Core Revision Proposal

Executive Summary

We propose a new core structure based on the notion of Connections. The proposed framework utilizes three thematic “pathways,” creates multiple opportunities for students to connect courses and experiences within each of these pathways, and culminates with students connecting their core course experiences to courses in their college or major. The proposal is consistent with the goals specified in the Charge document, on-campus surveys and other relevant data, and Marquette’s stated values.

Program Description

The vision of a core based on “Connections” is consonant with the Core Revision Charge document’s emphasis on the need for greater integration across the components of a revised core. It is also consistent with Ignatian pedagogical approaches, which emphasize learning as a process in which students gain deeper understanding by building on previous stages, ultimately developing the ability to act on what they have learned and then evaluate these actions.¹

In terms of categories of core frameworks, our proposal combines elements of a thematic core and a soft form of a sequential core. The central vision of Connections is broken down into three themes: Connecting to Our World, Connecting to Each Other, and Connecting Ideas and Action.² Each of these three themes involves a sequential “pathway,” which starts with a foundational course for that theme and continues through a three-course sequence. Rather than inserting these courses into a particular year, each course falls more flexibly into years 1-2, 2-3, or 3-4. We encourage instructors in this three-course sequence to communicate with each other and model for students that there are different but complementary ways to discuss important concepts across the courses of each theme. We would also welcome team-taught courses, preferably with instructors from different disciplines, to exhibit interdisciplinary approaches within a single course.

Each pathway ends by connecting experiences from that theme to a project-centered course taught by the student’s major department or college. The exact topic(s) would be left to the colleges or majors to decide, but it would be appropriate to have sections with different topics of focus from which students could choose. This course would require a project that generates some kind of tangible product that pulls from one or more elements of the pathway courses. Since this course serves as a bridge between the core and what students plan to do next, it is imperative that ideas from the core are consciously and visibly incorporated into student projects.³

¹ Although such stages could conceivably take place within a particular course, Jesuit teaching views this process as a long-term one, carrying across many years of student learning. For an overview of this idea, see “Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach,” Jesuit Institute, 1993, available at: http://jesuitinstitute.org/Resources/Ignatian%20Pedagogy%20(JI%20Edition%202013).pdf
² We believe action to be a crucial component of a Jesuit core, captured in the ideas that “Magis refers not only to academics, but also to action” and “there is no mastery without action.” See “Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach,” n. 134 and n. 149.
³ For example, a student in Engineering taking a course linked to the “Connecting to Our World” theme might propose a device that offers a better way to distribute an important service in a developing country, based on the economic, political, or cultural features of that country. Or, a student majoring in Theatre Arts taking a course linked to the “Connecting to Each Other” theme might write a short play about social justice issues in Milwaukee.
The three pathways comprise 36 credits of core course work,\(^4\) plus 9 “linked” credits that could count toward college or major requirements. Since the last 9 credits could count toward a student’s major or college requirements, the number of core-specific credits is akin to the existing UCCS.

**Connections to Learning Outcomes**

Mindful of the allotted space, we will note links between the proposed model and three learning outcomes from Survey 2: (1) Communicate effectively in writing, speaking and artistic expression,\(^5\) (2) Develop creative, problem-solving strategies and critical thinking skills in the context of complex global issues, and (3) Make appropriate professional and personal judgments rooted in a clearly articulated ethical or moral foundation. These were the three most supported outcomes from Survey 2, but we do not claim they should be the only outcomes in the new Core.\(^6\) Indeed, our framework can work with nearly all of the most supported outcomes of that survey, in large part because it provides an ideal structure for incorporating Marquette’s Guiding Values.

In the proposed model, the first outcome above connects to the “Ideas and Action” theme’s Introductory Writing course, as well as that theme’s Communication and Argumentation requirement.\(^7\) The second outcome combines two important ideas: creative and critical problem solving and a better understanding of global complexities. The proposed framework devotes an entire pathway to understanding the natural and social diversity of our increasingly globalized world.\(^8\) The Connecting to Each Other pathway’s Ethics, Citizenship, and Civic Engagement and Social Justice requirements provide a strong setting for assessing the third outcome above, particularly in combination with the college or major course connecting this pathway to a student’s chosen disciplinary specialization.

**Connections to the Charge Document, Other Supporting Data, and Marquette’s Mission**

*The Charge Document.* The Charge document specifies the need for a new core “to provide a transformative education that emerges from Jesuit pedagogical traditions and is distinctive to Marquette and the accreditation needs of the eight undergraduate colleges.” The proposed structure draws on Ignatian pedagogy -- moving students from context and experience to action and evaluation --

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\(^4\) 3 credits fewer if students could test out of the Foreign Language/Stats foundational requirement.

\(^5\) This was the top “scoring” learning outcome in Survey 2, and something that colleagues around campus also stressed in listening sessions. It involves a set of skills important to any discipline and in nearly any job.

\(^6\) Outcomes from outside those of Survey 2 should be considered during the implementation stage of core revision.

\(^7\) As a result, the proposed structure allows this outcome to be assessed early in the Core experience and toward the end, raising the possibility of for a pre-test/post-test assessment design or the use of a starting point and ending point for a communication skills-focused portfolio.

\(^8\) At the end of that pathway, students connect the information and skills they have acquired to a project-based course in their college or major. This provides an excellent opportunity for assessing the extent to which students can creatively and critically connect their understanding of global complexity to the specializations of their chosen field. The Logic and Critical Thinking component of the Connecting Ideas and Action pathway could also be utilized in assessing this outcome.
while also providing students with a bridge between the core and their major within one of Marquette’s various colleges. The Charge calls on the new core to recognize the centrality of social justice (a key component of the Connecting to Each Other pathway), and to fit with the vision of producing students “for others.” To develop a broad acceptance of this idea, students need to experience and reflect on how being for others connects to their disciplinary training.9

Other Supporting Data. As helpful as the survey on learning outcomes was to gauging campus views on the Core, the Revision website includes a wide variety of additional information. This proposal draws on several of them, including a 2013 “SWOT Analysis” by the CCRC that sees “culminating experiences” and “other ways to integrate knowledge areas more intentionally” as an opportunity to make the core more relevant to a student’s major. The External Review Report in 2014 (p. 4) suggests that “greater intentional connections among UCCS courses are needed to promote knowledge transfer and depth.” It adds that integration “might involve, among other possibilities, interdisciplinary courses, creating links between among course clusters or sequences or between the Core and the major.”

The process of core revision gathered momentum with an initial survey last fall that led to a number of organized campus discussions. One of the most important parts of Survey 1 was its question about what respondents believed the “characteristics of a student who has completed the Core” should be. The top five responses -- critical thinker, better able to communicate, comprehends and appreciates diversity, committed to social justice, and globally aware -- are all central components of the structure we propose.10

Marquette’s Mission. The Charge document sets clear parameters for core revision, and the various other resources provide a supportive context for our proposal. Ultimately, however, if the core is going to live up to its potential to help Marquette “become a leader among Jesuit colleges and universities by addressing the national debate about the balance between the education of the whole person and the training of the future professional” (External Review Report, p. 1), then the core must also reflect the entirety of Marquette’s stated values. Beyond the ways in which the proposed structure is consistent with the pillars of the Mission Statement, it is worth highlighting the following themes from the Guiding Values, adopted a little more than a year ago: personal and holistic development; students who are men and women for and with others throughout the world; interdisciplinary curiosity, research, innovation, entrepreneurship and application to change and improve ourselves, our community and our world; an inclusive, diverse community; and servant leaders with a commitment to the Jesuit tradition and Catholic social teaching.

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9 The Charge also highlights the need to show how being “global citizens” is complementary with being “successful professionals.” The process of navigating the Connecting to Our World pathway and connecting it to one’s major provides such an opportunity.

10 It is worth noting that the soon-to-be-released (on February 17th) document from the AACU, “Trends in Learning Outcomes Assessment,” shows that the most common (and often increasingly frequent) learning outcomes related to skills and knowledge areas are those at the center of our proposed core structure. They include: writing skills, critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills, ethical reasoning skills, civic engagement and competence, and integration of learning across disciplines.
The proposed structure reflects these values. We believe it has the potential to become the model of a holistic, Jesuit experience, which is connected to students’ disciplinary training and prepares them to go forth as Marquette graduates “for and with others throughout the world.”

A potential downside of this proposal is the rigid nature of its structure. Students are expected to take courses in a particular sequence through the pathways, to complete all three pathways, and to take a final “project-centered course” taught by the student’s major department or college for each pathway. One could argue that this makes the proposed core particularly difficult to implement for colleges that also have a rigid set of requirements and a sequential curricular approach. In light of these concerns, we envision two alternative formulations of the proposed structure that would make it much more flexible to apply across Marquette’s colleges. First, students might only be required to do one “project-centered course” rather than three. Second, students might be able to choose two of the three pathways rather than completing all three. Although these changes would somewhat weaken this proposal’s emphasis on integration and connecting the core to majors, this would be better than ruling out the Connections approach for being too structured and restrictive.