Summary of University Academic Senate Discussions about the Fifteen Core Structure Proposals

At the April 18th meeting of the University Academic Senate (UAS), there was an initial, brief discussion of the Core Revision process to date and an overview of the 15 core structure proposals. This included a PowerPoint presentation by Dr. Lars Olson, a member of the Core Revision Facilitation Group (CRFG), about the proposals.

Following that meeting, the CRFG developed a short, open-ended survey of UAS members. They collected responses to that survey and created a summary document from them. This summary document was distributed at the UAS meeting on May 2nd, along with a document summarizing of each of the 15 proposals. The UAS members worked in small-group tables, discussing the proposals. Each table had someone taking notes on the discussions, which centered around three questions: Which of the proposals “rise to the top”; What features or components of other proposals do you especially like?; Are there other comments/observations from the small-group discussion?

These main points from these discussions can be summarized as follows:

Which proposals rise to the top?

- Proposals 11, 14, 4, and 6 had the most support.
- Proposal 11’s model received positive comments about its inquiry-based approach, its first-year (mission-focused) experience, its common experiences for many students, its flexibility, its tiered approach, and the authenticity of an experiential project as a culminating experience. There is also a sense that the college-focused inquiry courses would enhance college buy-in. At the same time, concerns were expressed about the lack of a clear focus on a Jesuit experience from this structure, as well as how to make sure that different students have similar rigor in their coursework.
- Proposal 14 had support for its student-centered approach to choosing themes, its discovery seminars, its capstone experience, and that it had fewer credits than the current UCCS. Concerns included the amount of administrative effort involved in making this structure workable for students and colleges, the small amount of foundational coursework, a lack of specificity about the themes, as well as how multiple expressions of concern about how to make sure the student-chosen themes are Jesuit-focused.
- Proposal 4’s model was praised for its flexibility and integration between courses, as well as its experiential component. But there were also concerns raised about its heavy first-year load and possible challenges for assessment.
- Proposal 6 was praised for its 21st century Jesuit pedagogical approach, its focus on high-impact practices, and its encouragement of faculty development. There were concerns expressed, however, about the potential difficulty of implementation, the potential for students to still be taking foundational courses in their fourth year, and how to find the balance between general and disciplinary-specific knowledge.
Features/components of other proposals?

- The value of connecting the core to the majors in the colleges.
- The tiered approach in several of the proposals was well received.
- The idea of a capstone or culminating experience was common in the proposals and seems to have support. Can be a valuable part of the effort to improve integration among the components of the core.
- Experiential, interdisciplinary approaches were applauded. A great opportunity to enhance service learning.
- The importance of communication and critical thinking.

Other comments?

- The resource implications for implementation of the proposals is unclear. This a real concern regarding a core capstone course.
- The importance of flexibility; to make the core workable for students and colleges, it cannot be too rigid in its structure.
- The importance of bringing in the Jesuit tradition as the part of the core that offers a common experience to the students.
- What is the role for liberal arts in a future core?
- In foundational courses, there is a need to avoid a disconnect between students and the instructors who are content experts.
- How does study abroad fit into a new core?