee will bear the responsibility of approving courses for the Core.
 - 1. The Core Committee should review the current catalog of courses that are accepted as part of the WSU Core and examine the accuracy of tagging them for specific elements. In our examination, we found multiple courses that appear to meet the

learning objectives required for one or more elements of the WSU Core, but, perhaps because of a lack of awareness, they are not accurately marked as such. For example, there are several courses tagged for Element 3 – Global Tradition – Interdisciplinary Global Studies that can also be submitted for Element 4 – Arts/Humanities or Element 5 – Social Science.

2. The Core Committee should build upon the work completed by the Undergraduate Curriculum Review Committee during AY 2015-2016, which examined syllabi for approved IW and MC courses. We support the recommendations of the committee that focus on encouraging faculty to clearly communicate essential content in course syllabi and mapping student activities to learning outcomes. We also support the recommendation to provide faculty development opportunities for all faculty members (including adjuncts) on writing effective syllabi and teaching multicultural competence, and effectively evaluating writing.
3. The Core Committee should help communicate a clearer understanding of who evaluates transfer courses for applicability to Core. Tim Littell is working with a group of advisors from all of the colleges, Carl Brun, Academic Affairs, and the Registrar's Office to develop a consistent evaluation process of transfer courses for Core.
4. The Core Committee should examine the impact of Wright State's 38 credit-hour requirement for General Education, especially in light of the 120-credit hour mandate from the State of Ohio. WSU's Core (38 hours) is 2 hours more than the minimum required by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) for the Ohio Transfer Module (OTM). The 2 hour difference is because our natural science courses are 4 semester hours (either as single, 4 credit hour course or as a combination of a 3 credit hour course and a 1 credit hour lab). ODHE's requirement for the OTM is only 1 lab science, whereas WSU's Core requires 2 lab sciences. ODHE also allows for 3 credit hour natural science courses.
5. The Core Committee should examine the possibility of a systematic examination of the impact of College Credit Plus (CCP) to examine impact on Core examining especially the percentage of WSU students arriving with a high number of credit hours already completed. One impact of CCP is already being realized in lower demand for Core courses. It may also impact student success. College of Science and Math (COSM) advisors recommend a study of the impact of CCP on student schedules with Core and student success in higher level classes. With such a different environment for learning; students may arrive in college with credit and they are not ready.
6. The IW Subcommittee should revisit the question of class sizes for IW courses, especially in IW Core courses. The Core program adopted in 2012 advised that "Whenever resources permit, IW class enrollment should be limited to 25, the

maximum size for literature discussion classes recommended by both the National Council of Teachers of English and the Association of Departments of English. Larger classes designated as IW should provide some means of giving timely, meaningful individual responses to student writing (e.g, through the use of trained graduate teaching assistants, guided peer review, faculty release time from other course teaching assignments, class size reductions in other faculty teaching assignments.)”

7. The IW Subcommittee should review the current policy that transfer courses do not meet the IW requirement. Current policy does not permit such transfers, and the committee has heard from advisors and faculty that this not only complicates the registration process for students but that it also means we are losing potential students. There needs to be clarification of who can evaluate whether an exception can be made to this policy and accept a transfer course as meeting an IW requirement.
 8. The IW Subcommittee should examine availability of IW courses in various elements. For example, advisors expressed a need for more IW Lab Sciences in Element 6. There is especially a need for more natural sciences offered in the evening (students are taking their science classes at Sinclair and Clark State instead of WSU).
 9. The MC Subcommittee should identify and tag the study abroad courses that may be appropriate for Core credit. Any Core course that is taught as study abroad and meets the learning outcomes should be counted as MC. There needs to be a better system for identifying such situations.
 10. The MC Subcommittee should consider whether or not “Multicultural” is the best term for the intended attribute. The original WSU Core suggested that an approved Core course with a Service Learning designation could be counted as the second multicultural course in the Core, but there are only two MC courses that have service learning (SVR).
- B. We also recommend that a faculty liaison be named to work with the Assistant VP for University Curricular Programs to carry out the recommendations of this report and to work with the faculty committee overseeing Core. This liaison position should be recognized as a significant task worthy of a stipend and course release. Having a liaison will assure that faculty input is given to the implementation of these recommendations.
1. Responsibilities of this faculty liaison include working with the Faculty Senate committee or committees working on the Core (especially the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee) to approve new Core, IW, and MC applications, as well as assessing faculty members’ implementation and measurement of Core learning outcomes;
 2. Communicating to faculty and advisors changes in the Core, including the addition and deletion of Core courses that are no longer being offered;

Seeking accurate tagging of courses that may already be meeting the learning objectives necessary for particular Core elements and requesting that faculty members teaching such courses submit the course for consideration for the appropriate element;

3. Re-examine the accessibility of the WSU Core for transfer students, and stay abreast of decisions within the state that impact the Ohio Transfer Module;
4. Approve the process for reviewing transfer courses as meeting Core, IW, and MC attributes;
5. Routinely review a sample of transfer course evaluations to assure the process for reviewing transfer credit for Core is being implemented accurately;
6. Work with the faculty senate to review the current WAC and IW policies;
7. Work with the faculty senate to review the current MC policy.

Conclusions The committee re-affirms the importance of General Education and specifically the WSU Core, and seeks ways to communicate the importance of this as part of the overall educational experience at Wright State.

- With very few exceptions, the Core is working, but it could work better. Loss of communication and faculty oversight has weakened its implementation and especially the innovations that were introduced in 2012.
- The importance of writing and its role in the General Education curriculum was strongly affirmed by the committee and advisors alike.
- The current climate and approach to higher education within the State of Ohio is rapidly changing, especially with the emphasis on early completion, College Credit Plus and student loan concerns. This is most precisely expressed in the 120 credit hour mandate for majors (this includes a 36-40 credit hour OTM requirement). We recommend that one of the standing committees of the Faculty Senate undertake a review of the Core in light of these larger state changes. Other changes from the state, including the Budget climate and changes in the State Share of Instruction (SSI) formula, should be studied for their impact on all curriculum, especially the Core.

Committee membership: Maher Amer, Carl Brun (ex officio), Susan Carrafiello (ex officio), Megan Faragher, Subhashini Ganapathy, Beth Hersman, Mary Huber, Lisa Kenyon, Laura Luehrmann (co-chair), Kathryn Meyer, Sirisha Naidu, Liz Pulley, Anne Russell (co-chair), Ayse Sahin, Michelle Smith, Bill Wood.