Core Revision College Faculty Discussion Sessions, Arts and Sciences #1, 9/24/15

Core Revision Facilitation Group member Dr. Sarah Feldner (College of Communication) provided an overview of the Core revision process, including the Core revision process website (http://www.marquette.edu/common-studies-revision/), the Core Revision Charge document, timeline, and how of college-level discussions fit into the process.

Dr. Feldner then introduced the two main questions that would guide the discussion for the discussion today:

1) What ideas have you heard in this initial results that you would want us to hold on to? That is, what ideas do we want to make sure are not lost as we move forward?

2) What is missing? What ideas would you expect to see here that are not captured.

Dr. Feldner then presented an overview of the results of the first Core revision faculty survey, taken by the faculty in mid-September. (The full version of the results of this survey are available in .pdf format on the Core Revision website, as well as a PowerPoint document that summarizes the results.)

Following the presentation, the discussion moved between the two questions (What from the survey needs to be emphasized? What is missing from the results of the survey?). Points raised by the faculty in attendance included:

- Scientific competency is mentioned late in the presentation of the results of the survey but not in the results of the earlier questions. Why not? This competency should be stressed.
- Integration within the Core should not be too time-sensitive. It should focus on “base” themes that will hold up over time.
- Delivery of Core courses is as important as content.
- “Critical thinking” is too vague. The term “understanding” would be better.
- Students should get life skills from the Core, something they do not necessarily get in their majors.
- Social justice is only one aspect of Catholicism; students should receive a fuller expression of the Catholic faith.
- A capstone course is best put in the majors.
• Better to focus on big picture ideas and themes early on in the Core; bring in the experiential part toward the end.
• Jesuit education/tradition has included a focus on science.
• Critical thinking requires the ability to read and write; otherwise it is an empty concept.
• Social justice is popular, but what does it mean in practice?
• What it means to be human needs to be covered in the Core. Who are we, and what is our purpose?
• Appreciated the wide range of disciplines represented in the survey. Result was a better range of ideas than if from one’s own discipline.
• An important theme could be how we relate to ourselves, each other, and God.
• Noticed themes in the answers to the survey that included truth, dignity, meaning, and citizenship.
• Themes not as good as focusing on content. We need to be sure students have a base of knowledge.
• The Core needs to develop the essential building blocks of wisdom, wonder, and appreciation of the beauty of creation.
• Why such an aggressive timeline to complete the Core revision process?
• Aspirational institutions have discipline-focused cores; this lets students ask the questions. Thematic core is less liberalizing.
• Jesuit education assumes we can find God in all things. This requires a focus on faith, not just culture. Integration in the Core can take place around basic questions about reality.
• Core revision will work only if students buy into it. Students will sometimes react negatively initially but buy into it later.
• Undergraduates often do not appreciate a liberal arts education until years later.
• Some things that are most important about the Core cannot be easily assessed.
• With a 36 credit Core, this is only one-quarter or so of a student’s courses. The Core cannot carry the whole purpose of the university. Focus on what the Core can do, but think about how the Core relates to the rest of the curriculum including majors.
• Themes: We need to focus on “perennial” topics rather than temporary ones.
• Faculty should only teach in their areas of competency so we can respect each other’s competency.
• Think about implementation when designing the Core. Can’t box people in.
• Large classes limit how reflective a student can be. We need to move beyond presenting and receiving information in Core classes.